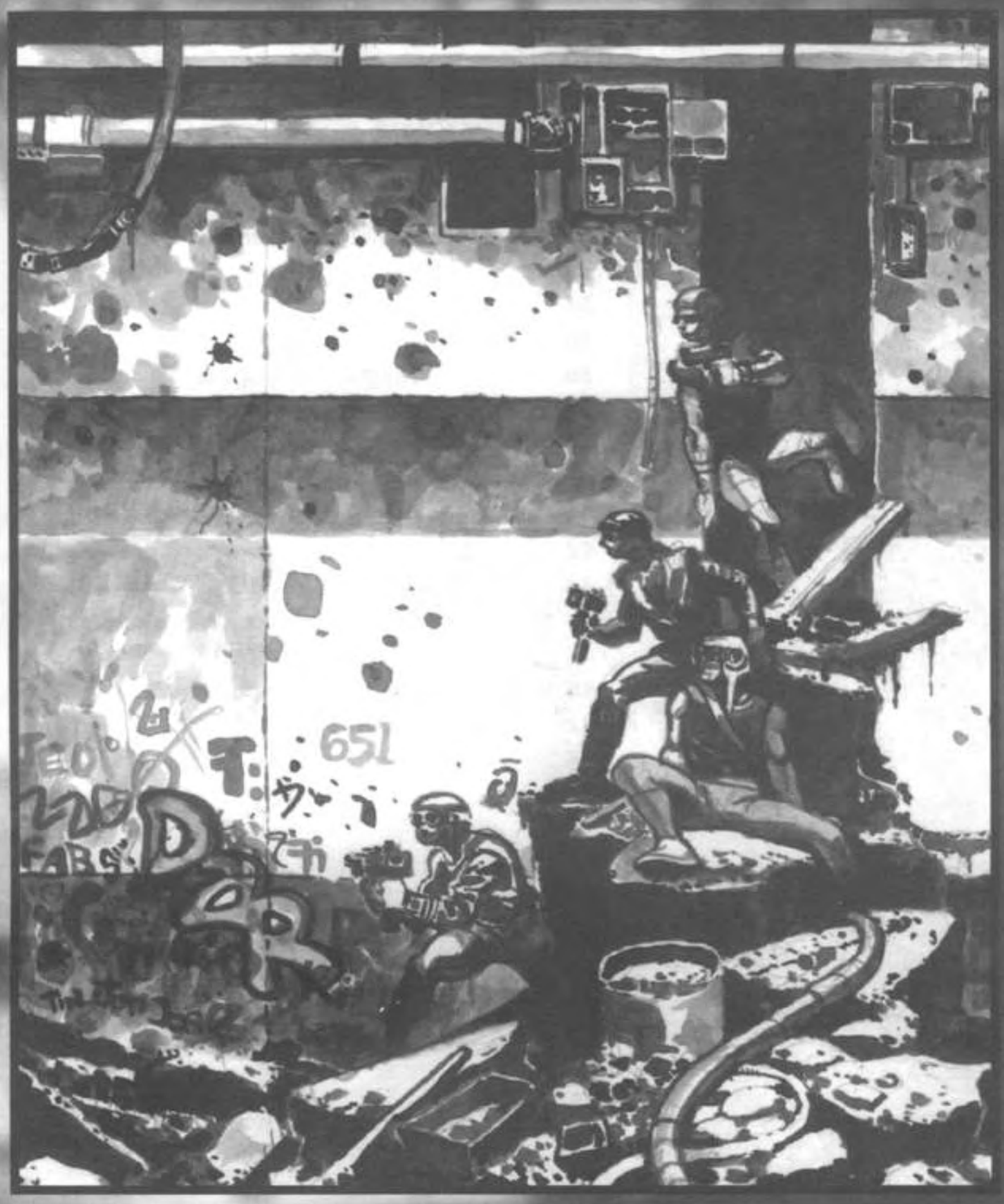
SHADOWRUN 7209

CALIFORNIA FREE STATE™



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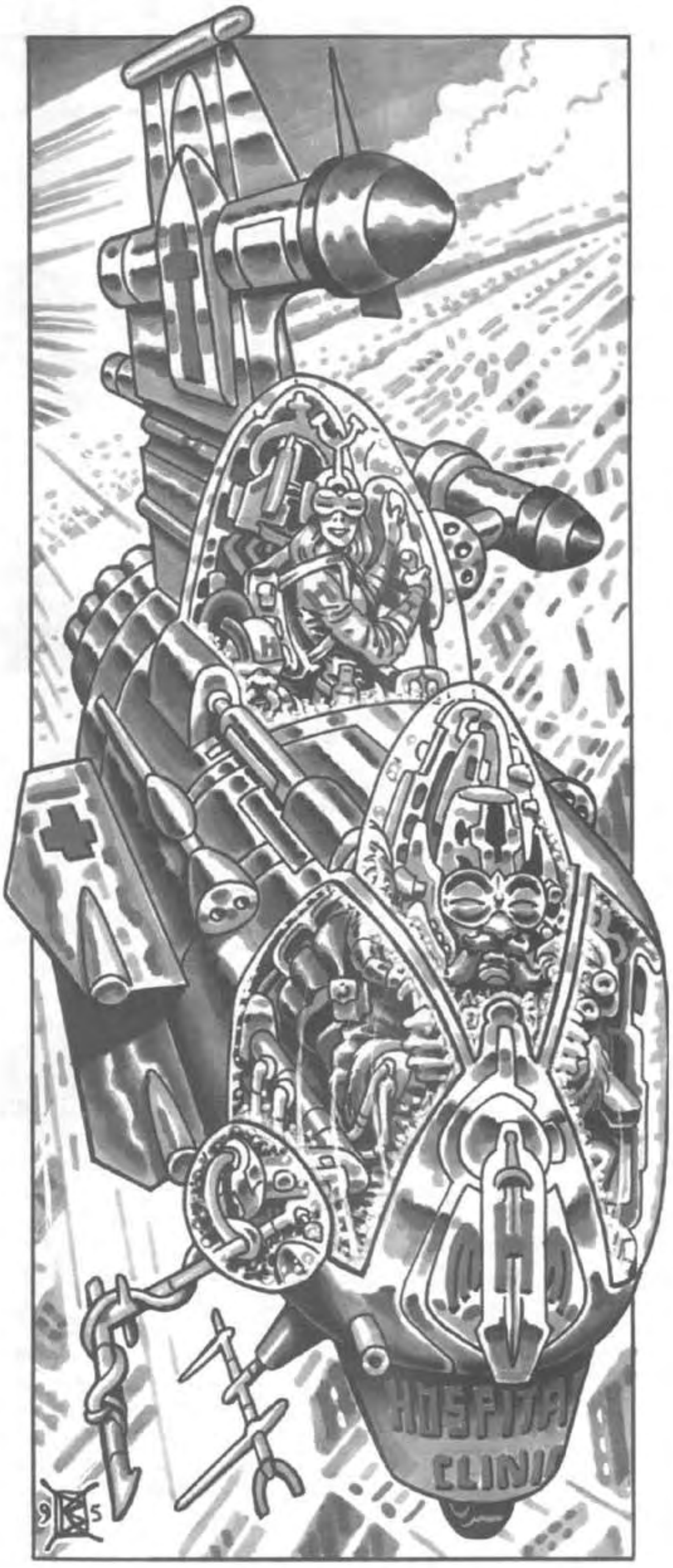
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INTRODUCTION



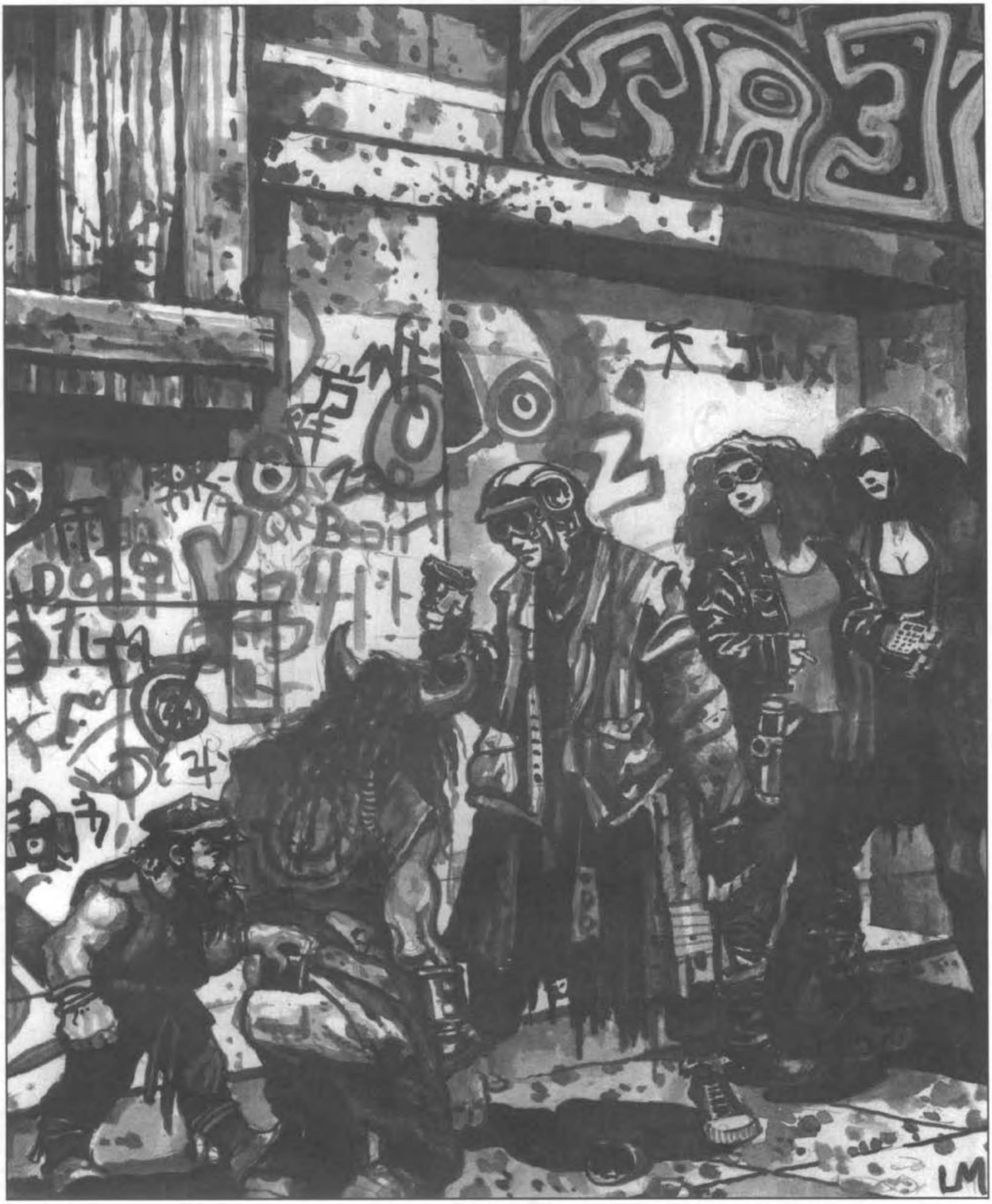
The **California Free State** sourcebook is a supplement for the Shadowrun game system. It describes the California Free State, a onetime American state that has existed for two decades as an independent nation. Freewheeling and unpredictable, California is a place of chaos and contradictions; what opens doors in the capital of Sacramento may be a ticket to disaster in the lawless borderlands of the North or the teeming slums of Los Angeles. Water wars, eco-disasters, corporate power plays and fractured politics all provide shadowrunners with plenty of opportunities to strike it rich in California ... if they can get out alive.

The **California Free State** sourcebook provides gamemasters with enough basic information to create adventures and campaigns in the Free State using potential adventure hooks and "story starters" scattered throughout the text. Players will find a wealth of facts, rumors, advice and warnings that they can use to arm their characters with the knowledge they need to survive runs in California.

Like previous Shadowrun sourcebooks, **California** is formatted as an electronic document from that fictional world. Scattered throughout the document are comments and additions from readers who seek to correct, expand, corroborate or contradict the information it presents. Because this "black" information comes from characters within the game universe, players or characters cannot safely assume that these comments are truthful, accurate, considered or clearly thought through (though they may be all those things). The material in the **California Free State** sourcebook comes from a variety of sources, most unofficial and all with their own biases built in. These different points of view give gamemasters greater scope to decide how much of the information presented is accurate, misleading or false in their own games.

This sourcebook describes six regions of California in detail, including the vast sprawls of Los Angeles and San Francisco and the magic-rich Mojave Desert. It also offers detailed information on California corporations, secret societies, and a never-before-seen great dragon. In addition, the sourcebook gives new rules for dealing with California's bizarre magic fluctuations as well as mutated and toxic creatures native to the Free State.

The **California Free State** sourcebook is intended for use with **Shadowrun, Second Edition** rules. It also expands on rules in **Awakenings: New Magic in 2057** and the **Grimoire, Second Edition**.



SHADOWLAND V2.0

"I have taken all knowledge to be my province."—Francis Bacon

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality."—T. S. Eliot

A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR:

To paraphrase an old saying, "The great thing about the UCAS is that anyone can grow up to be president." Of course, whether or not you stay in that oval office is another story. Steele didn't make it, and so far we're comin' up blank on all attempts to confirm the identity of the power behind the fall. Yeah, we think it's pretty fishy, too—when the best in the biz can't dig up the answers, it makes us ask a whole lot more awkward questions. Send any and all rumors, lies and innuendoes on this topic to yours truly at the usual address.



THE BACK STOCK
New Magic Download (The Awakened World all spelled out)
Fields of Fire Download (Guns, Guns, Guns, & Guns)
Cybertech Download (Man, Machine and Magic ...)
The Big A Download (Sorry, it ain't here)

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THE DAILY SPECIAL
California Free State (From the Tir to Aztlan and everything in between)

We're livin' in a nuyen-rich world, chummer! Today we're offering the CFS in one neat bundle, so check it out—if chaos makes nuyen, then California is the place to be. It's big, it has its own dragon and nearly everyone there is for sale. We got water wars, elf wars, simsense star wars, magical tree wars—it's the land of fun, sun and run!



COMING SOON
Threats (Secret stuff)
Campaign 2057 (Vote early, vote often!)

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NEWS



THE BIG D

Everyone' s favorite dragon is now a legal citizen of the UCAS. Dunkelzahn's latest press release says that he's packing up and moving all his stuff to Prince Edward Island, though Lake Louise will stay open for biz. For more info, tune into Wyrm Talk on March 15, 2057. Beware the Ides of March!



BALLOT BOX

Current UCAS Prez candidates: Arthur Vogel, spunky Democratic dwarf; James Booth, lame-duck VP; General Yeats, Republican good soldier; Kenny Brackhaven, Archconservative tycoon (can the HP be far behind?); and Roz Hernandez, mage-o-crat.



WE LUV THE CFS

New election, new talk. The UCAS wants some of its toys back, and California looks like the big target. Check out the public record on this one. We've got lots of talk that'll soon translate into action which always translates into ¥. Click here for your best interests.



WEIRD STUFF

More election news! The UCAS guvmint (the legal one) is gearing up the election machine. Early August for the polls, election, inaugural (can we get past that step without a new scandal?) and the usual whirlwind of parties. Place your bids now for invites to meet the elite.

It's 8:12:39. Do You Know Where Your Meat Body Is?

THE CALIFORNIA QUESTION

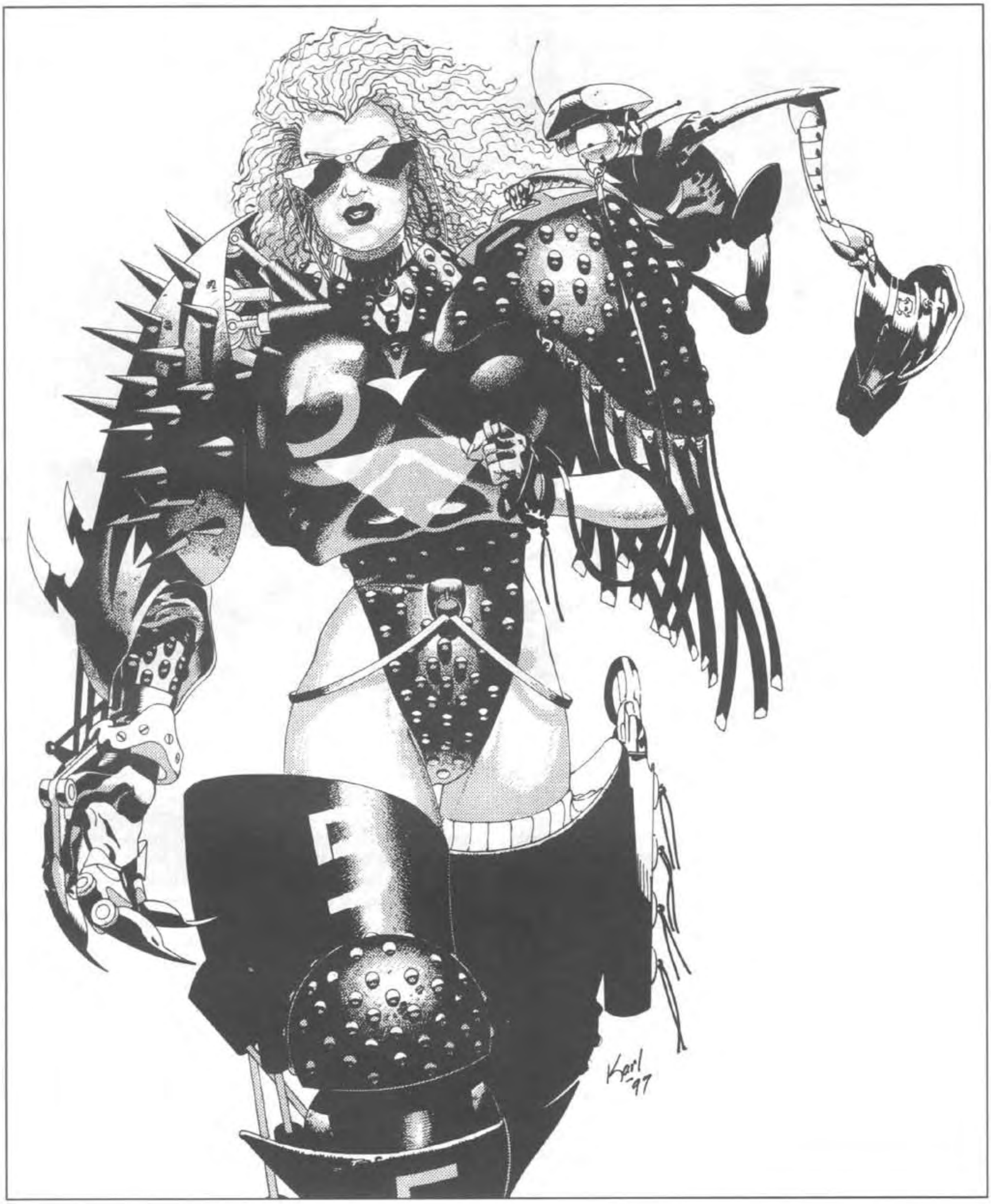


"Tonight, my fellow Americans, I come before you to discuss a matter of the gravest importance—the future of our once-great nation.

For more than five decades, America has suffered a steady decline, battered by disaster upon disaster, tragedy upon tragedy, humiliation upon humiliation. The record is a long and shameful one, burned into the hearts and souls of all true Americans. Who can forget the New York earthquake of 2005, a disaster that claimed 200,000 American lives and caused scars that are only now beginning to fully heal? In hindsight, it seems as if that terrible tragedy was a warning, a foreshadowing of the hard times to come. Within months of that devastating quake the United Nations abandoned its headquarters in the shattered city of New York, and that departure sounded the death knell of America's role as world leader. The following year, the Japanese Imperial State deployed its first fleet of solar-power satellites, indisputably eclipsing America as the world's most powerful nation.

In the years that followed, we came precariously close to Armageddon when a small group of native-born terrorists invaded the Shiloh Launch Facility and nearly assured the destruction of the nation by firing a nuclear missile at the Russian Republic. The grim specter of death stalked among us as the first wave of VITAS claimed millions of lives and unexplained mutations struck our children. As the nation reeled from these disasters, native-born terrorists struck again, announcing the formation of the Native American Nations and demanding that Americans abandon the homeland that generations of their ancestors fought and died to protect. American forces stood ready to combat these criminals, but disaster struck again. Armed with the mysterious powers of magic and the terrible destruction it allowed them to unleash, this band of terrorists held millions of innocent lives hostage. Humiliated and impotent, the United States was forced to surrender to these usurpers vast stretches of land consecrated with the blood of countless Americans who had fought and died for them throughout our nation's history.

But our humiliation had not ended. Indeed, the success of the Ghost Dance rebels seemed to accelerate the spread of secessionist rot. Foolishly inspired by the Indians' example, the so-called Confederate American States broke away from the fold in 2034; California followed them in 2036. What should have been a time of celebration—our joining with Canada to form


Karl
-97



the United Canadian and American States—was scarred by those losses. On the heels of these humiliations came years of hate-inspired rioting and mayhem, which continue to afflict us today. Our people had lost faith in the greatness of our nation.

Just when we believed we could fall no farther, we suffered the ultimate humiliation. Our own leaders betrayed us—betrayed the very principles on which our nation was built—by rigging our national elections. Had they succeeded in concealing their dastardly crime, our system of government "of the people, by the people and for the people" would have vanished from the earth at the whisper of a computer program.

For many years I served in the armed forces of our once-great nation, working my way up through the ranks until I was appointed a general and entrusted with the sacred responsibility of defending the UCAS against any and all threats. When I retired from my post three years ago, I did so believing that I had fulfilled my duty, and that my nation no longer needed my service. I realize now that I was wrong.

Like many of you, I assumed our nation was safe at the time of my retirement. I believed our long humiliation had finally ended, and that we could begin to use the peace we have rightfully earned to build a new future for ourselves and our children. But now I realize that I was blind, blind to a threat from the greatest enemy we have ever faced—ourselves.

Yes, ourselves! We can blame no foreign power, no outside enemy, for our sad state. We can blame no other sovereign nation for the disasters that befell us. As our Founding Fathers said, "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance," and that is a duty we have failed to perform. *We* must accept the blame for our decline, because we have brought it on ourselves by straying from the path our forefathers set out for our nation. *We* have allowed the decay to spread by neglecting the great dream that so many of our ancestors died to preserve. And only *we* can reclaim our manifest destiny, our rightful place among the great nations of the world.

To do so, we must root out the weakness and decadence that pervades our society. We must redress the wrongs that we have allowed others to perpetrate against us, and avenge the humiliations to which we have submitted! We must control the dangerous magic that brought our nation to its knees, so that it will serve good rather than evil. We must rid ourselves of our hidden enemies who would divide us with riots and protests! We must refuse to dance to the tunes of other nations! We must reclaim our birthright and destiny as Americans, and we must announce our intentions to the world with a bold statement of our purpose—a

bold action that cannot be denied. We will reclaim what is rightfully ours, starting with that Golden Land of Promise, that Pearl of the Pacific Rim—the great *American* state of California!"

—General Franklin Yeats, Presidential candidate, speaking at a rally in Seattle on January 2, 2057

"Over my cold, dead body."

—California Free State Governor Anthony Whitman, responding to a question about reunion with the UCAS. *This Week With Zachary Thorpe*, January 4, 2057

>>>>>(What with all the sound and fury lately about reuniting the California Free State with the UCAS, it seemed a good time to give our legions of loyal posters the full story on the Big State That Got Away. And before anyone starts thinking I've taken total leave of my senses, let me assure you that I'm not doing this to Get People Thinking About the Issue, or to Make an Informed Decision about some drek-hooped excuse for a UCAS presidential candidate who's using "Reclaim Old America" as a wizbang sound bite for the evening trid hounds. No, I figured it was time to post a screed on the great Free State of California for a reason any shadowskag will appreciate: money.

See, California has been its own country for more than twenty years now, and things in the Free State have just gotten more and more chaotic. Where there's chaos, there's cred to be made—if you know all the ins and outs of the situation and how to exploit them to your advantage. Hence, this post. Yup, kiddies, it's school time once again!

As there's gigabytes of information out there about California, and me with no way to tell what was true and what was drek, I resorted to my usual scheme of getting local residents to blather on about the place they call home and then send the resultant electronic gobbledygook to Shadowland. They've done a bang-up job; to one and all, I admit that I'm impressed. (There. There's your pat on the virtual head. Now go away.) There's 1,001 interesting things going on in the California Free State that represent potential profit (or danger) for those who want the cred and care to take the risk. There's even some worthy causes to fight for, for those who prefer their paysticks with a nice dose of warm fuzzies. (I just know every newbie street sammy on this board is gagging at that idea, but I like being able to look myself in the face on the morning after a run. Try it sometime—you'll see what I mean.) So here's a good look at what some wit dubbed "the land of sun and run." As always, I'm sure we missed some stuff (frag, considering how fractured the Free State is, I'm betting we missed a lot), so feel free to post whatever additions you want. Neither I nor anyone else at Shadowland takes any responsibility for anything you berks put up here.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (00:15:46/02-01-57)

>>>>>(Man oh man, I can't believe this drek. Like the UCAS has a prayer of dragging us back! What're they gonna do if we say, "Thanks, but no thanks"? Send tank battalions plowin' thru Injun lands?)<<<<<

—Slapdash (02:13:22/02-02-57)

>>>>>(They might. The UCAS government never has gotten over the Ghost Dance and the Treaty of Denver. Wouldn't surprise me to find out the pinkskins have been plotting their revenge for the past forty years.)<<<<<

—Braveheart (02:20:34/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Speaking as a "pinkskin" UCAS citizen whose skin is chocolate brown, I'd like to point out that the NAN nations didn't make themselves many friends among Americans of my color, either. I had grandparents in Nevada until 2018. They turned up on our doorstep destitute; the NAN authorities took everything they had.)<<<<<

—Lucinda (02:41:56/02-02-57)

>>>>>(We should rejoin the UCAS. Fat lot of good our "independence" has done us. Half of Northern California practically belongs to the Tir, the Azzies have taken San Diego, the Japs are all over San Francisco like a cheap suit, and L.A.'s gone from bad to hellish. The fragging government sits in Sacramento and pretends to run things, but Guv Whitman and his cronies can barely hold it together across the Central Valley. At least two-thirds of the state is fragging anarchy. Plus, our economy's in the toilet and our military is a joke—arms and equipment supplied at whim by Megacorps-R-Us! Some independent country!)<<<<<

—Real American (04:33:21/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Northern Cal is doing just fine, thank you, and half of it does not belong to the Tir. It belongs to folks like me who live there, and we happen to like it that way. No reunion! UCAS keep out!)<<<<<

—Native Son (04:55:36/02-02-57)

>>>>>(If the UCAS military'll kick the Japs outta what useta be my hometown, I'll gladly call myself a UCAS citizen again. Small price to pay.)<<<<<

—Muscle (05:10:43/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Like they care about the Japanese occupation. The UCAS Feds just want our resources. That's all they've ever wanted. Drek, Japanese megacorp money'll keep them from making so much as an impolite comment about San Francisco.)<<<<<

—CalGirl (05:25:47/02-02-57)

>>>>>(You know what's really funny? All you people acting like it matters. Life's short and then you die. Period.)<<<<<

—Erewhon (08:44:32/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Gosh, I don't think I can stand that much sweetness and light ...)<<<<<

—Snazz (09:01:34/02-02-57)

FREE STATE FAST FACTS

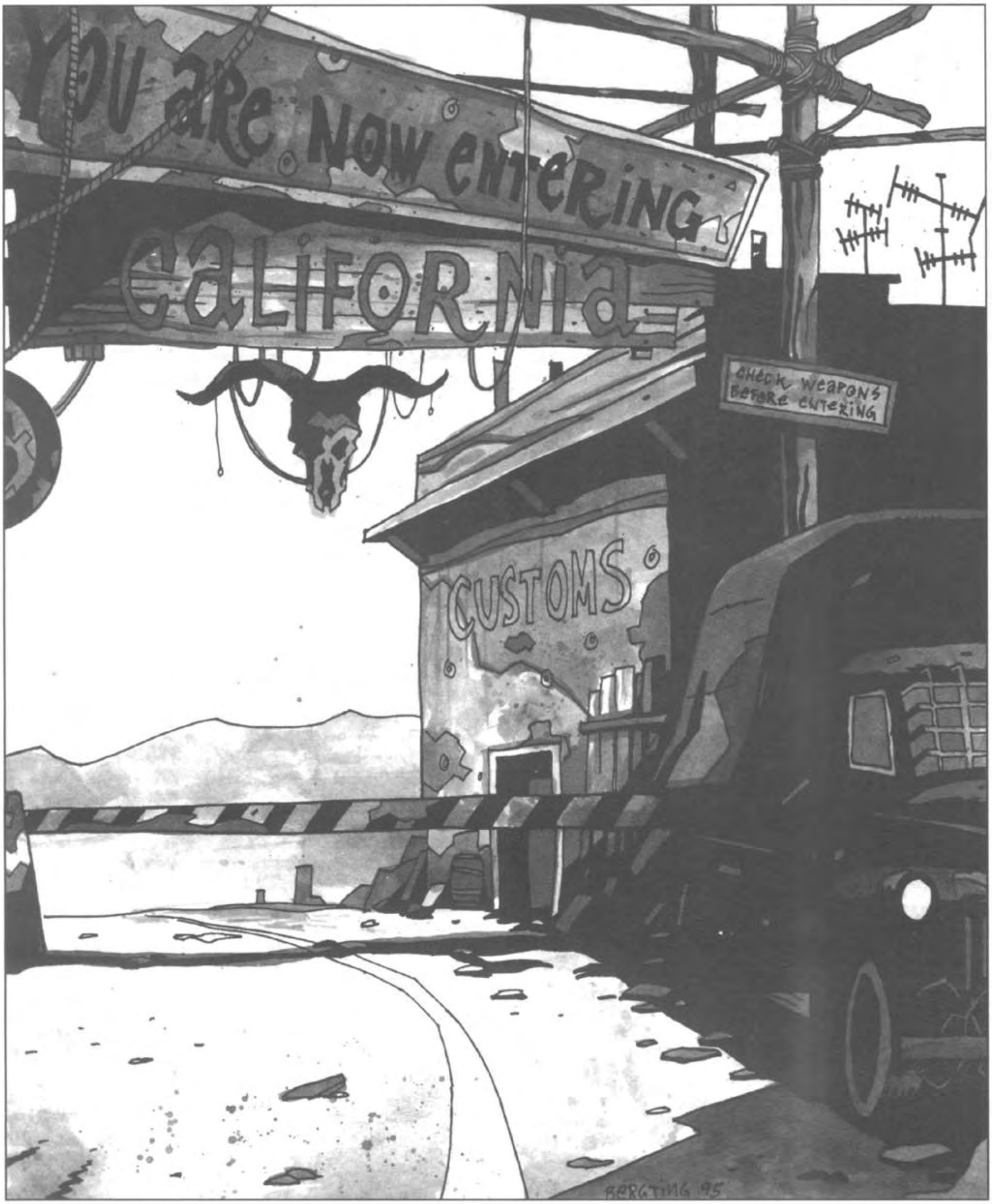


>>>>>(First a few basics courtesy of a fellow named Surf—then on to the meat.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (09:20:35/02-01-57)

For those of you who know absolutely nothing about the California Free State, a few vital factoids are in order. First of all, CalFree is big—about 355,000 kilometers big, stretching from either Yreka or Redding in the north (depending on who you're asking) to the Laguna Mountains in the south. West to east, it runs from the Pacific Ocean to the border of what used to be the State of Nevada and is now NAN territory. I just know some people reading this are going to ask why the frag they need to know the geographic dimensions of the California Free State, so I'll tell you right now. Look at a map and you'll see something about California's borders that ought to be of major importance to any shadowrunner with a functioning brain; namely, that this independent chunk of real estate is surrounded by hostile nations. There's Tir Tairngire to the north, Aztlan to the south, and the Ute and Pueblo nations to the east. On the west, there's ocean. So if you want to get to Free State territory, you can go overland through hostile countries that'll stop you at various checkpoints to ogle your datawork and harass you, take a boat ride through waters that may be infested with all manner of weird Awakened beasties and toxic sludge, or fly via plane or suborbital and hope no one lobs a missile your way just for the frag of it. This ain't an easy trip, kids, so make sure the profits are worth the risk.

AIR TRAVEL

As most of the nations around the California Free State have nothing much to gain by random shoot-downs of craft passing through their airspace, air travel is your safest option. (Also your most expensive, but then who says life is fair?) CalFree has four major airports, plus any number of little private airstrips that can deal with anything from single-fan cropdusters to large company shuttles. Most of the little strips are unregulated, no matter what some chunk of datawork in some government office may say. (Lots of the latter have cropped up in the chaotic Northern Crescent, or so I'm told.) Some, though officially abandoned, are still usable. As


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CALIFORNIA
CHECK WEAPONS BEFORE ENTERING
CUSTOMS
BERGTING 95

always in situations where government and corporate control is loose or nonexistent, local entrepreneurs have cropped up to fill the demand for quick transport with a minimum of questions—so all over CalFree and in lots of NAN border towns you can find smalltime carriers who'll take you to some of these fields. As always, check your facts carefully before your departure—otherwise you could find yourself in deep drek fast.

Long Beach International, built after the Great Quake of 2028 destroyed Los Angeles International Airport, is a state-of-the art airport with suborbital facilities, high security, and the highest gate fees on the continent. Tickets to or from LBI cost an arm, a leg, and possibly your first-born child depending on whether or not you go first-class. LBI serves the North American continent and the Pacific Rim, with less frequent flights to the rest of the world.

>>>>>(The corps owned LAX when it went up in toxic flames after the quake, and they knew they had to build a replacement fast. The old airport site was so contaminated by chemical spills from nearby waste dumps that it just wasn't economically feasible to rebuild over those shattered runways, and there weren't too many stretches of solid land left in L.A. big enough to hold the kind of airport they had in mind. So they built a snazzy landing field up on pylons in Alamitos Bay. Sounds crazy, doesn't it? An airfield on the water? But it's actually safer than the old LAX. It floats on tanks a few feet below the water line, and if there's a quake it just rides the waves.)<<<<<

—Architeck (15:22:34/02-06-57)

Sacramento Metropolitan Airport, in the Free State's capital, is the smallest of the four major airports. It can't handle suborbital flights, but relatively tight government/corporate control over the area means that threats of violence are a lot less likely to shut it down. That may be important if you're running your biz with solid bona fides and a need to get into the Free State without incident. If your datawork is at all shaky, though, consider another alternative. Sacramento runs a pretty tight ship, and they take a dim view of unauthorized outsiders sneaking into their bailiwick. Flights serve mainly the North American continent, with frequent commuter flights to most of California's other airports. Customs check-in is efficient and thorough.

San Francisco International Airport is in the Free City of San Francisco and under Japanese control. PacRim Airways is the major carrier; most flights are to or from points west. Like Sacramento Metro, SFO is a safe airport thanks to tight security. Nobanaga Corporation runs incredibly tight customs inspections—forget about smuggling anything past these guys. You'll only buy yourself trouble. Lots of shuttle services connect the airport with downtown San Francisco; however, the Japanese authorities recently shut down the Bay Area Rapid Transit system "for security reasons." This means that getting from SFO to communities in the Bay Area that BART once served may take a little creative thinking. Your best bet is to look for a jitney cab, but watch out for price-gougers.

Most major airlines serve Oakland International Airport, despite its frequent shutdowns due to violent incidents. The ability to reach the Bay Area without going through Japanese-controlled territory is still important to enough people to keep Oakland International a going concern, despite its gradually deteriorating facilities and lax security. For some people, of course, the lax security is one more inducement to choose Oakland over the other alternatives. Frequent shuttle service connects Oakland Airport to terminals for the California Free State Rapid Transit train system, and several highways can be easily reached from here.

ROAD TRIPS

As noted above, a road trip to the Free State means at least some travel through potentially hostile territory. I recommend against it, but if you really can't afford to fly (or you're too fraggin' cheap to pay for a suborbital ticket), the major roads into the Free State are described below. Most of the onetime Interstate Highways and larger state highways have become toll roads patrolled and maintained by a loosely organized group of riggers who go by the name of California Rangers. The roads are marked CTTR, for CalTrans Toll Road. Anyone traveling to or through California is hereby advised to pay tolls when asked; the Rangers don't take no for an answer, and really don't like having to ask twice. And they're not lining their own pockets; the money actually goes to help keep the roads in good condition.

>>>>(It's not nearly so bad as this skag's making out. I've gone through Ute lands any number of times on my way to CalFree, and the local peace forces have never hassled me. You just gotta know how to talk to people, is all.)<<<<<

—Little Bear (01:22:43/02-07-57)

>>>>(From your handle, I assume you're at least partly Native American. You don't suppose that has anything to do with the friendly reception you get ... ?)<<<<<

—Anglo Angela (02:35:56/02-07-57)

All the major roads across the California border sport well-guarded customs stations. Interstate Highway 5 is the main route from Tir Tairngire to Redding, the largest city in the disputed area between the Tir and CalFree (and a major stopover point for shadowrunners). A little further south, at Red Bluff, Highway 5 becomes CTTR 5; this road'll take you all the way south to Los Angeles. The Tir makes it a lot easier to get into California via Highway 5 than to get out; the elves close the highway to almost all northbound traffic at the Tir Tairngire border.

Highway 80 runs west to Sacramento from Reno and Salt Lake City in the Ute Nation. You can also take Highway 15 from Salt Lake City or from Las Vegas if you're heading southwest to Barstow or San Bernadino. From Flagstaff in the Ute Nation or Albuquerque in the Pueblo Corporate Council, Highway 40 is the main route west to Barstow. Those en route to Los Angeles can get there from Phoenix in Pueblo or Tucson and San Antonio in Aztlan via Interstate Highway 10. You can also get to L.A. from Tijuana in Aztlan via Highway 1 north, via Highway 15 in the Ute Nation, and via Highway 101 from the Northern Crescent. Long-distance bus service is available from Ute and Redding, though service is often interrupted.

>>>>>(There are plenty of other routes without customs checkpoints. A few roads have standing roadblocks. Others are set up at random.)<<<<<

—Black Bart (08:33:25/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Don't forget the mountain passes—tailor made for a panzer.)<<<<<

—Lone Ranger (10:26:14/02-07-57)

>>>>>(There's three major road routes to Chico-Oroville once you're in-country. From Redding, take CTTR 5 south and then Route 32 east to Chico. From Red Bluff, take CTTR 99 south. From Sacramento, take CTTR 70 north to Oroville. Chico's also got a municipal airport that handles daily shuttle flights from Sacramento and SFO. Finally, Chico's the last stop on the CFSRT going north. You can get train schedules from COGHub, the public datanet.)<<<<<

—ChicoMan (11:48:22/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Anyone heading for towns near Death Valley and the Mojave, CTTR 15'll take you there from L.A. & Las Vegas. From Reno, CTTR 14 and 395 are good fast roads. CTTR 40 runs from Phoenix to Barstow. You can also get here by air—there's small airstrips near Palm Springs, Needles, Shoshone & Lone Pine.)<<<<<

—Death Takes a Holiday (12:03:44/02-07-57)

TRAIN TRAVEL

California's train system, passenger and freight, is run by California Free State Rapid Transit, a private corp with lots of stockholders in the central government. In the early part of this century, CFSRT took over existing tracks and equipment from Amtrak, Southern Pacific and other commercial carriers, plus any municipal light rail that wanted to join. Nowadays, every train in the fragging state falls under CFSRT jurisdiction, including city systems like Sacramento's LRT and the Los Angeles Metro. As CFSRT has no competition, you can guess the average quality of service: drekky. Service is somewhat better on lines that run across the national border to and from major centers of corporate money; for example, the Central Valley corridor from Chico to Sacramento and Los Angeles has decent service because corporate and government bigwigs want it that way. Trains also run down the coast from San Francisco to L.A. and San Diego, by special arrangement with the Japanese Authority and the Aztlan government. East-west routes run from San Francisco to Reno and from Los Angeles to Phoenix and Las Vegas. The Sacramento government is just getting around to laying maglev tracks alongside high-demand routes, but they're not in service yet.

>>>>>(You can take the train as far north as Redding and Eureka, but expect to pay up to ten times the normal fare. Plus, you gotta sign a form releasing CFSRT from all responsibility for "any harm to persons or possessions." They don't want to take no flak for anything the train might run into in the Crescent, especially in the no-man's-land around Redding. Fares and cargo transport fees cover the cost of insurance for the train and CFSRT employees, plus hazard pay for the guards.)<<<<<

—Rail Rider (15:27:29/02-07-57)

TRAVEL BY SHIP

If you travel by ship, you're likely to run into problems on the water and in port. There's the inevitable risk of running into patrol boats as you approach the port of your choice; all the Free State's major ports are pretty well guarded. Clever folks who figure on avoiding patrol boats and other official nastiness by going ashore at some hidden inlet may run into the other danger: the interesting assortment of Awakened critters and toxic junk floating and swimming around long stretches of the California coast. Rumor has it that "sea monsters" of some unspecified variety lurk in the waters off Big Sur, and also off the toxic nightmare known as Coast Town in Los Angeles. Do your homework before setting sail, and pick your landing spot carefully.

Major harbors are a headache, each for different reasons. San Francisco Bay pretty much belongs to Japanese shipping—'nuff said, neh? Cruise lines also use San Francisco, as it's a lot safer than Oakland. The Nobanaga Corporation runs Customs; persistent rumor claims the Nobanagas are a yakuza front.

>>>>>(The ferries in San Francisco Bay are the best way to sneak ashore. They carry tourists and other passengers instead of potentially valuable cargo, so the customs folks scrutinize them a little less carefully.)<<<<<

—Snoop (18:55:43/02-07-57)

The Port of Oakland is the major port for the San Francisco Bay area, preferred by cargo carriers because of its direct connections to rail and highway routes. Overall security is somewhat lax, however, compared to San Francisco. The only reason this port is still alive is that certain people will go to great lengths to avoid the Japanese overlords in San Fran. As free traders must still get their cargo through the Jap-controlled Golden Gate, Oakland is less ideal for smuggling stuff than most people think. For smuggling people, however, it's not bad.

And then there's Monterey, California's first harbor and one-time capital. With San Francisco under Japanese control, Oakland increasingly prone to crime, and Los Angeles a Free City, Monterey Harbor is starting to come back into its own. The fact that the water and the land surrounding the city of Monterey are so drekked up they can't even sustain cockroaches doesn't matter a damn to the people who merely want to move a few goods through real quick. Why should it? They're not sticking around long enough for the poisoned environment to matter. The central government in Sacramento contributes a little something to Monterey's upkeep (the harbor, not the town), and government PR brags about Monterey's being "the safest port under domestic control in the Free State." Security is reasonably good, though the government's presence is mostly for show. Sacramento has better things to spend its money on, like anti-metahuman "public education programs."

Los Angeles has two harbors: Los Angeles Harbor and Long Beach Harbor. Both see a fair amount of corporate traffic, and security is correspondingly tight. You won't see more than the token uniform from the City Authority; the customs and security officials tend to belong to one corp or another. At Los Angeles Harbor, you

can occasionally use this fact to your advantage; there's a lot more corporations in the Harbor District jockeying for elbow room, and sometimes a little palm grease can convince the customs boys from Corp A to let you through without incident if you can convince them your presence will inconvenience Corp B. Long Beach Harbor is largely under the control of Lockheed Corporation, so there's no factions to play off each other. Long Beach is state-of-the-art and convenient to both rail and highway systems, and so most of the shipping from the UCAS and CAS comes through Long Beach. Most cruise lines also use Long Beach as a port of call.

>>>>>(Just for kicks 'n' grins, I dug around in the government's public database in Sacramento and dredged up a few census figures from god-knows-when. I think the date given was 2054 or something, I'm not sure. I thought they were such a hoot, they deserved posting (with appropriate alterations by yours truly). Your tax dollars at work ...

CALIFORNIA FREE STATE FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: 50,000,000
- Human: 65%
- Elf: 7%
- Dwarf: 9%
- Ork: 14%
- Troll: 4%
- Other: 1%

Regional Telecom Grid Access: NA/NOCAL/(local RTG) and NA/SOCAL/(local RTG)

REDDING FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: 21,000 (best guess)
- Human: 60%
- Elf: 12%
- Dwarf: 8%
- Ork: 15%
- Troll: 3%
- Other: 2%

RTG: NA/NOCAL/REDG

CHICO-OROVILLE FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: 300,000
- Human: 76%
- Elf: 8%
- Dwarf: 7%
- Ork: 5%
- Troll: 3%
- Other: 1%

RTG: NA/NOCAL/CO

SAN FRANCISCO FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: 650,000 (approx.)
- Human: 88%
- Elf: 9%
- Dwarf: 1%
- Ork: 1%
- Troll: 1%
- Other: 0% (not that they'll admit to, anyway!)

RTG: NA/NOCAL/SF

BAY AREA FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: Lots. You want specifics, tell me which bedroom community.
RTG: NA/NOCAL/BAY

BIG SUR FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: Yer kiddin', right?
RTG: NA/NOCAL/SUR

LOS ANGELES FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: 2,364,700
RTGs
- Los Angeles: NA/SOCAL/LA
- Fun City: NA/SOCAL/FUN

LTGs
- Downtown: 5134
- Studio City: 5102, 5104, 5136
- Westside:5132
- UCLA: 06-8147
- Coast Town: 5128
- Harbor: 5106
- East LA: 5129
- El Infierno: 5189
- Fun City: None

MOJAVE DESERT FACTS AT A GLANCE
Population: ?????
RTGs
- Mojave Area: NA/SOCAL/DESERT
- Palm Springs: NA/SOCAL/PS

LTG: Bakersfield: 1945)<<<<<
—Newsfax (20:01:32/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Want to hear something funny? That two-million-plus figure for L.A. presumes a countable population of 500,000 in El Infierno. Like any City Census flunky's set foot inside the walls since they went up!)<<<<<
—Angelfish (20:14:33/02-07-57)

>>>>>(It also doesn't include all the recent immigrants from Chicago who've washed up in tony neighborhoods like Westside. Of course, none of these "population" figures include the SINless, so they're all kind of useless anyway, aren't they?)<<<<<
—Capra II (20:20:55/02-07-57)

>>>>>(These figures are drek! I just did some quick math, and the quoted numbers add up to about 3,300,000. Out of fifty mil for the whole state, that leaves ... let's see ... 46,700,000. So that means there must be fragging near 47 million people with SINs in the Bay Area, Big Sur and the Mojave Desert towns. Does anyone else find that totally unbelievable?)<<<<<
—Factoid (21:10:22/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Well, there are cities like Sacramento and Fresno and Bakersfield and San Luis Obispo that aren't listed ... and there's the rest of the Northern Crescent outside Redding ... but then, no one's been keeping track of the Northern Crescent anyway. Yeah, I'd have to say I find the gummint's numbers a little unbelievable.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (21:15:45/02-07-57)

>>>>>(You all forgot somethin'...

Orkland Facts At A Glance

Population: 1,000,000 (I'm just guessin', but it seems like there are a million of us!)

Human: 22% (no Japanese!)

Elf: 10%

Dwarf: 34%

Ork: 50%

Troll: 25%

Other: I dunno what "Other" is ... but I saw a mage conjure up a spirit once. ...

RTG: NA/NOCAL/BAY

LTG: OKL

Now that's better!)<<<<<

—Orklander (00:12:59/02-08-57)

>>>>>(Hate to tell you, Orky, but your numbers are as far off as the fine CFS gummint's ... you get 141% when you add it all up.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (05:24:37/02-08-57)

>>>>>(I knew we was crowded, but not that much!)<<<<<

—Orklander (07:49:11/02-08-95)

>>>>>(Here's a little useful information for you out-of-towners. Consider the price ranges listed below as general guidelines for what you can expect to pay, but remember that CalFree is the place with no rules. Shop around if you don't want to get rooked. Oh, and the local currency's the CFS dollar. The exchange rate with the UCAS dollar is penny-for-penny, so there's no head-bending math to do (ain'tcha lucky?).

COST OF LIVING

Item	Cost (percentage of standard Seattle cost)
Weapons	80-150%
Ammunition	150-300%
Explosives	100-200%
Accessories	150-300%
Armor	100-150%
Security/Communication Devices	80-100%
Survival Gear	80-150%
Electronics	50-150%
Cyberware	80-200%
Magical Equipment	75-200%
Vehicles	100-300%)<<<<<

—Masters (21:30:59/02-07-57)

>>>>>(The CFS dollar is a real scream. It differs not a whit in worth from UCAS currency—it exists mainly to make the Sacramento



government slags feel like a real regime 'cause they can print their own money. There's a fragging golden bear in the middle of the CFS sawbuck, of all the jackass things!)<<<<<

—Halfpint (21:36:45/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Who pays a hunnert-fifty percent markup for electronics?! Get 'em in Silicon Valley—decks and programs and all that stuff are drek-cheap there cuz some skag's always tossing out some state-of-the-art thing for a new thing that's even more state-of-the-art. All the software nerds around here throw away as junk what most deckers'd have wet dreams over. Just gotta rummage through the right garbage cans!)<<<<<

—CompU (21:45:21/02-07-57)

CRIMINAL FINES AND PUNISHMENTS

Category	Possession	Transport	Threat	Use	Intent
(A) Small Blade	—	—	500¥	1,000¥/3 mo	2,500¥/1 yr
(B) Large Blade	100¥	500¥	1,000¥	2,500¥/6 mo	8,000¥/1 yr
(C) Blunt Weapon	100¥	—	500¥/1 mo	1,000¥/6 mo	2,500¥/1 yr
(D) Projectile	—	—	1,000¥/3 mo	2,500¥/6 mo	5,000¥/1 yr
(E) Pistol	500¥	1,000¥	2,500¥/6 mo	5,000¥/1 yr	10,000¥/3
(F) Rifle	1,000¥	2,000¥	5,000¥/1 yr	10,000¥/2 yrs	25,000¥/3
(G) Automatic Weapon	10,000¥	15,000¥/6 mo	1 yr	3 yrs	5 yrs
(H) Heavy Weapon	25,000¥/2 yrs	50,000¥/3 yrs	2 yrs	5 yrs	10 yr
(I) Explosives	2,000¥	5,000¥/1 yr	2 yrs	5 yrs	10yrs
(J) Military Weapon	6 mo	1 yr	3 yrs	7 yrs	15yrs
(K) Military Armor	5,000¥	—	—	—	—
(L) Military Ammunition	2,000¥	—	—	—	—
(M) Controlled Substances	250¥	1,000¥/2 mo	—	—	—
(CA) Class A Cyberware	5,000¥	—	—	—	—
(CB) Class B Cyberware	—	—	—	—	—
(CC) Class C Cyberware	10,000¥	—	—	—	—
(CD) Class D Matrix Technology	10,000¥	50,000¥/6 mo	—	—	—

>>>>>(You're likely to pay the high end or higher for just about anything in Redding—actually, in most places in the Crescent. People up there don't have a lot to make a living on, plus their supplies are erratic (to say the least!). That means they've got to charge more for what they have if they want to eat this week.)<<<<<

—Danny Boy (21:57:32/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Bull. I've gotten explosives drek-cheap in Redding. The troops left a lot of stuff behind after the California War—if you know who to ask or where to look, you can lay mitts on it for not much cred.)<<<<<

—Daredevil (22:03:45/02-07-57)

>>>>>(For magical supplies, the low end of the scale is what you pay the black marketeers. They price low to undercut the shamans at Shasta Lodge, who sell top-grade stuff for what it's worth. Of course, buying from the black market you risk getting less good materials.)<<<<<

—Magicker (22:15:58/02-07-57)

>>>>>(You also risk getting your butt fried off by a certain dragon who runs the show in that neck of the woods. Get caught with contraband and you're dead.)<<<<<

—Rusty (22:19:43/02-07-57)

>>>>>(The spiffy table above is another bundle of yuks from the central govt. database. I scalped this drek from Survey of the Administration of Justice in the Free State of California, circa 2050. Anybody rolling on the floor yet?)<<<<<

—Newsfax (22:34:21/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Anywhere in the Central Valley, if you're a metahuman and you wave a pocketknife in the general direction of the skag who's busily engaged in clubbing you over the head for your valuables, you'll be lucky to get life in prison. A "citizen's death sentence" is a helluva lot more likely.)<<<<<

—ChicoMan (22:40:55/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Same thing'll happen to a human in some of the all-ork, all-troll, and all-elf enclaves in the Northern Crescent. Racist stupidity isn't the sole province of humans.)<<<<<

—Native Son (22:50:33/02-07-57)

>>>>>(If you commit any crime in San Francisco, god help you unless you're human and Japanese.)<<<<<

—Orklander (22:56:48/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Or a high-up corp slag. I saw a Japanese elf corporator get a slap on the wrist in San Fran for assaulting a dwarf janitor who went into his office without permission.)<<<<<

—Tusker (23:04:55/02-07-57)

>>>>>(In general, justice in CalFree is a standing joke. Outside of major cities, particularly in the disputed part of Northern California, legal penalties vary wildly depending on the whim of local authority. Any given offense may merit no punishment at all, or may result in a death sentence delivered by a kangaroo court (or anything in between those two extremes).)<<<<<

—Legal Beagle (23:25:44/02-07-57)

CALIFORNIA HISTORY TIMELINE, 2001–2058

2001—The *Shiawase Decision* firmly establishes the principle of corporate extraterritoriality.

2004—Multinational corporations use their newfound power to buy up priceless land and resources in the so-called Resource Rush. California corporations buy up federal parklands throughout the state.

2009—Native American radicals capture a missile silo and inadvertently launch a Lone Eagle toward the Russian Republic. Nuclear war is narrowly averted, but the Lone Eagle incident touches off anti-Indian riots across the US, including California.

2010—VITAS-I plague breaks out, killing a significant proportion of the world's population. Remote areas of California such as the so-called Green Crescent in the north, as well as the ghettos of major cities like Los Angeles, suffer casualty rates of 50 percent or better.

2011—The first births of elf and dwarf children herald the reappearance of magic in the world, later dubbed "the Awakening." New Age mystics flock to California in search of magical sites.

2014—The shaman Daniel Howling Coyote proclaims the existence of the Native American Nations and claims most of the western United States. Redondo Peak in New Mexico erupts, for which Howling Coyote takes credit. In response, the US government declares war on Native Americans.

2015—The newly elected president of Mexico renames his country Aztlan and calls for all Hispanic peoples to "join in reclaiming our glorious cultural heritage." California's Hispanic population remains skeptical.

2016—U.S. President Garrety is assassinated. His successor, William Jarman, orders Native American tribes exterminated. Anti-Indian prejudice spills over to California's Hispanic population, some of whom begin moving to Aztlan.

2017—Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams simultaneously erupt, demonstrating the awesome power of Native American magic in the Great Ghost Dance.

2018—The Treaty of Denver is signed, giving most of the western United States to the Native American Nations. Seattle and the state of California are the only exceptions.

2021—Roughly 10 percent of the worldwide population goblinizes into the Awakened races of orks and trolls.

2022—Race riots erupt across the globe. Los Angeles is rocked by gang warfare, eventually suppressed by National Guardsmen. The city's worst slums are walled off, soon renamed "El Infierno" by local residents.

2023—US Supreme Court grants metahuman races equal protection under the law. VITAS-II strikes, and subesquent riots over hoarded serum level the Los Angeles neighborhood of Watts. Humanis policlub first appears in central California.

2025—UCLA establishes the world's first undergraduate course of study in magic.

2027—Desperate to alleviate water shortages, the Los Angeles Power and Water Company pioneers the first use of cold fusion technology, which produces fresh water from salt water as a by-product.

2028—A major earthquake rocks Los Angeles, destroying Los Angeles International Airport.

2029—Sony, Fuchi and RCA-Unisys develop the first cyberterminals. Some months later, the Crash of '29 brings down the entire global computer network.

2030—The remainder of the United States and Canada unite to form the United American and Canadian States (UCAS). In California, local elections include a referendum on secession from the UCAS.

2034—The Southern states secede from the UCAS, forming the Confederate American States (CAS). Secession fever begins to build again in California.

2035—Texas declares independence from the CAS and invades Aztlan. Four months later, having gained nothing from its military venture, Texas applies for and is granted readmittance. The elves of NAN secede to form Tir Tairngire.

2036—In response to California's latest secession threat, President McAlister kicks California out of the UCAS and withdraws all federal forces from the state. Almost immediately, Tir Tairngire launches a drive southward and captures northern California down to the city of Redding. Meanwhile, Aztlan strikes northward and captures the city of San Diego. California's governor appeals to the Japanese for aid, hoping to shame the UCAS or CAS into sending troops. Instead, the Imperial Japanese Navy takes control of San Francisco "to protect Japanese lives and corporate assets" in the Bay Area.

2037—Guerrilla warfare waged by local citizens forces the Tir army to retreat to Yreka. An informal stalemate results between the Tir and the California Free State, with both states claiming the territory between Yreka and Redding, but neither able to hold it militarily.

2039—Thousands of metahumans perish in global race riots, later dubbed the Night of Rage.

2046—A team of rogue deckers erases the results of California's gubernatorial election, allegedly aided by a Los Angeles street gang. The so-called Lost Election prompts the government to declare war on the "criminal element" in Los Angeles, sending army and corporate mercenary troops to raze El Infierno. After fighting a losing battle, California's central government declares Los Angeles a Free City.

2053—Tir Tairngire attempts to capture Shasta Dam, but is forced to withdraw by the great dragon Hestaby. Hestaby takes possession of the dam and much of the surrounding land.

NORTHERN CRESCENT



>>>>>(In keeping with the grand Shadowland tradition of not shooting off our mouths in ignorance, we've asked local folk to fill us in on the way things are in the California Free State. This particular section opens with some comments by my good friend Native Son (who, despite the jingoistic-sounding moniker, is good people without a bigoted bone in his body). Nate passed along my request for info to a few of his friends, all of whom have something to say about important stuff in this file. As always, feel free to post whatever comments you fragging well please (but keep it clean, OK?).)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (01:22:31/02-01-57)

The Crescent's one of the last real pieces of Heaven in the whole state of California—IMHO, anyway, and I think I'm qualified to judge because I've lived here all my life. Before the Secession, before the fraggin' elves from the Tir came stomping in and tried to take over, before things got as crazy as they are in these parts, I lived here and loved the place. I still love the place, even with all its troubles. So does 'most everyone around here, whether they're long-time citizens like me or newbies fresh off the highway from points south. We love our forests and mountains and hillsides and *clean* lakes and rivers, and we're not going to let anyone take them away from us—not a bunch of magicked-up daisy-eaters, not the bought-and-paid-for agribusiness lobby masquerading as a government in Sacramento, not the night riders who want to make this a humans-only paradise, not the UCASers who want to grab the stuff they missed during the Resource Rush, *nobody*.

'Course, it'd help if we could all just for once mind each other's business as well as our own. Or if we could quit squabbling over who's right and who's wrong about the best way to keep outsiders' mitts off the North. Or if the Tir was real far away. Those are the big realities that shape everything about our little piece of Heaven: the Tir on our doorstep, the resources we have that everyone else wants, and our crazy quilt of independent, isolated little towns full of people who all want to run things their own way. We've got metahuman refugees from the South and Central Valley—scads of them, running away from human bigots and poverty and filth to the one place they can live clean and more or less free. We've got humans, dwarfs, orks


Karl
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and trolls driven out of the Tir for the crime of not being elves—they're in no mood to move on, and some of them want to pay back the Tir in blood. We've got separatist types of every race, busy building their own little human-only or ork-only or troll-only utopias in the wilderness. They've come here to live with their own kind, and frag everybody else. We've got ganger leaders shoved out of the sprawls where they used to be king snakes, taking over a town here and a town there just so they can have a bunch of ordinary people to lord it over. We've got back-to-nature magical groups who don't care what happens to anyone as long as they get to keep working magic in their little corner of Heaven. We've even got elves who left the Tir because they don't like the way it's going—all they want is to live decent and be left in peace. I love the Crescent, but it gets crazy out up here. The rest of this file'll tell you why.

TIR TAIRNGIRE—TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

The Crescent's northern border lies just north of Yreka's city limits—unless, of course, you ask the Tir elves. They figure the northern border runs just south of Redding. Look at any map of CalFree and you'll see a wide swath of territory between those two "lines in the sand." Sacramento thinks it all belongs to the Free State, the daisy-eaters think it belongs to the Tir, and the only thing that keeps troops on both sides from pouring in to settle the matter is mutual distaste for starting up another major war. Bad for business-as-usual, I guess. Those of us who actually live in this buffer zone (or whatever you want to call it) figure it's ours—as long as the Big Boys stay out of it, we're happy. Trouble is, no one can be sure how long they'll keep away.

>>>>>(The Tir holds the far north of the old state of California. Then there's the buffer zone, including Shasta and Redding. CalFree controls everything south of that, though the government doesn't have a lot of power north of Chico-Oroville. The Northern Crescent also includes most of the old national forest land down to the southern tip of Lake Tahoe, then runs east to Pueblo and Ute territory.)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (13:25:59/02-03-57)

If we could set aside our hundred thousand differences for long enough, we'd stand a chance of keeping them out for good. So far, though, we haven't done it—and I don't see us pulling it off any time soon. There's just too many fault lines, and too many people with a vested interest in keeping the faults wide open. Here's the lowdown on one of the biggest, and the one I know the best—the environment.

GREEN POLITICS

Of all the folks living in these parts, the loudest voices belong to those of us who like our environment clean and pure, and want to keep it that way. Environmentally conscious people are definitely a majority around here, and lots of them are top dog in the Crescent's little towns and settlements. You'd think our common concern for our surroundings would motivate us to form a united front against any threat to it. You'd be wrong. See, the trouble is that no one agrees on where the greatest threat lies. Is it the Tir? The gummint in Sacramento? The UCAS, who're talking like they want their State of California back? The Native American tribes, some of whom want the bits of land that the old US government gave them as reservations? Or maybe the big threat is the little town a few miles down the road, whose mayor or sheriff or whatever disagrees with your mayor or sheriff? Everyone's got a different answer, and plenty are willing to fight over it. The Tir and Sacramento and the UCAS and everybody else have twigged to this, of course, and are busy using our differences to their advantage. Nuyen'll buy a lot of things; nuyen together with the promise of helping your side win the game will buy just about anything the payer of the nuyen desires.

>>>>>(Anybody doing biz in the Northern Crescent, pay attention to that last sentence. Any job you take, you could be working for god-knows-who. Fraggin' near everyone who wants a piece of the Crescent for any reason—the Tir government, a thousand million corps of all sizes, the CFS central government, magical groups who operate so deep in the shadows that no one ever sees them, even the local branch of the United Talismongers Association—is putting money and clout behind whoever they think has a chance of putting them at the top of the slag heap. They don't dare fight in the open, so they hide behind proxies and hope for the best. Keep in mind that a simple run to sabotage Shiawase's secret waste-dumping operation on the shores of Lake Whatever could turn out to mean blowing up a large portion of the local Green Earth Society. Only you won't know that until it's too fragging late.)<<<<<

—Balder (16:32:41/02-06-57)

>>>>>(Hey, I was on that Shiawase run! We didn't blow up no protesters. We didn't blow up nobody. We made sure there was nobody around before we set off the charges!)<<<<<

—Lieberman (17:31:11/02-06-57)

>>>>>(Did you assense the place, or did you just scout around for moving bodies?)<<<<<

—Balder (17:40:34/02-06-57)

>>>>>(Aw, FRAG ...)<<<<<

—Lieberman (17:46:43/02-06-57)

Green-minded people in the Crescent divide most sharply over the Tir. Some see the daisy-eaters as the good guys, at least where Nature's concerned. They like to point out that the Tir's biggest reason for invading California in the first place was to "save" the redwood groves and the wooded hillsides from exploitation by the UCAS, the Japanacorps, and the California state government. This, they say, means the Tir is the Crescent's best hope for staying clean and beautiful. The daisy-eaters will protect the land; they have the military and magical strength to keep the exploiters out, and enough love for Mother Earth to keep from exploiting it themselves. Folks who think this way don't talk much about other consequences of the Tir taking control. Most of

them figure the Tir'll leave ordinary folks well enough alone; all they really want is to keep the world safe for trees, right?

>>>>>(Why does that statement make me think of an old saying about buying prime real estate in the Everglades?)<<<<<
—Hasenpfeffer (01:03:44/02-07-57)

Then there are those of us who feel just a wee mite skeptical about the Tir's good intentions. Sure, they want to keep the agribusiness boys and the megacorps and the UCAS from exploiting the Crescent—because that way, the Tir gets all the plunder to itself. They probably won't wreck the environment—they're not stupid enough to tap out the very resources they went to war for—but they'll do as much damage as they can get away with, prodded by Tir-based corps that are every bit as profit-greedy as any other megacorp. The Northern Crescent and everything in it will exist for them to use. If they get control over the Crescent—directly or by proxy—we can kiss our freedom good-by.

>>>>>(Maybe I wouldn't trust a Tir elf with my credstick, but I'd trust him to keep the water clean and the trees growing. They've proved how much they care about a decent environment—the redwood groves are still standing. Flourishing, in fact. If the Tir had a secret plot to despoil the environment by inches, those groves wouldn't be doing half so well.)<<<<<
—Mudskipper (12:30:41/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Those groves are the Tir's biggest source of profits—they're chock full of virgin-pure materials for enchanting fetishes and foci. Of course the Tir's not going to trash the source of their biggest industry. But that same desire for profit makes the whole Northern Crescent look to them like one big shiny magical toy for the taking. They want our land, and they'll make a move to take it eventually. It's just a matter of time. The strike on Shasta Dam in '53 was a practice run—they wanted to see how alert we were. If we want to hold on to our land and make sure we keep the profits from harvesting pure magical materials, our only chance is to unite. By ourselves, we're easy marks—together, we can keep everyone else out.)<<<<<
—Tom Paine (14:35:56/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Are you proposing a sovereign State of Northern California?)<<<<<
—Hamilton (14:49:46/02-07-57)

>>>>>(We already are that, Ham. Sacramento owns us in theory, but when's the last time anything they said or did affected us? I'm suggesting that, instead of remaining a hundred little independent enclaves, we should form a federation. That's the only way we can possibly hang on to our freedom.)<<<<<
—Tom Paine (15:01:30/02-07-57)

>>>>>(So who gets to run your little federation? The orks-only settlement outside Fortuna? Or how about Herlong, the gangers' paradise right next to the old Sierra Army Depot? Or maybe your home town oughta run things? Ya think?)<<<<<
—Lightfinger Larry (15:25:44/02-07-57)

>>>>>(How about Redding?)<<<<<
—Red Rover (16:02:33/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Hey, now there's a thought ...)<<<<<
—Redd Dog (16:11:22/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Spirits help us all if the Tir takes over. Once again, all us non-elves will get booted out of Paradise.)<<<<<
—Only Human (17:21:31/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Anti-ork pogroms. Elf paladins riding us down like animals. I lost family to drek like that down near Bakersfield—only it was Humanis thugs that time. The elves'll do the same thing if they get the chance.)<<<<<
—Sharptooth (17:54:56/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Fragging daisy-chewers. We ain't movin'. Let 'em try a second invasion; we made 'em regret it twenty years ago, and we'll do it again. With UCAS backing, we'll stomp the pointy-ears into snail snot.)<<<<<
—Real American (18:10:35/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Great idea. Let the UCAS and the megacorps who own it walk in and take everything away from us.)<<<<<
—Free and Proud (18:15:44/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Anybody but elves, chum. That's what I say.)<<<<<
—Real American (18:22:34/02-07-57)

With all the divided opinions over who's best qualified to keep the Crescent safe for people to live in, the power players have an open field for a massive chess game using Northerners as pawns. Depending on who runs what town, the local sheriff or chief councilman or top thug or whoever may be in the pay of the Tir government, Tir corporations, flunkies from Sacramento, Free State corps, UCAS government or corporate agents, any of the megacorps, or all of the above. Left on the sidelines are those of us who'd rather save the Crescent on our own, thanks—we live here, after all. Of course, we don't have the nuyen to buy people off, so we're not getting much of anywhere.

>>>>>(The mayor of Mill Creek is pro-Tir; he's a dwarf, but a lot of elves live in his town. Because of that, the place gets hassled a lot by night riders—Humanis and Native Californian thugs, plus ork and troll gangs who have no use for elves or anyone who lives with them. Mill Creek hasn't got enough fighting men and women to strike back, so they're looking for protection anywhere they can get it. Can't really blame him for accepting the Tir's "loaner" of a few crack troops.)<<<<<
—Freebird (09:04:35/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Those aren't Tir troops. They're just people looking for a place to live, like everybody else who comes to the Crescent. Jeez, can't an elf go anywhere in these parts without being fingered for a Tir agent or a fifth columnist?)<<<<<
—Carlisan (09:11:56/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Nope.)<<<<<
—Tusker (10:13:45/02-12-57)

>>>>>(The Tir's bought off a whole slew of towns between Mill Creek and Bella Vista. Once they've got enough local leaders in their pockets, they'll manufacture some excuse to invade the Crescent to "protect" their allies. The night-rider bands in the area have been stepping up their attacks on elven enclaves and mixed-race towns lately, playing right into the Tir's hands. All it takes is one raid too many ...)<<<<<
—Mandragora (02:33:23/02-13-57)

>>>>>(I hear a lot of those night-rider raids were staged by elf gangs. They want to make it look like the rest of us are hitting the elves, so the Tir will come stomp on us.)<<<<<
—Tiggerman (04:44:52/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Did you see the dead and injured, Tig? If not, I'd shut the frag up.)<<<<<
—Carlisan (05:01:33/02-13-57)

>>>>>(I know for a fact that the sheriff of Phillipsville is in the pay of Saeder-Krupp. He's a former ganger, got one of the biggest armies of bruiser boys in the area. Old Lofwyr figures Sheriff Kingston stands a good chance of controlling a swath of territory between Phillipsville and Hayfork, and he's likely right. Of course, Saeder-Krupp just so happens to have at least two R&D facilities in beautiful nearby Six Rivers National Forest. Draw your own conclusions.)<<<<<
—Dragonsbane (06:44:35/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Right on most of the facts, Drag, except for one. The corp paying Sheriff Kingston isn't Saeder-Krupp. Aztechnology's behind it—they've been trying to buy out those facilities for years, and figure turning up the pressure on the ground can't hurt.)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (08:33:54/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek, both of ya. Kingston don't owe nobody nothin'—'cept a few nuyen he lost to me in a poker game.)<<<<<
—Charger (09:16:44/02-13-57)

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR (UNLESS HE'S AN ELF)

by Micawber

Micawber—not the sort of name one would expect an elf to have, is it? A genial character from a musty old novel written almost two hundred years before the Awakening—a novel that has nothing to do with forest-dwellers, or magic, or faery-legends, or stars, or any of the things most non-elves insist on associating with my kind. According to conventional wisdom, my name should reflect my "essential elvenness," meaning that it should contain some reference to green glades or moonlight. Leafchild, perhaps, or Willowsong, or Stardancer, or Moonglow. Or possibly something a tad subtler but still obvious—say, Forester or Greenleaf. "Micawber" simply isn't in the cards. Why, with that kind of name I might be anyone! How is one to tell the daisy-chewers from the normal people without a convenient hook from which to hang them? (And I use the word "hang" advisedly.)

If all this sounds bitter, then allow me to illustrate exactly why. Read, and learn what life is like for many an elf in the Northern Crescent. Between non-elves who hate us for what the elves of Tir Tairngire did to them, and our dear brethren across the border who regard us as apostates for leaving their so-called elven paradise, we can claim few friends. Yet we stay in these wild and lovely lands because their beauty belongs as much to us as to anyone—and because we wish to live free, not bound by someone else's dictates of what it means to be an elf.

>>>>>(No one "dictates" what it means to be an elf. All elves share a certain essential nature—purer in mind and heart and soul than the lesser races. Our inner purity is what leads us to revere the woodlands and the stars and other beautiful and precious things. To refuse to accept this simple truth is an act of willful blindness.)<<<<<
—Oakenthorn (13:21:43/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Hey, Oakie—don't be so modest.)<<<<<
—Tusker (15:32:45/02-16-57)

All prejudice has its grain of truth, of course—in the case of my people in this region, a rather larger grain of truth than most. Elves have not been well-loved in Northern California since 2036, when Tir Tairngire swept down from the old state of Oregon and attempted to grab as much California territory as they could hold. According to Tir officialdom, their sole motive for conquest was a noble one: to save the precious redwood groves from despoliation by ravening hordes of California natives (read: non-elves only). That many humans, elves, dwarfs, orks and trolls either perished in the fighting or lost all they owned to the fires of war was merely an unfortunate side effect. A few Tir elves have been known to admit to a second motive—somewhat less altruistic, but still defensible by their terms. They say the Tir invaded California in order to carve out needed living space for elves displaced by non-elf Native Americans, as well as those fleeing anti-elven prejudice throughout North America. According to them, the elven race has the same right to self-determination as any other race or nation; Tir Tairngire's foundation and expansion was therefore a moral imperative, and those inconvenienced by it merely paid a debt incurred by the bigotry of their fellow humans or orks or what-have-you in other parts of what was once America. Given such a history, it is understandable that elves should be universally despised in the Northern Crescent—especially in that part of it which remains disputed territory between California and her would-be conquerors.

To despise us all for the actions of Tir Tairngire, however, is unjust. Those of you who read the above paragraphs carefully may have noticed an unexpected word in the list of those killed or impoverished in the California War: elves. Yes, elves. We fought for California, too—fought alongside humans and our fellow metahumans to keep our "brother" elves from taking what did not belong to them. Over the past twenty years, however, memories have grown distressingly short. In only a few of the Northern

Crescent's towns can elves live without the burden of constant suspicion. Many towns bar elves outright, or allow us entry only to barter for goods. In certain settlements—most often populated by humans or orks only—having pointed ears is a swift and sure death sentence. Even in those places where our fellow citizens tolerate us, they do so largely because they do not really regard us as elves—instead, we are neighbors they have known for years who just happen to look a little different. Should an elf from elsewhere arrive in one of these towns, he is watched wherever he goes and suspected of virtually every crime known to (meta)humanity (without his actually having to commit one!). If he is fortunate, he may eventually get an opportunity to prove his trustworthiness. If not, he may suffer anything from unending minor harassment to outright threats upon his life until he leaves the area.

>>>>>(It gets really bad sometimes—crimps biz something awful. Me and some chummers took a job just over the border into the Tir, and figured we'd use the little town of Etna as our staging base 'cause the map showed it was the closest to where we needed to be. (No sense tracking through any more Tir territory than you can help, says I.) So when we get there, guess what? The town's full of trolls, not a single person of any other race do we see, and the big bruisers guarding the palisade gate won't let us in. Even Big Johnny, our own tusker, couldn't get anything out of them but insults and threats. One of them even took a shot at him, calling him a "dirty human-lover." We got out, fast. The next town down the road had a mix of people, and we thought we'd be OK. Didn't see any elves, though, and that should have tipped us off. Starlight, our elf mage, couldn't go anywhere without getting hassled. People would call her names, cross the street to avoid walking on the same sidewalk, even spit at her when she passed. She took it real well—she's a pro, and a pro learns to deal with just about anything necessary to get the job done—but I could tell it hurt.

One night a bunch of drunk humans and dwarfs ganged up on Star in the local tavern—I was getting us some beers at the time, and Big Johnny'd stepped out to use the facilities. I swear I wasn't gone from our table more than five minutes, when suddenly I hear glass breaking. I turn around, and there's Star backed into a corner, surrounded by four big humans and three dwarfs, all with weapons. The biggest and ugliest of the humans—a redhead with a nasty scar down her left cheek and muscles that Big Johnny might have envied—was pointing the jagged end of a broken bottle at Star's throat. All seven of 'em were taking turns insulting her, calling her things I can't post. You gotta understand, Starlight is one of the gentlest people on the planet. She's real zen about things, hates to get violent. So what she does, as I'm frantically trying to plow through the crowd that's suddenly collected between me and her, is toss a sleep spell that sends the seven thugs and half the tavern down for the count. I collared Johnny and we took off, counting our blessings that Star had kept things from turning real ugly.

So the next morning, four of the thugs—two humans, two dwarfs, all dressed in black synthleather jackets with little sheriff's-badge stars on the shoulders—come busting into our rooms at the local Inn (the worst in town, natch) and haul Star off to the local jail for "disturbing the peace." They tell us we can get her out relatively intact if we give the owner of the tavern a hefty chunk of cred "to compensate for brawl damage." Never mind that there was no brawl thanks to Star's quick thinking. She was an elf, we were "dirty elf-lovers," and the good folks of Callahan wanted a piece of our hides because of it. We paid up—we had no choice. After that we went to ground in Redding, even though it was a lot farther away from where we wanted to be. In Redding, all we had to contend with was the occasional funny look. Be warned, folks—unless you pick your ground real carefully, you could be the target of racist drek from just about any direction.)<<<<<

—Mycroft (21:23:46/02-18-57)

And then there are the night riders. The unthinking prejudice of otherwise decent people is a bitter enough pill to swallow; however, with them there is always the chance of proving yourself an exception to what they see as the rule. In time, given exposure to enough "exceptions," such people may even shed their bigotry. The night riders of the Northern Crescent, alas, are of a different stamp. These people hate anyone different than they are because the very existence of difference terrifies them. For them, the California War is merely an excuse—had Tir Tairngire not invaded, they would have invented some other reason to hate elves.

Native Californians and Other Vermin

Of the various groups who make it their mission in life to attack elven settlements and other places where elves live, one of the most vicious—and the ones I know personally—are the so-called Native Californians. How many there are throughout the Crescent, I can't guess. I know they travel in bands of twelve to thirty, favor stocking masks and dark clothing (the better to hide in the night), and use fire as their chief weapon. To my knowledge, all of them are human. Cowards at the core, the Native Californians' favorite tactic is to surround an isolated farmstead or other dwelling, fire gel rounds at its walls and roof until they burst into flame, and then throw rocks through the windows to wake the residents. When the people inside the house flee from the fire, the night riders snipe at them from the shadows. Sometimes, for fun, they shoot at their victims' feet and drive them back inside the burning house, keeping them there until the roof caves in. I have also seen them burn orchards, most often just before harvest when the loss will be most keenly felt. In their early days just after the end of the California War, they rode through towns late at night shooting exploding gel rounds at random buildings (or people, if they could get any in their sights). When the townspeople surrounded their communities with palisades, the Native Californians developed a different tactic. Nowadays they enter a town legitimately during daylight, set small explosive charges at their leisure, then detonate the charges several hours later. This way they can set fire to several buildings at a time from a long distance away.

>>>>>(They've added a new wrinkle to the game lately—sabotaging water pipes so there's no pressure when the fire really gets going. More than once we've been reduced to bucket brigades



to put these monsters out. They don't always use explosives, either. Sometimes, the arson-causer is as simple as a book of damp matches set to smolder slowly in a shop's stockroom or a pile of rags too close to a wooden wall.)<<<<<

—Backdraft (11:23:13/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Elves aren't their only targets. The Native Californians target all metahumans. They're not too kind to their fellow humans who treat metas decently, either. A band of these jokers around Honey Lake, where I live, has recently been stepping up its attacks against so-called race traitors.)<<<<<

—Halfer (12:44:53/02-19-57)

When the Native Californians came to Harvest Home—the small elven settlement where I live—they attempted to burn down the grove of almond trees whose crop is our chief means of living. Fortunately, the shamans of Harvest Home were able to call up a storm spirit to quench the flames before too many trees were lost. We captured one of the thugs, who had unwisely lingered to enjoy the show. He refused to tell us anything save for his name and rank in his detestable organization. Two days after his capture, we found him hanged in his jail cell.

>>>>>(Drek-eating pointy-ears killed the poor sonofabitch. Never trust an elf!)<<<<<

—Native Boy (13:54:32/02-19-57)

>>>>>(I've heard the NCs have a suicide pact. They'll kill themselves rather than talk if they're caught.)<<<<<

—Crescent Moon (15:56:31/02-19-57)

>>>>>(I heard they kill their own, to keep 'em from talking.)<<<<<

—Raven (16:14:35/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Oh, so somebody sneaked into this poor sod's jail cell, strung him up and then sneaked off without a trace? Ri-i-i-ight.)<<<<<

—Mr. Mistofeles (16:30:43/02-19-57)

>>>>>(One piece of vital info this Micawber slag ain't tellin'—the Native Californians are gettin' wads of cred from Sacramento. Specifically, from the slag who sits in the chair labeled Director of Education and Morals, or whatever they call it. Lester Brown, that's his name. He's a Humanis policlubber who wants all metahumans dead.)<<<<<

—Lightning Lizzie (19:44:21/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Bull. Humanis don't do stuff like that. They don't know how. They're just a buncha stupid good ol' boys who like to break heads.)<<<<<

—Lenny (19:57:29/02-19-57)

>>>>>(I don't know, Len. I've heard that rumor too. I've also heard that Les Brown and some like-minded folks outside the government are shuttling funds to some of the other race-hate gangers around here—like the Redeye Tribe and the Hardboys, an ork and troll gang respectively. Both of them started up just recently, supposedly in response to the Native Californians' poaching around ork and troll enclaves. Me, I wonder if someone in Sacramento is thinking, "Let 'em all scrag each other and save us the trouble.")<<<<<

—Third Eye (21:33:24/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Redeyes take no money from anyone! We are a warrior tribe, not some honorless sprawl gang. We fight to keep our people safe and avenge our dead, not for filthy money!)<<<<<

—Sharptooth (22:00:34/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Attention Native Californians, Redeyes, Hardboys and all others who dare shed elven blood—we will not tolerate your evil any longer. When you burn our houses, the Ravens will burn yours. When you kill our kin, the Ravens will kill yours. We will see to it that you reap what you sow.)<<<<<

—Raven King (01:02:35/02-20-57)

>>>>>(That works both ways, chumboy.)<<<<<

—Lightning Lizzie (01:21:34/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Who the heck are the Ravens?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (01:34:51/02-20-57)

>>>>>(A jumped-up elf go-gang with a nasty habit of cracking non-elven heads (whether their owners have done anything to deserve it or not).)<<<<<

—Native Son (02:12:33/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Liar. No Raven has ever harmed an innocent person. We punish the guilty so that our people won't have to live in fear.)<<<<<

—Ap Bran (02:25:44/02-20-57)

>>>>>(And just what were the little troll kids who died when you burned out Blackthorn Orchards guilty of?)<<<<<

—Native Son (02:30:41/02-20-57)

>>>>>(This just goes to show how tragically stupid racism is. Gangs like the Raven exist because of it—without it, they'd die on the vine. For years, elves in the Crescent have spent every day of their lives trying to prove to the rest of us that they're just ordinary folks. They're not out to deliver us bound hand and foot to the Tir, they're not out to exterminate us or take away anything that's ours, they don't have a scrap of the holier-than-thou attitude that most of us assume is "typically elven." They just want to live and let live. Only some of us non-elves can't seem to let them. After twenty years of struggling for acceptance as normal people, is it any wonder they're starting to get sick and tired of it? So many people have been calling elves the bad guys for so long that they're starting to fulfill those expectations. The Ravens may be a bunch of thugs, but all of us are at least partly responsible for them.)<<<<<

—Gypsy Lass (04:56:27/02-20-57)

>>>>>(If you knew daisy-chewers like I do, chica, you wouldn't be so fragging naive.)<<<<<

—Sharptooth (05:11:56/02-20-57)

>>>>>(I know elves, all right. Half my clan are elves. The rest of us are humans and orks, since racial categories seem to mean so much. We all get along just fine, because we're people first and elf or ork or human second. We depend on each other, so we've learned to live with our differences. In fact, we've learned to appreciate them. We're living proof that people don't have to hate each other just because they happen to look different.)<<<<<

—Gypsy Lass (05:23:55/02-20-57)

Gypsy Bands

Countering the pernicious influence of the one-race militants are the bands of gypsies who wander across the Northern Crescent. Despite their name, they are not descendants of the Romany people. Most of the gypsy clans began as friends and neighbors of various races displaced by the California War who banded together for protection against marauders. Driven off whatever land they had once owned, unable or unwilling to tie themselves down again to a permanent settlement that might be taken from them, these displaced wanderers gradually built a comfortable life traveling the roads. As more and more refugees fled to the North from elsewhere in California, the gypsy bands took in all who wished to join them. No one knows for certain how many gypsies are living in the Crescent nowadays, but their caravans can be seen just about anywhere at any time of year.

Traveling in anything from minivans to old school buses to built-up farm wagons, the gypsy bands bring news and goods from town to town throughout the Crescent. They also help to maintain the roads, a service desperately needed in a region where benign neglect by the central government is the order of the day. Because the gypsies fulfill such vital functions, most towns give them at least a grudging welcome.

>>>>>(These people make great biz contacts if you know how to talk to 'em. They go everywhere and see everything. Whatever you might want to know about what's going on in the Crescent, you can bet some gypsy band somewhere has the clean gen. They also make good traveling companions, cuz they know exactly where they're going and what to avoid.)<<<<<

—Wizard (05:45:37/02-20-57)

>>>>>(The gypsy bands are the last bastion of tolerance in Northern California. They tend to be targets for just about every militant race-based gang that exists in these parts, precisely because of what Gypsy Lass said—they show up the sheer idiocy of race hatred and separatism by example. Groups whose existence depends on convincing people that they have to hate the other guy can't afford to let anyone show (meta)humanity another way.)<<<<<

—Native Son (06:01:22/02-20-57)

>>>>>(I spent some time with a gypsy band a couple of summers ago, traveling between Klamath Glen and Blue Lake by way of the Salmon-Trinity wilderness. We stopped in half a dozen little towns in the Salmon Mountains, carrying medicinal supplies to trade with the locals for whatever they could spare. One of the van drivers, an older guy they all treated with a lot of respect, also happened to be a metalworker; he'd offer his services to anyone who needed knives and axes sharpened or tools and wheels repaired. It was the most peaceful six weeks I ever spent. The gypsies have a magic about 'em, y'know? I'm not talking hermetic or shamanic, though there's an awful lot of shamans among 'em. They're just ... special. They play music a lot and tell stories. Every night it didn't rain, we built a fire in the middle of all the circled vans and wagons, and everybody swapped stories: ghost stories, tall tales, stuff that'd happened to 'em, before they got adopted into the gypsy clan.

The clan matriarch—a dwarf about sixty-plus with the most amazingly beautiful eyes—told the best stories I've ever heard. Her tall tales were so funny I damn near rolled into the fire laughing. Everybody listened to her the way little kids listen to their favorite kindergarten teacher—and not just when she was storytelling, either. Every word she said to 'em, right down to "Nice morning for a drive," was important. You could tell they all loved her to death. They wouldn't stand for anyone giving her any drek, either. One day, at a troll settlement near Cecilville, the local strongman came by the gypsy camp with a couple of bruisers to dicker for

supplies. The matriarch wouldn't agree to his terms for barter, and the troll made the mistake of calling her a greedy little halfer. Inside of two seconds, the entire clan materialized around them, everybody carrying a weapon—knife, pistol, iron skillet, whatever was nearest to hand. Nobody actually threatened the trolls—they just stood there, holding their weapons casual-like and giving the trolls the hard stare. It didn't take long for the tuskers to get the message—they left real quietly.)<<<<<

—Sprawlboy (08:11:34/02-20-57)

>>>>>(The gypsies have magic, all right. Evil magic. They consort with dark powers and steal our children away. They bewitched my daughter, and she ran away to them right before her wedding. One of the gypsy women—a human, of all people, whom we had graciously allowed into our home to make our girl's wedding dress—filled her head with wild tales and cast a glamour on her to make her go with them. She was a good girl, a credit to her mother and me—she'd never have left us if she hadn't been stolen.)<<<<<

—Grieving Still (08:35:56/02-20-57)

>>>>>(If Grieving is who I think he is, I'm the daughter in question. My "wedding" was arranged without my consent, to a friend of my dad's about twenty years older than me. I was fourteen. That's considered legal age in Covenant, the little enclave of crazed survivalists where I had the bad luck to grow up. The gypsies showed me there was another life out there if I had the courage to take it, and I bless them from the bottom of my heart.)<<<<<

—Freedom Rider (09:02:03/02-20-57)

RAIDING THE COOKIE JAR

by Greenboy

As Native Son mentioned at the start of this screed, the Northern Crescent is a beautiful place. A clean place. One of the few places in North America, in fact—probably on this whole motherfragging planet—that's not poisoned beyond our ability to repair the damage. In short, it's a prime target for those in search of pure materials for magic. Talismongers, corps doing magical R&D, you name it—any skag who wants to be sure he's getting the good telesma comes to the Northern Crescent.

>>>>>(One-stop shopping at its best—and a prime target for shadowruns that pay real well.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (22:01:33/02-11-57)

>>>>>(If you get out alive with the goods.)<<<<<

—ThisOldMan (22:30:44/02-11-57)

Those of us native to the area take a dim view of such raiding—or at least, most of us do. (Some are in such desperate need for money that they actually help foster the black market in telesma, but mercifully they're few and far between.) We'll harvest materials in small amounts for interested customers so that we can make a decent living, but we keep our takings well within reasonable bounds. After all, we didn't settle here to get rich. We settled here to breathe fresh air, drink clean water and enjoy the landscape. So we constantly have to contend with "strike teams" sent to chip bits off the redwoods for some Johnson or other, corporate "black ops" boys trying to run us off the parcels of land they want, and private armies guarding all kinds of facilities that the corps think are some big secret. Lately we've also had to deal with the Tir Rangers. They used to be a bunch of pretty decent guys interested in taking good care of the forests on their side of the border. With the groves expanding well beyond their area of authority, however, they've gotten a lot more militant lately about enforcing their "jurisdiction" wherever the whim takes them.

>>>>>(Hold the phone. The redwood groves are growing?)<<<<<

—Bud (24:36:21/02-11-57)

>>>>>(By leaps and bounds. Even the elves are surprised—and not pleasantly, from what I've gathered. The redwoods are growing a lot faster and farther than they bargained for. Last I checked, they'd damned near choked off access to Highway 299, which doesn't make the California Road Rangers real happy either. No one has a frag of an idea why it's happening.)<<<<<

—Druid Lass (01:10:44/02-12-57)

>>>>>(This is one of those hincky magic things, isn't it?)<<<<<

—Rattler (01:17:22/02-12-57)

>>>>>(You ask me, the dragon's doin' it. It's some fraggin' dragon plot.)<<<<<

—Lenny (01:35:22/02-11-57)

>>>>>(WHAT DRAGON?)<<<<<

—Bud (01:39:08/02-12-57)

>>>>>(You aren't from around here, are you? And don't shout. The dragon's name is Hestaby, she's been sighted around Mount Shasta, and I'd say more if I knew more. It's a good bet somebody somewhere does—if you look through this whole post, you'll probably find the dirt.)<<<<<

—Druid Lass (01:51:59/02-12-57)

>>>>>(If you're planning a run for magical supplies, check out the new-growth areas outside the Tir Rangers' official jurisdiction. You'll likely run into a lot less opposition just because there won't be a Ranger post every thirty meters or less. The Rangers roam around all over, so keep your eyes peeled no matter what—but your odds of getting in and out are a lot better.)<<<<<

—Talismonger (03:44:56/02-13-57)

>>>>>(And watch out for the local treehugger with a shotgun. BANG BANG, you're dead!)<<<<<

—California Girl (04:11:23/02-13-57)

>>>>>(That bit about black marketeers being few and far between? Don't believe it. Magical smuggling is thriving up north. You just gotta know who to ask.)<<<<<

—Lightfinger Larry (04:22:35/02-13-57)

As if raids on our magical resources weren't enough to contend with, there's also the new corporate sport of location scouting. A couple-three midlevel execs, accompanied by the inevitable team of troopers to keep their high-priced little hoops safe, come dropping in every so often to check out the scenery and lay claim to it. Top of the list right now are sites for waste dumps.

>>>>>(Literally "dropping in." A lot of these slags arrive by copter, mostly because they don't know what the frag they might run into by road.)<<<<<

—Black-Eyed Susan (06:33:12/02-13-57)

>>>>>(They don't go anywhere near Mount Shasta anymore—not since Renraku lost a real expensive VTOL to a dragon attack. Flamed up real pretty, I thought.)<<<<<

—Lowell (02:22:14/02-14-57)

Waste dumps are a hot ticket right now because lots of corps are running out of places to put all their toxic junk. They've spent most of the last sixty years fouling up the rest of the state beyond recognition, and now they've got their beady little eyes on the Northern Crescent. The Crescent makes the ideal dumping ground—it's clean (so far), and there's no power in it strong enough to keep the corps out. (I'm not even going to *talk* about the flat-out abdication of responsibility by our lovely "national government" in Sacramento.) With a thousand different people running things up here, rampant paranoia about what the neighboring town may be up to, and nearly every little town feeling short of ready cred to buy stuff they can't make themselves, any corp has a good chance to buy off enough people to let it dump its dirt in our backyard. Lucky for us, the corps are not a monolith. For every corp that wants a waste dump in these parts, there's another corp—or even another division of the same corp—that wants to keep the Crescent clean for some reason. Research-and-development enterprises don't want to wreck their best source of pure magical materials; corp water poachers don't want to lose their free H_2O. So far, conflicting corporate interests are the only thing keeping the Crescent from being flooded with drek.

>>>>>(The other big corporate interest in the northern Free State is research facilities. The Crescent's a prime spot for hush-hush R&D for much the same reason it makes a good dumping ground—no central authority to kick up a fuss and lots of people potentially willing to sell their own grandmothers. On any given day, rumors are flying about corporate installations hidden deep in the woods or partway inside a mountain or tucked behind a hill in some out-of-the-way spot. Sometimes they're true, sometimes not—but a smart runner can sift the false from the true and make a packet of cred.)<<<<<

—Lowell (03:16:57/02-14-57)

>>>>>(I know for a fact that Saeder-Krupp and the Big A have stuff in the Crescent. They're into heavy magical research; that's why they chose to locate here. What better spot than the cleanest place left in the state?)<<<<<

—Local Talent (03:28:33/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Not to mention that the central government's anti-Awakened bias makes it fragging near impossible for SK and Aztechnology to operate legit elsewhere in CalFree. The Crescent's free territory by comparison.)<<<<<

—Native Son (03:35:45/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Anyone interested in what Saeder-Krupp's doing, check out what used to be the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation—but be reeeaaaal careful.)<<<<<

—Wizard (05:33:21/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Shiawase and Yamatetsu have set up shop in the Crescent too. Some kind of biogenetic drek is what I hear—something they don't want anyone else to know about.)<<<<<

—Black-Eyed Susan (06:11:45/02-14-57)

>>>>>(They're working on VITAS-4!)<<<<<

—Rattler (06:44:52/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Drek. That's total drek.)<<<<<

—Lieberman (06:56:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Yeah? Then how come a buncha my best chummers got scragged trying to break into the place?)<<<<<

—Rattler (07:02:33/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Could be lots of reasons—not least of which is the corps' nasty habit of geeking intruders on principle.)<<<<<

—Black-Eyed Susan (07:18:34/02-14-57)

The final target on the corporate hit list is water. Out-of-staters who come from water-rich places may find it bizarre to think of water as having value in nuyen, but in California it's a precious and expensive resource. The Northern Crescent has drek-loads of rivers and quite a few decent-sized lakes. All that water is better than gold to people in the parched southern parts of the Free State.

In former years, the South got enough water to support a swimming-pool lifestyle from the North and the Central Valley. Sure, they had to fight Valley agribusiness for it, but their lobbyists managed to do pretty well against the agriboys in the California statehouse. Since the Secession, the South hasn't done so well. The Valley has hung on to every drop of its water like grim death, grudgingly selling small amounts of it to L.A. and other points south for exorbitant prices. Needless to say, quite a few corporations, towns and cities in Southern California aren't too fond of this arrangement. Knowing that they have no prospect of getting Sacramento or agribusiness to change their ways, they choose another option: waterjacking. Rather than pay Sacramento through the nose, they send in hired guns to steal water from the fragmented, poorly defended enclaves of the Northern Crescent.

In the past few years, waterjacking has become such big business that independent "water smugglers" are getting into the act. Where once upon a time you could bet that any given gang of waterjackers was in the pay of either a corp or some city council, nowadays they might also be smalltime mobsters or petty crimi-



nals figuring to make it big in the water biz. There's not too many independents as yet, but look for California's water wars to become even more intense real soon.

>>>>>(Some chummers and I made a nice chunk of nuyen defending Rio Dell from waterjackers. Rio Dell's right on the Eel River, and also right off Highway 101. Guess the proximity of a decent stretch of highway made the Dell look like a good target—somebody was thinkin' fast getaway. Plus, Rio Dell's a fair-sized place with a lot of traffic, as towns in the Crescent go. You're less likely to notice a few strangers in a place like Rio than you are in some real podunk little town where everybody knows everybody.

Well, the locals had been hit for water a few times that year and they were tired of it. We happened to be passing through—never mind why—and they asked us to help them out. For a solid week, we watched that fragging stretch of river, waiting for someone to show. Finally they did—a gang of six, driving a truck full of water tanks. We let 'em get the tanks into the water and start filling them, and then our mage whistled up a motherfragging huge water elemental. The elemental swamped the lot of 'em—swept 'em away in a spontaneous explosion of whitewater rapids. We drove the truck and the tanks into town, dropped 'em off in front of City Hall, and collected what must've been the easiest cred I've ever made. Frag, the mage was practically the only one who had to work for it.)<<<<<

—Seattle Joe (10:33:42/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Don't be thinking all waterjackers are easy pickings. Joe was obviously dealing with amateurs. The corps and organized crime outfits send up well-equipped commando teams, often including magic-users. One elemental won't be much use against them.)<<<<<

—Pfister (11:02:33/02-14-57)

NICE PLACE TO STAY, BUT I WOULDN'T WANT TO LIVE THERE

>>>>>(To give potential visitors to this region of California a clearer idea of just what they might be getting themselves into, I asked a friend to toss in her three nuyen about the shadowrunner's likeliest destination in the Northern Crescent: the city of Redding. She also gave us what she knows about the area around Mount Shasta. Read, pay attention, and take notes; this stuff could save your life.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (01:39:44/02-01-57)

FREE CITY OF REDDING

by Redd Dog

Redding's my hometown—once a quiet community of farmers and loggers, now the largest bastion of California sovereignty in the so-called no man's land between the Free State and the Tir.

Redding and the rest of Shasta County sit right in the middle of a large swath of territory that the Tir armies took in 2036 but couldn't hold. Local resistance forced the Tir elves back to Yreka, and ever since then the Tir and the Free State have agreed to disagree on just exactly where the California-Tir border lies. Meanwhile, us natives of Redding and its environs have quietly gotten on with our ever-more-interesting lives.

The first thing to understand about Redding is, it's officially a Free City. That means people in Redding pay no taxes or fees to the central government in Sacramento, in return for which the Sacramento Stooges leave us the hell alone. And I mean alone—they send us not a plugged nuyen in state funds, and are under no obligation to send a single soldier our way if the Tir tries to invade again. (They'd probably send us a little something just to frag off the elves, or to keep from losing what little face they have left in these parts—but that's another story.) This state of affairs doesn't bother us much. After all, it wasn't crack California guv'mint troops who tossed the Tir out of Shasta County all those years ago. It was us—the ordinary people of Redding and every little nearby town, fighting the Tir occupiers every way we knew how until they got so bloody sick of it they packed up and left. We figure if they're stupid enough to forget that lesson, we can easily teach it to them again.

Not that we're exactly looking forward to the prospect of another war. That's the second thing you need to understand about Redding; it's kind of a nervous place. We worry about the Tir elves trying to take us over again, and how many good people we'll lose making them leave. We worry about the dragon who's set up house on Mount Shasta not far away—nobody knows anything bad about her, but most don't know any good, either. And with a dragon, who the frag knows what good and bad even mean?

>>>>>(Hestaby has proved her good intentions. She's keeping Mount Shasta free of harmful influences.)<<<<<

—Shasta Sam (04:35:46/02-03-57)

>>>>>(Yeah? Like what—the people who used to live near there?)<<<<<

—Grifter (05:04:55/02-03-57)

>>>>>(Like the fraggin' Tir. She drove 'em off when they tried to take the dam. Go Hestaby!)<<<<<

—Angelface (05:12:33/02-03-57)

>>>>>(We live near Shasta, and the dragon's never done us any harm.)<<<<<

—Wanderer (08:33:21/02-03-57)

>>>>>(Yet.)<<<<<

—Grifter (08:35:59/02-03-57)

We worry about refugees, human and metahuman, who often bring their fears and troubles and hates with them. We get a lot of refugees—frightened, poorer than dirt, sometimes madder than hell about what they left behind. Angry people don't make good neighbors. Folks in Redding can't afford to have the races at each other's throats; we survive and thrive on a certain level of tolerance. If we ever started seriously fighting among ourselves, the elves of the Tir wouldn't have to worry about a united population throwing guerrilla war in their faces. They'd have the perfect opening for invasion, and this time they'd keep control.

But for all our worrying, we have a real freedom here that other folks in other places can only dream about. That's the third thing to understand about Redding. We really are a Free City, free from corp control and government regulation and laws designed to reward the big fish while gutting the little ones. Anyone who wants to live free, mind his or her own business, and make enough of a living somehow to keep body and soul together can do that in Redding. We prize our freedom, we're willing to fight and die for it, and we're willing to share it with anyone who'll use it responsibly.

Local People and Everyday Life

Redding has two parts to it—what used to be downtown, and the Outside District that takes in everything from the edge of downtown to little nearby towns like Anderson. Downtown got pretty well blasted during the California War, and we've had precious little money since then to rebuild on a large scale. However, plenty of squatters have moved into the buildings that were left intact, and lots more have shored up houses and tenements that were only partly damaged. We have a saying here in Redding—if you put a roof on it, it's yours. After twenty-odd years of refurbishing downtown Redding building by building and block by block, we've done a pretty respectable job of re-creating the city the Tir armies tried their best to destroy. There's still areas of downtown Redding that look like bomb craters (hell, lots of 'em *are* bomb craters!), but we've made more than half of it whole again.

>>>>>(Watch out for those bombed-out blocks. Not only do you stand a good chance of breaking your neck in the dark, there's gangers on the prowl. Redd Dog's upbeat picture to the contrary, Redding has its share of mean streets.)<<<<<

—Sammy Boy (09:57:23/02-09-57)

Most of the folks who live in Redding, apart from the ones who've arrived in the past few years, are the children and grandchildren of those driven out of the Native American Nations and Tir Tairngire. The bulk of them are humans and dwarfs, with somewhat fewer orks and trolls. Partly to escape prejudice and partly from exaggerated fear of it, a fair number of trolls and orks left Redding in the late 2030s to form "tribes" of their own kind in the wilderness.

>>>>>("Exaggerated," nothing! Try hearing people call you "frog" everywhere you go, and then come and tell me there's no prejudice in Redding.)<<<<<

—Tuskeroo (10:05:34/02-09-57)

Elves live in Redding too, though fewer of them than any other race. Lots of Redding's elves bought the Tir's claims of an "elven Eden" and went to join it before the war; after the war, lots of elves left Redding for other towns to escape angry former neighbors who weren't bothering to distinguish between one pointy-ear

and another. By the early 2040s the anti-elf hysteria had died down somewhat, and those elves who'd fought for Redding against the Tir no longer had to shrink from the hostile glares of their fellow citizens. Nowadays, most Redding residents don't mind elven refugees—they figure any bunch of elves fetching up poor and hungry in Redding probably aren't secret Tir fifth-columnists.

>>>>>(You can still find Farmer Bob the Elf-Hater living on outlying farms in the Outside District, but most places in Redding there's less animosity toward elves than you'd expect. Local people tend to be cautious around elves they don't know personally, but they won't hassle you bad unless you start pulling some kind of attitude.)<<<<<

—Monster (11:24:55/02-09-57)

>>>>>(Hey Monster—define "bad!")<<<<<

—Seastar (11:36:21/02-09-57)

As for who runs the place—well, that includes everybody who cares to chip in at town meetings. That's where things get decided—the monthly meetings in the Matrix, where anyone who wants to can speak his piece. We've also got a City Council, whose members take care of essential city services. (Some things, like whether or not to have a fire department, you just can't leave to a two-thirds citizen majority.)

After the war, with Redding in a shambles and no hope of outside help to rebuild, those of us who'd survived the Tir occupation pretty much had to figure out how to run a city from scratch. Not to toot my own horn or anything, but I think we've done a respectable job. The top leaders of the anti-Tir resistance groups formed a five-member City Council to handle the big important stuff—police and fire chiefs, a treasurer, the head of the Redding Militia, and our local mayor to make sure the other four bigwigs all work together. All Redding citizens shell out a flat 8 percent tax on whatever money we make to pay for the purchase and upkeep of fire-fighting equipment, a few police cars and cycles, our share of the local California Rangers' road-repair bill, garbage pickup, maintenance of our three local hospitals, and other stuff like that.

>>>(Query: California Rangers? Road-repair bill?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (14:22:45/02-09-57)

>>>>>(The California Rangers are the closest thing to a genuine statewide authority left in the CFS. What they are is a bunch of riggers—lots of 'em from what used to be the California National Guard—who dedicated themselves to keeping the Free State's highways and county roads from deteriorating after the Secession and the California War. Each ranger has his or her own little stretch of road, which he protects with occasionally vicious intensity from anyone foolish enough to try taking it over or charging a toll to pass. They get funding from all kinds of sources—pretty much everyone who ever uses a road, from the central government to the corps to people in small towns, pays these guys a little something toward maintenance and equipment. Decent roads are California's lifeline in a lot of ways, and (luckily) everybody realizes that. It's a weird system, but it works.)<<<<<

—Capistrano (14:43:31/02-09-57)

>>>>>(They're crazy, man! Me an' some chummers wuz drivin' down Highway 101 outta Chico, goin' quick cuz we had company on our tails. Just past Red Bluff, we hear sirens and a voice tellin' us ta pull over. Like we're gonna obey orders, right? We did what anybody else'd do—we floored pedal, figurin' ta outrun the skag behind us. Well, this guy chasin' us, he pours on the speed and frag if he don't go flyin' right by us. Speeda light he wuz goin', swear to god. So he goes streakin' by and then whips around so he's lyin' straight across the fraggin' road. Now we're runnin' at I dunno how many kph—no way we can stop in time. Jammer, our rigger, he tries anyway. Jammer can see the guy in the front seat, siren still wailin', grinnin' fit to split his face. Jammer really don't wanna kill the poor skag; riggers kinda act like every other rigger's their brother, ya know? So Jammer slams on the brakes. We go plowin' forward, screechin' so loud I hadda cover my ears. I see the skag's big ol' car loomin' up like a mountain, and I close my eyes. I can't look, ya know? I'm waiting for the sound of crunchin' metal, which never comes. We stop, and I slam hard into the seat back in fronta me. Jammer says, real soft, "Aw frag," and then I hear two things: the whine of a missile launcher foldin' into position, and engines way behind. Our company from Chico was catchin' up.

So we all start swearing and grabbin' fer guns, and the engines are gettin' closer every second. Then the missile launcher fires, over us. Next thing I see out the back window, a big fireball explodes down the road. When the light fades, there's a pile of twisted metal. Nothin' movin'. No engine noise no more.

Then the missile launcher whines again. And this crazy rigger says over a loudspeaker on his vehicle, "Now that I've got your attention, there's a little matter of a speeding ticket—payment due immediately." One of our sammies says, "Forget that," but then Jammer says to shut up and points through the windshield. The skag's got a second missile aimed straight at us.

We paid what he asked and hauled outta there. What good's a few extra cred if ya ain't around to spend it?)<<<<<

—Bleecker (15:14:22/02-09-57)

Because the one thing we tend to be shortest of around here is ready cred, the favorite punishment for crimes committed in Redding is a fine. The exceptions are violent crimes and smuggling certain goods—specifically, materials for enchanting. Those offenses bring automatic extradition, meaning that the militia escorts the offender over the Tir border or leaves him stranded on the slopes of Mount Shasta for the dragon to deal with. Trials are quick and decisions are final; we haven't got enough jail space in Redding to hold folks for weeks or months while a full-blown court system grinds its way to a conclusion.

>>>>>(I hear the people dumped around Mount Shasta are never heard from again.)<<<<<

—Lightfinger Larry (22:03:44/02-09-57)

>>>>>(Not true. I know one who turned up. Gunsel was a friend of mine, one of the toughest street sams I've ever worked with. She never met a big gun she didn't like. People who crossed her tended to end up damaged on a first offense, dead on a second. Nobody

messed with Gunsel, not even for kicks 'n' grins. They were afraid she'd plug 'em before she figured out they were joking around.

On a job in Redding last summer, Gunsel decided that a particular troll in a local bar was looking too hard at her pointed ears for her taste. (Turned out later the guy had a walleye; but who knew?) So Gunsel lets him have it. Not shooting—she didn't want to cause us trouble that'd blow the run—but a whack upside the head with the butt end of a heavy pistol. For Gunsel, that counted as showing restraint.

So they dumped her at the foot of Mount Shasta and asked the rest of us politely but firmly to leave. I'd been hearing rumors for some time about the Shasta dragon, and I figured poor Gunsel was wyrm food. I hated to lose a friend, but none of us was prepared to go up against a dragon. So we left Redding nice and quiet, and lay low in a nearby little town for awhile trying to figure out how to rework our plans for the biz.

A week later, I'm walking down the street when I run into Gunsel. Something struck me funny right away, but it took me a minute to realize what. Then it dawned on me: she wasn't packing a single recognizable weapon. And she was smiling. Not the drek-eating, knock-this-battery-off-my-shoulder grin I was used to; a sickly sweet kind of smile. "Helloooo, Russ," she says, in this vague, gooey-sounding voice that set my teeth on edge. "Isn't it a pretty day?" And then she starts to giggle like a six year-old.

We took her back to Seattle with us, but a few days after getting home she ran off. Left us a note saying she was looking for inner peace, she didn't know when she'd be back, and we should all remember that the Universe loved us very very much. I don't know what the frag happened to her, but I'm sure it had something to do with that fragging dragon on Shasta.)<<<<<

—Rusty (23:10:32/02-09-57)

>>>>>(Redding's pretty hospitable to shadowfolk, as long as you're not planning on stealing from Hestaby or blowing up something major in the Tir. (Not that they mind skulduggery against the Tir elves—they'd just prefer that it not be too showy, in case the elves decide to make an example of Redding in retaliation.) In some ways, the whole town is one giant shadow community. Most out-of-towners from places like Seattle or Denver or other major sprawls will find Redding weirder than drek—though you may get to like it after a few days' acclimation. There are no Free State government toadies to deal with, no arcologies full of suits and wage slaves, not even too many gangers. There's almost none of the kinds of people that shadowrunners are used to dealing with in the typical sprawl. Redding's just full of ordinary folks trying to lead ordinary lives as best they can, who don't care where you come from or what you're doing so long as you pay your bills and don't bring trouble down on their heads. As long as you behave yourself, you can operate with a remarkable degree of freedom. You'll also find plenty of congenial society. Because Redding is one of the last bastions of civilization (such as it is) before entering the wilderness or Tir-controlled territory, plenty of runners doing biz in the Tir use Redding as a base. Lots of others come here to rest up, resupply, or just lie low for awhile after hot runs in other parts of California.)<<<<<

—Redbird (24:35:42/02-09-57)

>>>>>(There's plenty of biz a lot closer than the Tir. Lots of corps, both megas and smaller fry, have research facilities and plants and spirits-know-what-else scattered around Redding and elsewhere in the Crescent. Mid-sized corps in particular put a lot of their stuff out here in no man's land; what better place to set up an installation where you can work on whatever you want without the Big Boys finding out? The Crescent has no central authority whatsoever, and so much of it remains wild that you can tuck a few buildings within a klick or two of a little town and no one will be the wiser.

For biz involving magic, Redding's also got great resources. Lots of shamans live in the area, and they'll gladly supply talismans, advice, information and even the use of powerful medicine lodges.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (02:01:33/02-10-57)

>>>>>(If you can meet their price.)<<<<<

—Capistrano (02:45:01/02-10-57)

>>>>>(We charge what the local market will bear. Shamans have to make a living too, you know.)<<<<<

—Dancer (02:50:35/02-10-57)

Members of the militia also double as law enforcement when needed, though any citizen has the power to make an arrest if necessary. We're a well-armed bunch in Redding, because we never know who or what we might have to take on. It pays to be prepared, especially in the Northern Crescent.

>>>>>(The Redding Militia grew out of the California National Guard unit that fought against the Tir. Those of us who survived the war took a lot of local Californians and trained them up into an effective guerrilla force despite the fact that we can't afford to buy decent equipment. We make do with outdated materiel left intact after the Battle of Redding, plus whatever else we can scrounge—anything from farm implements to top-of-the-line weapons that fell off the back of a truck. Amazing, the things those trucks drop sometimes—the latest weapons from Ares R&D come our way surprisingly often.)<<<<<

—Doughboy (04:32:55/02-11-57)

>>>>>(I've heard that some corporations also funnel small amounts of money toward arming the militia because they don't want the Tir taking over the territory. They've got stuff all over between Redding and Yreka, and the last thing they want is for the Tir elves to get their hands on it. The corps only need a small military force to keep the Tir at bay, because the Tir doesn't really want the no man's land badly enough (yet) to deal with fierce local resistance.)<<<<<

—Marlowe (04:41:57/02-11-57)

>>>>>(They haven't got a lot of heavy weapons or armored fighting vehicles, but they know the territory really well. They also make good use of light infantry anti-vehicle weapons. They get around on all-terrain sports vehicles; just about everyone around Redding has one.)<<<<<

—Locus (05:00:33/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Sports vehicles as a substitute for tanks? How goofy can you get?)<<<<<

—Silver Sammy (05:06:22/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Ever seen 'em in action, kid? I'd quit laughing so hard if I were you.)<<<<<

—Doughboy (05:10:33/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Redding is a major crossroads of several highways. There's Highway 5, which runs north-south—go north far enough on it, and you'll end up at Mount Shasta (if the dragon lets you get that far). Then there's Highway 299, also known as Eureka Way, which runs west over the coastal mountains to Eureka and east to Tir-held Alturas in Modoc County. Highway 44 comes in from Susanville in Lassen County, ending at Redding. The roads are pretty well-maintained by the California Rangers, especially considering the beating they take from inclement weather and the chronic scramble for funds. Somehow, the rangers and local people manage to come up with the minimum needed to keep up repairs, though there's never much left over. Anyone driving into these parts, pick your season carefully; if bad weather blocks or damages the getaway route you were counting on, you're hosed. Redding and environs aren't like the sunny California everyone always thinks of; there's four distinct seasons up here, complete with winter snows down to the 600-meter elevation. As you might imagine, an all-terrain vehicle is a definite plus.



Also, watch out for night riders in the area. For safety's sake, anyone coming to Redding from the south should join a convoy in Red Bluff. Night riders are cowards at heart, and don't tend to attack large numbers of well-armed vehicles.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (07:33:54/02-11-57)

>>>>>(How tough is it to get to Redding by river?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (07:42:44/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Depends on the craft. You can come up the Sacramento, which runs right through Redding, but only in a small boat. I'm talking one small enough to carry—say, a canoe. The Sacramento has quite a few dams along its length, and people make a real effort to maintain the ones in the Crescent because we desperately need the hydroelectric power from them. So if you're traveling by water, make sure you can carry your boat overland when you have to detour around a dam. An amphibious vehicle is another alternative, if you can lay hands on one.)<<<<<

—Monster (09:13:43/02-11-57)

THE SHASTA ENCLAVE

And then there's the enclave around Mount Shasta—roughly forty miles around, with Mount Shasta at its center. It also includes Lake Shasta Caverns and Shasta Dam, a major source of hydroelectric power for the Northern Crescent. Nobody knows much for certain about this little piece of the Northern California wilderness, except that a mysterious dragon named Hestaby has set up house on the mountain and seems to control who gets in and out of the area under her protection. Most recently and dramatically, Hestaby asserted her authority over the dam by stopping a Tir Tairngire strike force dead in its tracks.

>>>>>(That dragon sticks it to the elves, she's a friend of mine. Nuff said.)<<<<<

—Vet

(09:34:51/02-12-57)

Mount Shasta had a reputation as a mystical site even before the Awakening, and the presence of a dragon on it seems to indicate that the rep is deserved—but what kind of magic the mountain holds, or why Hestaby is interested in it, no one seems to know.

>>>>>(The magic produced the dragon. Hestaby is the magic of Mount Shasta.)<<<<<

—Shasta Sam

(10:22:45/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek. A dragon's a physical thing, like a person or an animal. Magic doesn't "create" a big beastie like a dragon out of thin air. Hestaby may be attracted to Mount Shasta because of the magic, but she isn't made of magical energy.)<<<<<

—Monster (10:28:44/02-12-57)

>>>>>(I'd like to point out one teensy example of a physical creature that most certainly is some kind of magical energy incar-

nate—spirits! Physical existence and magical essence are not mutually exclusive.)<<<<<
—Mistyk (11:34:54/02-12-57)

Aside from the dragon, the Shasta enclave is home to a medicine lodge at the site of the old Shasta Ski Resort. The shamans of Shasta Lodge, as locals call it, are a pretty reclusive bunch; all anyone can say for sure of them is that they seem well-intentioned, are fiercely loyal to Hestaby, and show sharp business sense. The shamans of Shasta Lodge earn a solid living selling materials for enchanting, taking a carefully limited harvest from the redwood groves and other unspoiled areas within the enclave's boundaries. Some of them also travel from town to town across the Crescent providing homeopathic medical care.

>>>>>(All with the dragon's express permission. Me, I wonder what a dragon wants with a materially wealthy, magically powerful group of shamanic initiates. She must be planning to use them for something.)<<<<<
—Skeptic (12:03:43/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Maybe she just likes their company. And how do you know they're powerful initiates? They could just be a bunch of nature-lovers. Maybe that's why the dragon likes them. She sure doesn't seem to have much use for high-tech. I've heard the dragon won't allow any machines in her territory more complicated than a bicycle.)<<<<<
—Redbird (12:37:48/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Wrongo. The gypsies wander around all over the place inside the Shasta enclave, and lots of them have cars. Hestaby does seem to dislike other forms of advanced technology, though. Does anyone else find it weird that there's no Matrix node for Shasta Lodge?)<<<<<
—Nancy Belle (13:04:54/02-12-57)

>>>>>(There is, too. It's just well concealed behind a private LTG and a vanishing SAN. Unless you know exactly where and when it's going to turn up, you'll never find it. (And never mind how I found the PLTG—I'd like to keep my skin whole, thanks much.) I can tell you that the deckers roaming the Shasta system are really odd. Something about them just didn't feel right.)<<<<<
—Byteman (13:19:33/02-12-57)

>>>>>(They're not your average deckers. They're otaku—children of the Matrix who can make it do whatever they want. Be afraid.)<<<<<
—Livermore (13:31:43/02-12-57)

>>>>>(There's no such thing. Otaku don't exist.)<<<<<
—Skeptic (13:44:53/02-12-57)

>>>>>(The Shasta Matrix is the home of the Spirits of the Machine. Hestaby, in her infinite wisdom, knows that the only way to redeem the potential evils of reliance on technology is to give it a soul, so that the Matrix and other soulless things can become like Nature. The Spirits of the Machine are the avatars of that soul. They will be the life of the technological world.)<<<<<
—Shasta Sam (14:02:03/02-12-57)

>>>>>(My weird-o-meter just went off the fragging scale ... !)<<<<<
—Calvin (14:11:03/02-12-57)

>>>>>(The traveling medicine men from Shasta Lodge hitch rides with the gypsies most of the time, though you may see an occasional loner tramping through the forest. Nobody bothers them—the few foolish enough to try have all ended up regretting it. I spoke to one such idiot who fetched up on the doorstep of the local clinic in Susanville. Several cracked ribs, a fractured tibia, and a concussion. He swore the shaman never touched him—just stared at him and made him fall down.)<<<<<
—Glory (15:57:43/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Physical adepts, maybe?)<<<<<
—Curious George (16:10:32/02-12-57)

>>>>>(Terra First supposedly has a cell and a camp up here. No one'll confirm it, of course; ratting is against the local code.)<<<<<
—Spayd (12:34:56/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Anybody know why Mount Shasta didn't blow its top during the Ghost Dance?)<<<<<
—Walker (14:41:28/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Hestaby's spirit protected it, of course. What a silly question.)<<<<<
—Shasta Sam (15:02:33/02-14-57)

>>>>>(So what's with the deer around the dam? Every single time I've met one, there's been a Spirit of the Land right nearby. Are the deer some kind of pets for the spirits, or what?)<<<<<
—Gypsy Lass (16:11:23/02-14-57)

>>>>>(The deer are summoning the spirits. I know it's hard to believe, but they are. Trust me.)<<<<<
—Willowspear (16:27:48/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Drek. Total jetwash. Like Bambi can summon a nature spirit! You have to be intelligent to work magic.)<<<<<
—Monster (17:33:42/02-14-57)

>>>>>(What makes you think the Shasta Dam deer aren't?)<<<<<
—Willowspear (17:38:24/02-14-57)

>>>>>(I hear the local shamans consult with the deer. If that's true, they must be intelligent.)<<<<<
—Rusty 20:35:56/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Or the shamans are cracked.)<<<<<
—Jillian (20:42:45/02-14-57)

CENTRAL VALLEY



>>>>>(Here's the scoop on the biggest chunk of the California Free State, leading off with commentary by my buddy Sac Watcher. Enjoy.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (04:32:19/02-01-57)

The Central Valley region has always been the heartland of the great state of California, and that's truer than ever in the 21st century. In a sense, the Central Valley *is* California—the largest chunk of land that isn't under constant dispute by someone or other, and the only place in the Free State where the government's writ runs pretty much unchallenged. Compared to the rest of our little nation, we're big, rich, stable and secure. Lots of water, lots of arable land, not a lot of enviro-toxins messing things up. Nice place to live, neh? No worries, no troubles big enough to notice, right? Right—unless you're a metahuman doing well enough to attract unwanted attention. Or a human who refuses to believe that humans are superior and metahumans are scum. Or a small farmer trying to make a living in spite of the agribusiness big boys. Or any one of the legions of people who may be getting by OK now, but who know their security could vanish tomorrow if the megacorps who practically own the Sacramento state house decide they feel like changing the status quo. The Central Valley may seem like the eye of the California storm, but don't be fooled by appearances. We've got as many factions and fault lines as everywhere else in the Free State—and anyone planning to visit better know all about them.

WHO'S IN CONTROL

Like most other places, the real power in central California lies where the money is. This means corporations, large and small (though the large ones have a definite edge). They have the money, they create the jobs, and they pay the government just enough in "voluntary service donations" to let it run essential services in the Valley's cities and towns. Not coincidentally, the "service donations" also pay the salaries of the government's flunkies.

This picture of total corporate control, however, is slightly misleading. Yes, corporate interests hold the lion's share of power, but the central government has a measure of independence


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SURVIVORS
WILL BE SHOT
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because no single corporation wants to make the opening bid for total control of the Valley and its resources. All the corps big enough to do so know that the first one who tries it will go down to flaming death at the hands of the others. The corps need a neutral party to preserve the polite fiction that a limit exists on their power, and the government in Sacramento fills the bill.

>>>>>(Think of it as a high-stakes poker game in which nobody dares get caught cheating—or a never-ending dance between partners who hate each other, but who don't dare stop moving together. Ain't politics grand?)<<<<<

—Arnold (11:24:53/02-08-57)

>>>>>(The operative phrase is, "nobody dares get caught." The corps and the government are constantly playing off each other behind the scenes—corps against government, California corporations against foreign-run megas, midlevel corps against the Megacorp Target of the Week, megacorp against megacorp. You name it, they're doing it. There's an awful lot of mutual fragging going on underneath the tranquil surface.)<<<<<

—Eponine (11:45:56/02-08-57)

>>>>>(Go Ares!)<<<<<

—Bingo (13:56:21/02-09-57)

>>>>>(?????)<<<<<

—Outtatown (14:02:22/02-09-57)

AGRIBUSINESS

The Central Valley is the major center of economic power in the Free State for two reasons: water and open land. The vast stretch of territory that makes up the Central Valley runs from the Chico-Oroville Greater Metro Area in the north down to Fresno and Bakersfield in the south. It contains the state's two largest river systems, the Sacramento and the San Joaquin, as well as the fertile valleys through which those rivers run. Unlike Northern California, the Valley is made up of largely flat land or gently rolling hills. This is prime farming country, and fresh produce is one of the Free State's biggest cred-makers.

>>>>>(Central California used to be called "the Salad Bowl of the United States." Nowadays, it's Salad Bowl to the world.)<<<<<

—Farm Boy (14:33:52/02-09-57)

The Central Valley also includes California's famed Sonoma and Napa wine country, and sales of Free State vintages bring in additional wads of cash. All this money coming out of the ground has made agribusiness the economic king of the region. It's not the only game in town, but it is by far the most profitable.

Never ones to pass up large pots of gold, most of the world's megacorporations set up agricultural divisions in the Free State shortly after its secession from the UCAS. Along with the megas, there are also a few midsized corps—some California-owned, some not—fighting tooth and claw to stay in the game. Lost in the shuffle are the small farmers, who keep losing more and more economic ground to large agribusiness concerns.

>>>>>(This trend actually started in the latter half of the 20th century. The Shiawase Decision kicked it into high gear, and for the past sixty years or so the small-scale farmer has had no chance against the big boys.)<<<<<

—Histobuff (02:33:14/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Runners, take note—corporate infighting means biz for the taking. There's so many sides you can work for in the Free State, it'll make you dizzy trying to keep up.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (03:12:43/02-11-57)

Because agribusiness makes the largest share of the cred, they have the greatest political power in the Central Valley. They have pretty much bought and sold the government in Sacramento, and run things their own way 90 percent of the time. Occasional power plays by other corporate interests, or one agricorp trying for some advantage over another, account for the remaining 10 percent.

This small fault line in the bedrock of corporate power is the one thing keeping the Valley's small-scale farmers alive. No agricorp has yet turned all of its resources toward eliminating them, either through buyouts or through violence, simply because they provide convenient cover behind which Company A can make trouble for Company B. Afraid your rival may be about to edge you out on a profitable land deal? Help the local branch of the Small Farmers' Union sneak onto your rival's land and drop a gengineered parasite in a corner of a field. Nothing too nasty, mind—no sense scragging yourself too—just something to guarantee a lousy harvest and lower profits for the quarter. Is the other guy's produce selling way ahead of yours? Pay some local hotheads to jack water from him, and see how well his next crop does. Between the people the agricorps hire to do each other dirt and the people who get the same bright ideas all by themselves, Central Valley agriculture is one big dysfunctional family just waiting to fly apart. Oddly enough, the puppet government in Sacramento is one of the few things holding them together.

>>>>>(We're nobody's patsies. What's keeping us alive is our willingness to fight for our rights. Some of us remember what it's like to have a real say in how things work—and there's more and more of us every day.)<<<<<

—Rebel With a CAWS (03:44:56/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Query: CAWS?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (03:49:44/02-11-57)

>>>>>(California Agriculture and Water Society. Dedicated to the overthrow of Big Agribusiness in the Valley. Save the family farm!)<<<<<

—Rebel With a CAWS (03:55:21/02-11-57)

>>>>>(But only if it's run by Right-Thinking Humans. I used to grow tomatoes, and I did OK until my fellow small produce farmers burned me out. Guess they couldn't handle a dwarf making a living where they failed. Couple months after they ran me off,

Shiawase AgroTech bought up my parcel—and a whole lot of theirs. There's something like justice in the Universe after all.)<<<<<

—John Henry (04:11:23/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Everyone knew you were a corp stooge, Henry. That's why you made money where we didn't, and that's why we burned you out. You being a dirt-eating halfer was incidental. You got your revenge though, didn't you, short boy?)<<<<<

—Neighbor Bob (06:34:11/02-11-57)

THE SACRAMENTO PUPPETS

Sacramento has been the state capitol of California since 1854, and remains so largely because California agribusiness has no particular reason to change that arrangement. Agribusiness and other corps bankroll Sacramento's operations, so government officials don't have much power ... at first glance. A second look shows a government that goes along with the majority corp vote most of the time, but every so often gets to do what it wants by playing different corp interests against each other. All the corps want to preserve the government because it provides such incredibly convenient cover; instead of risking retaliation by making open moves against rivals, they can jockey for power by suborning an official here, a flunky there, and so on. Sacramento's flunkies take advantage of this uneasy balance of power to keep a little independence from the executives who pay them. Whether or not they use it well is a matter of opinion. Me, I'd say not.

>>>>>(Gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "Executive Branch," doesn't it?)<<<<<

—Arnold (02:33:41/02-13-57)

The flunky at the top of the ladder is Governor Anthony Whitman, an affable and not-too-bright fellow who made a pile of money operating a chain of booze-serving laundromats.

>>>>>("Wash down your wash day with a cold beer at the Launder-Bar!" Easily the worst advertising slogan ever conceived.)<<<<<

—Tridboy (03:44:12/02-13-57)

Whitman warms his backside in the governor's mansion, from which he occasionally issues a statement on domestic or foreign policy. These "policy statements" then go to the Assembly, where various elected and appointed representatives pretend to debate them. The elected reps are from local counties, large cities like Chico-Oroville, and the Small Farmers' Union; appointees (by far the majority) come from the megacorps, a few organizations of midsized corporations, and the State Water Board. Eventually a vote is taken, which nearly always turns out to be the exact decision that the greatest number of megacorporations wanted. From there, the lower-level flunkies—the Social Policy Director, Economic Coordinator, Director of Education and Morals, and Director of National Defense—translate the Assembly vote into the nuts and bolts that affect everyday life. It's a simple system with a passing resemblance to what used to be democracy, and so most people in the Valley are willing to settle for it.



>>>>>(More's the pity.)<<<<<

—Eponine (05:55:43/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Some democracy. You have to prove "middle-class or better" socioeconomic status before you can register to vote. SINless, of course, need not apply.)<<<<<

—Native Son (06:12:33/02-13-57)

>>>>>(WHAT?! How can you just decide that poverty wipes out the right to vote?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (06:24:55/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Referendum, chumboy. The so-called community stakes law passed by popular referendum, mostly because the people who should've opposed it thought it was too extreme to appeal to anybody. So a lot of them didn't bother turning out to vote. It passed by a landslide of 80 percent to 20 percent ... out of about a fifth of all eligible voters. It was aimed at metahumans, most of whom were less prosperous than humans. To this day, of course, no one will admit that.)<<<<<

—Eponine (06:32:23/02-13-57)

>>>>>(There was absolutely no bias involved. It passed because sensible people recognized that the responsibility for guiding the community was best left to those with the greatest stakes in its continuing prosperity. Most of the disadvantaged never bothered to vote anyway, so what did they lose?)<<<<<

—Hamilton (08:45:23/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Community stakes was a pet project of Guv Whitman's. He's anything but affable and not-too-bright. That's all a good ol' boy pose. He's bright, he's cagey, and he's a card-carrying member of the Humanis Policlub.)<<<<<

—Arnold (09:01:34/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek. Ol' Tony may be a good ol' boy, but he's not a Humanis member. I wish he were—that'd be a great piece of drek to hold over him at election time. He's just a garden-variety human bigot whose attitudes happen to dovetail with Humanis's party line.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (09:10:23/02-13-57)

>>>>>(You think Humanis membership would be a good piece of political dirt? Where have you been living lately? Most of the skags who bother to vote in the Valley think of Humanis as the good guys. To them, the policlub and their like-minded friends in the gummint are the only thing keeping ravening hordes of Those Awful Metahumans from Destroying the Human Way of Life.)<<<<<

—Eponine (09:34:53/02-13-57)

>>>>>(California's more than the Valley, chumminski. There's plenty of metas and decent humans in the north and south of the Free State who'd vote Whitman right out of office if they knew he was an HP member.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (09:41:32/02-13-57)

>>>>>(But they don't vote. They're too busy just coping with the challenge of survival to notice what "their" government is up to, let alone care enough to take some action. In case you hadn't noticed, the only government there is outside the Valley exists on paper.)<<<<<

—Arnold (09:45:56/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Didn't some Neo-A post a few years back say that CalFree was run by a President and a bicameral Congress, just like the UCAS? What's this "Governor" and "Assembly" bulldrek?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (11:30:44/02-13-57)

>>>>>(CalFree's governor functions like a president, but the title of the office didn't change. Why bother? As for the bicameral elected Congress, that's pure fiction. Some members are elected, sure—but the government publishes whatever election results it thinks will make most of the public happy, and there's no way to verify them. The corp appointees never make the news, so most people aren't aware of the power they hold. In theory, we have a two-chamber Assembly. In practice, it's just like Sac Watcher's been saying.)<<<<<

—Arnold (12:01:45/02-13-57)

By and large, Governor Whitman and his cronies in the Assembly don't buck what the corporations want, and not just because the corps pay their salaries. The central government just doesn't care that much about the rest of the state—so if agribusiness and other corporate interests want to set things up to their own advantage, the government is willing to let them do so. As far as Sacramento is concerned, northern and southern California are a source of cheap labor at best and a useless drain on the Valley's resources at worst. Southern California's starving for water? Let 'em. We need all the water so we can keep growing our oranges and kiwi fruits. Tir Tairngire looks like it's building up for another invasion of the Northern Crescent? Gosh, sorry we can't send in the troops—we're too busy making sure all our corporate installations are safe from local waterjackers and other criminal elements. We'd love to stick the elves in the eye, but hey—priorities are priorities. The Japanese are trying to extend the reach of their occupation throughout the whole Bay Area from San Francisco? Guess all you Bay Area folks'll just have to live with that—we'd rather the Japanese weren't there, but priorities are ... and so on and so on. It makes a weird kind of sense, if you think about it—after all, why should the government care what happens in regions outside its control?

>>>>>(So if the Tir invades northern Cal, the government's just gonna let them get away with it?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (03:44:53/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Naah. They'll let the Tir walk in, see how far it looks like the daisy-eaters are gonna get, and send in corp armies to stop 'em cold the minute it looks bad to the business boys in the Central Valley.)<<<<<

—Masters (04:13:22/02-15-57)

>>>>>(The government doesn't have an army of its own?!)<<<<<

—Outtatown (04:22:34/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Not much to speak of. They draft able-bodied male wage slaves, mostly humans, for State Guard duty—which means spending alternate weekends running around the countryside with outdated military equipment, looking for trouble. The only time they get anything decent to play with is when Ares or some other weaponmaker decides it's time to test a new product—what better guinea pig than the State Guard? If the new equipment works, the guardies get to do some real damage. If it doesn't, time to draft some new guardies. The pay's decent, so most folks have learned not to ask too many questions when Sonny Boy comes home from his patrol tour in a bag.

As for who they target, mostly the Guard hassles recalcitrant farmers, suspected waterjackers, and anyone else that some big corp or other finds inconvenient. The real military power in the Valley lies with individual corporate armies, who cooperate real well against enemies that threaten their common control over Valley land. The rest of the time, they guard their own little pieces of earth and don't make a move outside 'em for fear of triggering a response from a rival corp.)<<<<<

—Arnold (04:40:11/02-15-57)

>>>>>(What a mess.)<<<<<

—Outtatown (04:43:57/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Welcome to California Free State.)<<<<<
—Native Son (05:01:34/02-15-57)

OTHER CORPORATIONS

Aside from agribusiness, the biggest business in the Central Valley is advanced technology. From cyberdecks, hardware and software to weapons, the Central Valley is California's largest provider of high-tech goods to the rest of the state and the world. The biggest fish in this particular pond is Ares Macrotechnology, which opted to corner the tech market rather than fight its fellow corps for a share of agriculture profits.

>>>>>(Don't be thinkin' Ares ain't got nothin' in the ag business. They got some biotech labs out by Big Sur where they're doin' stuff that'll curl yer hair.)<<<<<
—Riley (07:12:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Your proof, oh less-than-coherent one?)<<<<<
—Sac Watcher (07:21:45/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Went on a run against an Ares lab a coupla years ago. So there.)<<<<<
—Riley (07:26:24/02-14-57)

Ares makes serious cred in a variety of ways. It sells military hardware to corporate security forces throughout the Valley and the rest of the state, and leases impressive-looking weapons as props to simsense production houses in L.A. Sometimes it even sends Knight-Errant detachments to play soldier for the simsense techs—at a hefty fee, of course. It sells sophisticated computer equipment to aquacities and fish farms along the Big Sur coast (the parts that aren't poisoned beyond redemption, that is). The biggest key to the corp's success, however, lies in its ownership—lock, stock and cyberdeck—of the high-tech powerhouse once known as Silicon Valley.

>>>>>(A local resident of Silicon Valley gives the skinny on that hi-tech paradise (hah!) in the file on San Francisco and the Bay Area. No need to repeat it here. (Sorry about that, Sac.))<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (07:32:41/02-01-57)

In addition to its virtually unchallenged position in the California tech-and-weapons market, Ares has two other advantages: more public support than the other megacorps, and preferential treatment from the Sacramento government. Both these advantages stem from the same sources: racism and parochial attitudes. The Central Valley and the government are dominated by "humans-first" types, ranging from the guy who "don't mind orks 'n them kindsa folks as long as they keep their place" to the guy who'll cross the street on purpose to hassle some poor dwarf or elf for kicks. Not too many metahumans work for Ares, at least as far as the average Joe in the Valley knows. The average Joe approves of this, as do his elected representatives. But, you say, the Japanacorps don't hire many metahumans either—an ork janitor or two at most. What makes Ares so special? Simple—the Japanacorps are foreign-owned, Ares isn't.

See, the average Joe in the Central Valley didn't really want to leave the UCAS in the first place. Since secession was forced on him twenty-odd years ago, he may have gotten used to it—he may even have gotten to like it—but he wouldn't have gone for it if he'd had a choice back in 2036. The average Joe feels like an American, just as much as anyone from the UCAS might. He sees the UCAS as a friendly neighbor, full of his own kind of people. Ares Macrotechnology, the only UCAS-based and -owned megacorp in the world, is the one megacorp our average Joe trusts because it, too, is "his kind of people." The other megacorporations—one German, one from Aztlan and five Japanese—are foreign operations in his mind. They and the people who run them aren't like him. Therefore, they are not to be trusted.

Translated into policy by Sacramento, this preference for Ares shows itself in significantly less paperwork for starting up California-based subsidiaries, a virtual waiver of the requirement that 51 percent of the work force must be California citizens, and vanishingly small import duties on Ares products reaching California from the UCAS. None of these goodies gives Ares enough of an edge to prompt a corporate gang-up, mostly because Ares isn't threatening their hold on agriculture. However, they do make Ares king of the hill where tech is concerned. This frags off several smaller companies no end, but thus far they haven't mustered enough power to do anything about it.

>>>>>(And aren't likely to, either. Ares Macrotech's is the last corporate army I'd want to take on.)<<<<<
—Arnold (10:22:31/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Lockheed's been trying lately. Word on the streets says they'll pay top nuyen for sabotage and extractions. Leave a message at the usual drop if you're interested.)<<<<<
—Listerman (11:44:53/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Fred Lister, aka Listerman, was found scattered between several dumpsters yesterday morning in a back alley in Oroville. Word to the wise: learn to keep your mouths shut.)<<<<<
—Local Yokel (03:41:25/02-18-57)

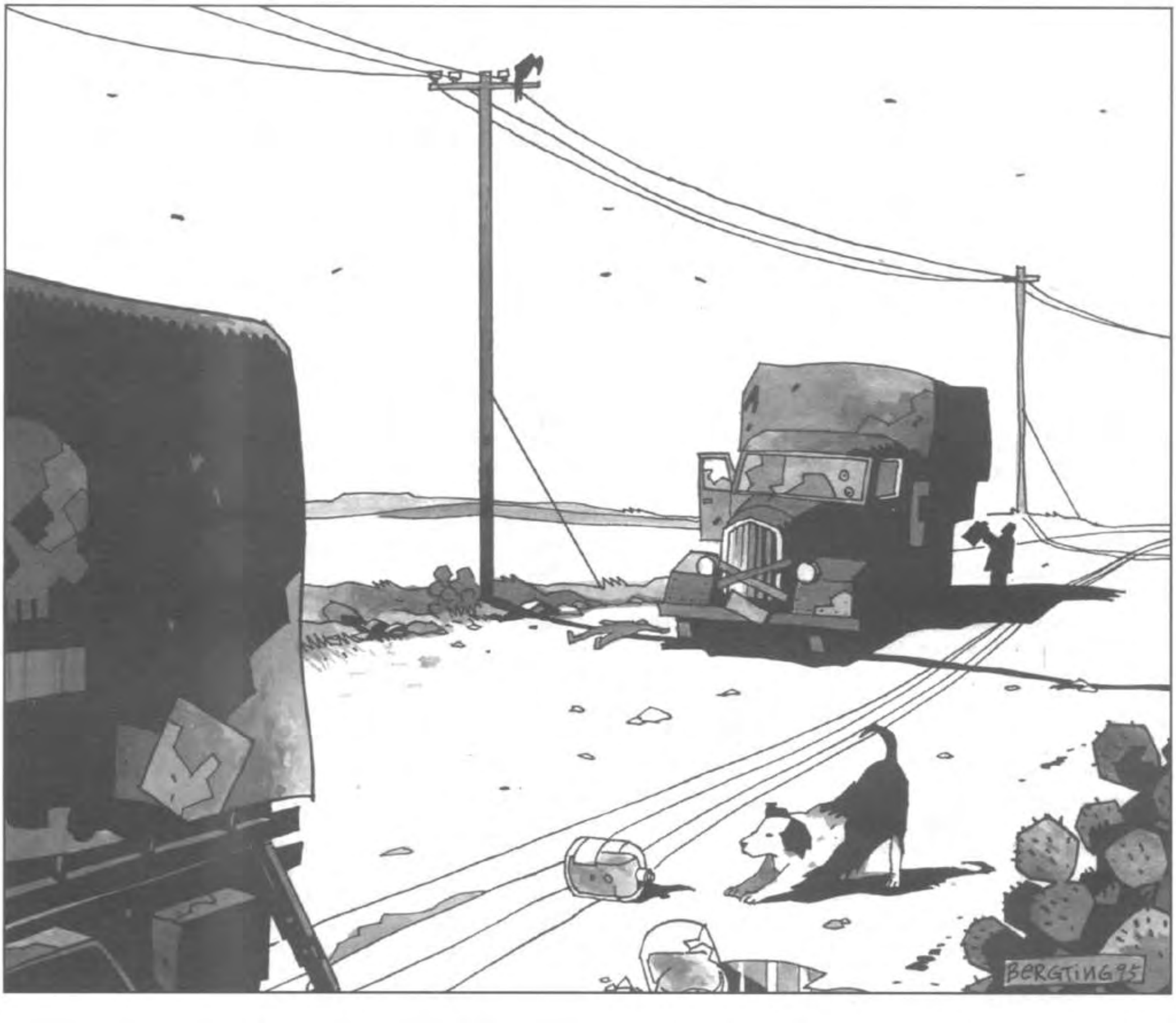
For its part, Ares uses its privileged position to "influence" government policy to its own advantage. According to persistent rumors, Damien Knight gives his good buddy Governor Whitman a new gun for his extensive collection every year on Whitman's birthday.

>>>>>(Oh, man ... I want in to the guv's house!)<<<<<
—Silver Sammy (06:55:43/02-18-57)

FAULT LINES AND FLASHPOINTS

by California Dreamer

Compared to the rest of the great state of California, the Central Valley looks pretty tranquil. Central authority exists, and it has a pretty tight grip. And most folks like it that way—they have no reason to challenge that authority, and they like knowing that



those who stir up the Accepted Social Order will get what's coming to them. That sense of security is the most important thing in these people's lives—more important than freedom, more important than choices, more important than justice. The biggest reason for this love affair with order is the dirty little secret most Valley residents don't want to admit—namely, that "God's little acre" has its fair share of flashpoints just waiting to go up. Water wars, territorial disputes with the Native American Nations, and most recently simmering disagreement over reunion with the UCAS all feed the fear of imminent social collapse that most Valley-ites have never quite lost.

WATER WARS

Considering that the Valley controls a heck of a lot of California's water, the notion of water wars seems ridiculous at first. To those fighting them, however, battles over water are serious business. The major combatants are the region's small farmers and corporate agribusiness. Both sides fight among themselves almost as often as the tackle each other, and so the warfare goes merrily on all over the countryside.

To understand the water wars, a little background is in order. The central government and its agribusiness handlers control the State Water Board, a bureaucratic holdover from pre-Secession days. Now as then, the Water Board officially controls important resources like the Oroville Dam, the California Water Project's massive aqueduct system, and the huge irrigation network known as the Central Valley Project. Once upon a time, the Water Board saw to it that a certain amount of the Central Valley's water went to small farmers and to communities outside the Valley, like San Francisco and the Los Angeles area.

Nowadays, the Water Board rubber-stamps whatever water policies are acceptable to Big Agriculture. This leaves the small-scale farmer out in the cold.

Not willing to take this lying down, the Valley's small farmers have been fighting back. Several farmers' organizations have sprung up over the past twenty years, most notably the Californian Agriculture and Water Association (CAWS) and the Small Farmers' Union, in an effort to match the agricorps' political clout. These unions occasionally manage to force some concessions when one big agricorp decides it wants to frag off a rival, but most of the time the big corps hang together on water policy. Against their relatively united front, the small farmers have no choice but to carry the battle out to the fields. Waterjacking and sabotage of aqueducts and irrigation canals have become the Central Valley's most popular sport, and it doesn't look like stopping any time soon.

>>>>>(To make things even more fun, there's more than two sides in the water wars. It's not just the little guy versus the Big Bad Agricorp. Lots of times the corps use the little farmers to frag each other over, all in the name of posting the biggest profits on the block. (Easiest way to put yourself ahead is to sabotage the other guy, right?) Also, CAWS and the SFU and some of the other farm groups fight all the time over who's top dog. It's absolutely crazy.)<<<<<

—Eponine (10:34:54/02-16-57)

>>>>>(One of the favorite targets for saboteurs is the 900-kilometer aqueduct system used by the California Water Project. The system starts at Oroville Dam, where water from the Feather River is collected and sent down the first few klicks of its journey across the Valley. (Used to be across the state, but that's another story.) Various corps have security divisions all around the dam, and they don't tend to frag with each other—somebody's smart enough to realize that sabotaging the dam would be bad for all of the big players, so they don't do it. And they go to some lengths to keep anyone else from doing it, either. Away from Oroville Dam, though, some parts of the aqueduct system aren't real well guarded. It's hard to put up enough troops to guard all those klicks and klicks of tunnels against every crazed skag with a small explosive charge. So the saboteurs are actually doing pretty well, despite the fact that their resources are fewer.)<<<<<

—Arnold (12:32:44/02-16-57)

>>>>>(Sometimes CAWS goes out and sets up tap lines at isolated spots in the system. The water goes down the tap lines to wherever CAWS wants to store it, and Farmer Bob can go get himself a tank of it at his leisure.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (14:23:11/02-16-57)

>>>>>(The corps have started sending strike teams out across the countryside looking for what they call "illegal reservoirs." Slowly but surely, the whole Valley's turning into a low-level war zone.)<<<<<

—Eponine (09:54:23/02-17-57)

>>>>>(There's nuyen in that thar Valley!)<<<<<

—FFFixer (10:33:43/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Outside the Valley proper, the aqueducts are in sorry shape. The lines that used to carry water to San Francisco get hit by corporate "black ops" teams all the time, cuz they don't want to keep giving the Japanese their precious water. They don't dare cut off the water flow openly, because that might make the Japanese mad—and you don't want the guy with the big naval attack cruiser in the Bay mad at you, cuz he might just bring in more troops. So they hire shady folks to do their dirty work, and cover themselves in plausible deniability. As for the ducts that used to carry water down south, those are crumbling to rubble. No one in the Valley cares about maintaining them, and the folks down south don't have the money to. I've heard there're squatters living in some of the more intact sections—any roof is better than none, I guess.)<<<<<

—Arnold (13:44:21/02-17-57)

RESERVATION LANDS

Another flashpoint is the land originally set aside for Indian reservations, which California took back in a tit-for-tat land grab when the Native American Nations were founded. There's already considerable bad blood between the Pueblo and Ute governments and Sacramento over the Colorado River, which runs through Pueblo and Ute territory before emptying into California. Disputes over the onetime reservation lands are just the latest addition to the long-running squabble between the "Anglo" Californians and their Native American neighbors.

The Ute nation—and to a lesser extent, the Pueblo Corporate Council—play games with the flow of the Colorado whenever they want some leverage against the Free State government. Every so often, usually when domestic discontent looms, the Ute Nation decides it wants to use that leverage to force the return of the lands "confiscated" from it by CalFree. Demands that Sacramento honor the old US treaties that gave the Native Americans that land are often accompanied by threats to dam up the Colorado. Understandably, most Free Staters in the Valley take a dim view of these tactics. Their typical response is something like, "Stinkin' Injuns. They kicked us outta our land—they fraggin' owe us what's left. We ain't givin' them nothin'!" So far, the reservation lands and the Colorado River have not been seen as important enough to either side to go to war over; the potential, however, is always there.

>>>>>(History lesson: World War I started because somebody threw a bomb at some high muckety-muck in a little city called Sarajevo that most of the rest of Europe hadn't even heard of. That one incident was enough to start off a chain reaction that killed off damned near a whole generation of European men. Big wars often start for incredibly stupid little reasons, out of all proportion to the initial harm done.)<<<<<

—Histobuff (15:22:31/02-18-57)

The wild card in this deck is Pueblo, which sometimes supports the Ute Nation and sometimes gets in its way. Part of the

reason is arcane intertribal politics, but there's also the fact that Pueblo's corporate culture often feels more kinship with Sacramento's agribusiness owners than with the Native American people it claims to represent. Thus far, the Pueblo Corporate Council's unpredictability has kept the reservation dispute from flaring into open conflict.

>>>>>(The Injuns' land grab ain't got nothin' ta do with no treaties. And after takin' fraggin' near the whole West off us, they sure don't need the livin' room. The real reason they want the reservations is cuz there's somethin' magic about 'em. Some kinda magical whatsis livin' in the rocks and trees—maybe free spirits or somethin'. Nobody knows for sure what the magic is, but they know it's there. Them Injuns don't want us pinkskins figurin' out how ta use it.)<<<<<

—Laszlo (16:21:34/02-18-57)

>>>>>(We want the land because it belongs to us. Our ancestors are buried there.)<<<<<

—Willow (20:34:12/02-18-57)

REUNION WITH THE UCAS

With election fever building in the UCAS, a favorite platform topic is reuniting the UCAS with the California Free State. No one around here knows whether the UCAS could actually manage that feat or not, assuming that a pro-union ticket gets into office. However, that doesn't stop anyone and everyone from having an opinion on the subject. As Californians tend to have strong opinions, the question of reunion has become yet another potential flashpoint. This is especially true in the Central Valley; all the Free State's power brokers live in this region, and so those in favor of or opposed to reunion are in the best position to translate their particular convictions into action.

The simple answer to the question "Pro or con?" might seem to be government and agricorps, yes; small farmers, little corps and Joe Wage Slave, no. As with everything in California, however, there is no simple answer. All kinds of people have ended up on both sides for all kinds of reasons, most of them conflicting.

The Japanese-based megacorps—Renraku, Fuchi, et cetera—don't much like reunion. They sure as drek don't need access to the UCAS market; they have extremely profitable UCAS branches raking in tons of cred for the home office. The Free State-based subsidiaries mostly get to run their operations like little fiefdoms, and they like it that way. The CEOs also like having California profits listed on balance sheets right next to their names. If reunion happens, the Free State corp branches will merge with UCAS operations, saving a little money for the parent corp but robbing the California execs of their chance to shine. It's a lot tougher to impress your boss in Tokyo if he can't tell which profits you earned and which came from your rival CEO in Seattle.

>>>>>(There goes a big chunk of leverage in intercorp politics.)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (01:22:13/02-19-57)

And then there's the issue of San Francisco. Right now, the Japanese government (and corporations) control it. This fact has implications for the Japanacorps in the Valley; as long as Imperial Japan is a major power in the Bay Area, Valley-based Japanese corps can use that fact to remind Sacramento which side its bread is buttered on. Reunion would likely lose them that big stick, because California could call on UCAS military resources to push the Japanese off of California soil. Big military showdowns are terrible for business, and the Japanese megas would like to avoid this one.

>>>>>(There's another reason the Japanacorps don't want reunion. They want to keep their chokehold on California's economy by denying California-based, midsized corps free access to the UCAS market. Our homegrown companies'd pose a real threat to the foreigners if they could just get their goods into UCAS consumers' hands.)<<<<<

—Eponine (02:11:34/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Nothing's stopping local companies from selling to the UCAS. They do that now.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (02:20:33/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, but they gotta pay tariffs and jump through all kindsa hoops. The megacorps don't. Unfair advantage, that's what I call it.)<<<<<

—Farmer Joe (02:55:43/02-19-57)

On the pro side, Ares Macrotechnology is the loudest megacorporate voice. Ares is the only major corp based in the UCAS, and rumor has it that Damien Knight would love to bring his UCAS and CalFree holdings under the same umbrella. As things stand now, even with the kid-glove treatment Ares gets, it still must duplicate its operations to a certain extent in order to make a profit in the Free State. Reunion has the potential to put Ares and Knight at the top of the megacorporate heap.

>>>>>(Go Ares!)<<<<<

—Bingo (03:21:44/02-19-57)

>>>>>(You are looped around the bend. Ares is a megacorp, no more trustworthy than any other. So it's UCAS—so what? They're all extraterritorial, remember? The megacorps are nations unto themselves. Just because Damien Knight's a white guy who operates out of Detroit doesn't mean he's got the interests of "real Americans" at heart, any more than some CEO running a business out of Tokyo or Berlin.)<<<<<

—Eponine (04:01:44/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Knight's a good guy. Ares is North America's only hope of a fair fight on the economic battlefield. I say more power to him!)<<<<<

—Realist (04:19:02/02-19-57)

>>>>>(I don't care a frag what Ares does or wants, as long as they keep putting out top-grade bang-bang. Guns, guns, guns!)<<<<<

—Silver Sammy (05:02:33/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Saeder-Krupp and Aztechnology have been pouring money into pro-reunion groups, sponsoring rallies and all kinds of other drek in the UCAS and the Free State. They both want reunion so bad they can taste it. Right now, they can't legally do business in California—at least, not the part of it that actually has a government. Sacramento hates their guts because of Lofwyr and the Azzies' dabbling in magic, and their fellow megacorps are only too happy to let the anti-Awakened crowd have its way on this one. If CalFree goes back to the UCAS, SK and the Big A can set up shop without having to go through the hassle and cost of keeping it hush-hush.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (06:13:44/02-19-57)

>>>>>(So just who are the Big Bad Corps supposed to be bankrolling?)<<<<<

—Skeptic (06:24:55/02-19-57)

>>>>>(I'm still digging. I'll post the names when I've got em dead to rights.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (06:28:33/02-19-57)

>>>>>(I hear there's some dissent among the Japanese megacorps about the reunion question. Lots of them don't like it, but there's a growing faction that's wondering if it might be preferable to putting up with Sacramento's constant niggling harassment. The central government may be bought and sold by the megacorps, but the governor and his cronies also resent their dependence on corp money. They deal with it by playing petty policy games, requiring the corps to stand on their heads or jump up and down before they can start up a new facility or sell more than a certain amount of goods or send more than a certain amount of cred out of the country. Nothing really major—they don't dare—but enough to make some of the lower-level execs pretty ticked off.)<<<<<

—Masters (07:03:45/02-19-57)

Outside the megacorporate league, opinions are just as divided. Some midsized and smaller corps are pushing hard for reunion, mainly because they figure any major change in the way things work has got to benefit them. They also want easier access to the huge UCAS market. On the other side, some midlevel corps prefer to remain bigger fish in a smaller pond. They oppose reunion, figuring that absorption by the UCAS economy might drive them out of business. Some California-based smaller corps also don't want to lose the preferential treatment they get for being human owned and run.

>>>>>(Also for not being Japanese. Ethnic prejudice among humans remains alive and well, especially in the Central Valley. Just ask any Humanis thug you happen to meet on the street.)<<<<<

—Arnold (08:10:22/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Why does all this political bulldrek even matter? Howzit gonna get me any biz?)<<<<<

—Silver Sammy (08:15:33/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Suppose a Johnson from Renraku hires you to dig up dirt on some outfit supporting reunification? Or maybe some pro-union group'll hire you to blackmail the anti-union party across the street. Or some desperate Free-State-or-die bunch might pay you to smuggle weapons for them, so they can fight in the streets when the UCAS troops come to town. There's lots of possibilities.)<<<<<

—Eponine (08: 24:16/02-19-57)

Ordinary people in the Valley are every bit as divided as corporate interests, though their opinions are less likely to shape the outcome. (No cred, no clout, neh?) Right now, majority opinion is against reunion. Folks in the Central Valley think they're doing OK on their own, and don't see what the UCAS has to offer them that's worth giving up an independence they've come to value. Even the sentimental appeal to "rejoin America" doesn't sway many Valley residents. Plenty of them remember the days of the Resource Rush, and don't want to see that happen again.

>>>>>(Especially since these days, they're the ones with a lot of the valuable resources—farmland and water. The UCAS might make 'em start sharing their water with Southern California again.)<<<<<

—Farmer Joe (09:13:52/02-19-57)

A vocal pro-reunion minority has hit the hustings in recent months, claiming that the Free State and the UCAS must unite "for the sake of True Humanity." As you might have guessed, a lot of these people are Humanis sympathizers, if not actual members of the policlub. They see California, and the Central Valley especially, as the last bastion of humanity surrounded by hostile nations: the elven Tir to the north, the magic-oriented Aztlaners to the south, and anti-Anglo Native Americans to the east. Of these enemies, they fear the Tir and Aztlan the most, lumping them together as places full of Awakened evils. They desperately want UCAS aid against a combined Tir/Aztlan attack that they're sure is coming any day now. Some of them have even stated that the UCAS and Free State armies together can "push the metahuman abominations into the Pacific Ocean."

>>>>>(I wouldn't go that far. Just push them all south into Los Angeles, wall off the city, lock the gates, and throw away the key. No big loss.)<<<<<

—Neighbor Bob (09:34:22/02-19-57)

>>>>>(You're all wrong. Reunion or independence, doesn't matter. Our lives'll still be drek. You want the good life, be a megacorporate exec. Or even CEO of a little corp, so the megas'll wine you and dine you and sell you their souls to get you on their side and frag their rivals. Better yet, be a white human so you can get

into the government's good ol' boy network and earn a fat credstick doing nothing. The rest of us aren't going to get anywhere no matter who's in charge.)<<<<<

—Godfrey (11:21:56/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Cheerful fellow, aren't you?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (11:34:12:02-19-57)

LIVING IN THE BIGOT'S PARADISE

by King Rat

Those of you planning on visiting the Central Valley in hopes of making a little cred need to understand one thing. The Valley's a great place if you're human. For metahumans, things are a lot different—bad different. Of course, there's prejudice against metahumans just about everywhere in the world. If it ain't the humans doing the hating, it's one race of metahumans deciding it hates another's guts. California's Central Valley, though, is a place apart. Here, anti-metahuman bigotry is more than just a feeling in the air and an occasional jerk starting something in a seedy bar. It's codified, solidified, and fragging near petrified because the bigots run this place.

Oh, most of 'em wouldn't call themselves bigots—lots of 'em don't even admit to being members of the Humanis policlub. At most, they'll admit to a certain sneaking sympathy for their "poor oppressed fellow humans." You know, the line that Humanis likes to feed the public. There's quite a few, even, who disapprove of the nastier tactics favored by a lot of Humanis thugs. They don't hold with tossing dwarfs across the alley for fun, or beating up on elves, or refusing to seat orks in the local fish-fry joint. (They'd rather just give the orks their own section—right by the kitchen door, the least desirable spot. Better yet, give 'em their own fish-fry joint so they won't want to come to yours.) The order of the day, though, is that humans are better than metahumans. In some areas, like major cities and the "company towns" outside large agribusiness installations, metahumans are grudgingly tolerated as long as they keep their place. Out in the boondocks, being metahuman can get you dead.

To understand how the human supremacists got such a solid grip on this part of the Free State, you need to know a little history. Throughout most of the 20th century, central California was home to lots of upper-middle-class or richer people—mostly white, all used to seeing themselves as naturally entitled to money and power. In the early years of this century, their comfy me-first view of the world took some nasty shocks: the VITAS plague, the Awakening and the Great Ghost Dance. VITAS, especially, scared the drek out of them because all their money and power couldn't beat it. They died just as quick as the poor kids in the city slums. Like terrified people everywhere, they looked around for someone to blame. Rumors that it was "an Indian plot" flourished for a while, fueled by the relatively small number of Indian deaths.

>>>>>(Because we were isolated in "re-education centers." Lucky us, neh?)<<<<<

—Willow (14:26:57/02-19-57)

Three years later, when the NAN nations formed and started kicking non-Indians off the land ceded to them by the Treaty of Denver, a lot of displaced people came to California. They'd been forced to leave their homes and valuables behind, and they weren't shy about telling their horror stories. In many cases, the folks in charge of the forced relocations came down hardest on whites, seeing harsh treatment as long-awaited payback for historical wrongs. This fed intense resentment of the "Injuns" who had dared to treat whites as badly as those whites' forebears had treated them.

Among the many who came to California during the mass expulsions were the few remaining survivalist-type crazies who'd ridden out VITAS in rural Idaho and Montana. They brought their virulent hatred and distrust of just about everybody with them. Some of these people settled in the Northern Crescent, but many others came to the Central Valley in search of work. They found Central California's comfortable, mostly human, middle-class communities and farming towns to be congenial bastions of "traditional values," and so they stayed.

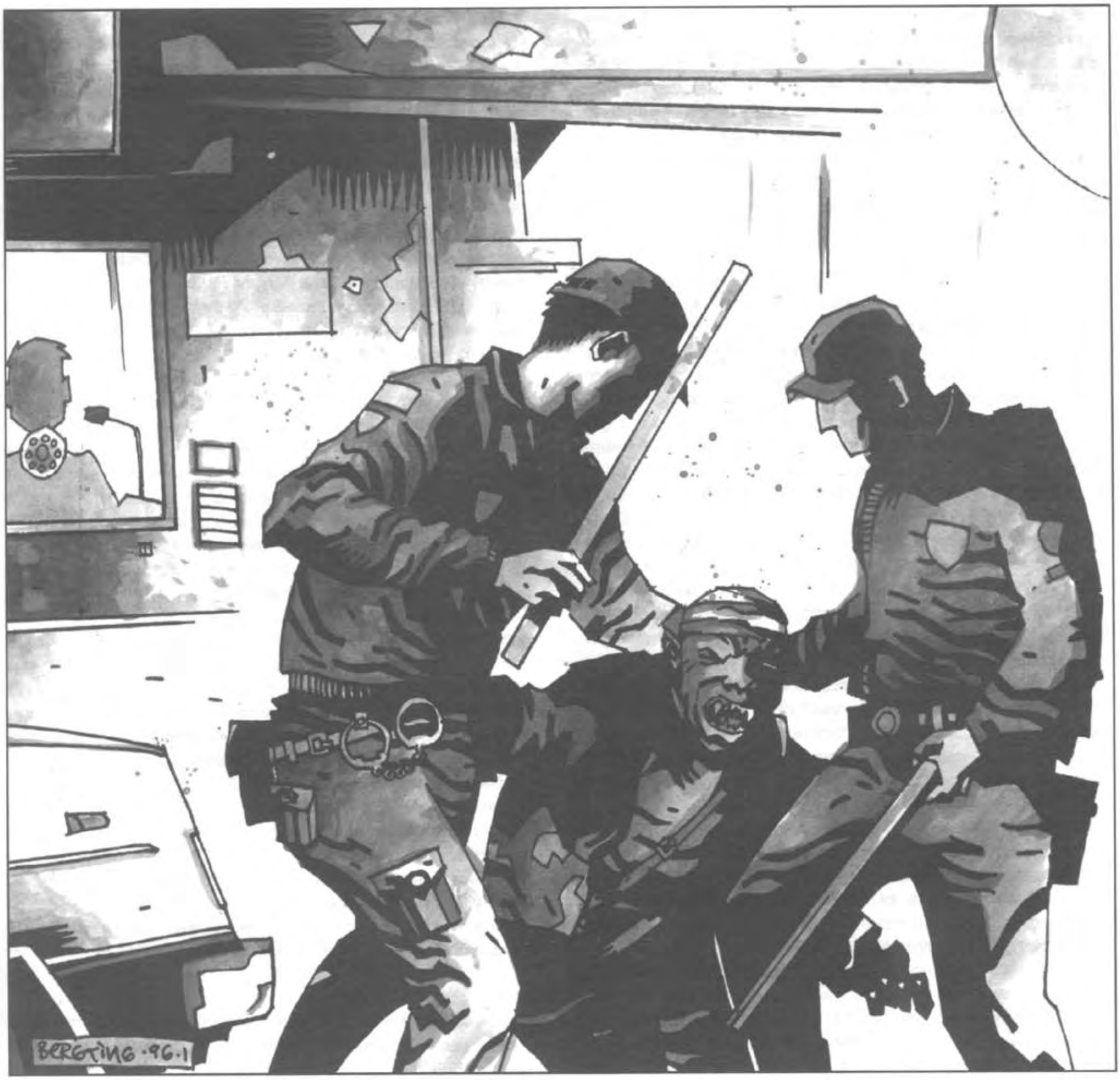
In 2021, when one out of ten people began to goblinize into orks and trolls for no apparent reason, the traumatized people of the Central Valley lashed out in fury and fear at these "unnatural" new races. Local pockets of the Fundamentalist political movement, seeing a chance to turn this widespread hate into political power, enthusiastically joined in, calling orks and trolls "cursed in the sight of God." Soon they added elves and dwarfs to their list of demonspawn, and started calling for the dominion of "true humanity" over metahumans. The average citizen of the Central Valley, not having had any positive personal experiences with metahumans to balance the propaganda, fell for the "pro-human" line all too easily. And that's the way things are in these parts to this day.

So that's how we've ended up with a government half run by policlub members (and most of the rest sympathizers). That's how we've ended up with a local police force that spends more time hassling metahumans than going after human go-gangs in the poorer areas of Chico-Oroville and Sacramento. That's how come you see so few metahuman faces anywhere in the Central Valley, and those you do see look nervous. They're constantly braced for the next bad thing we humans are going to throw at them. And that's how come most of the metahumans left in the Valley really hate our guts. They didn't used to—but since Humanis and their friends took over, they've had little reason to believe in humans who don't wish them harm. We're all enemies in the Central Valley, watching each other from behind veiled eyes, just waiting for the other guy to strike.

>>>>>(Jeez. Lays it on thick, don't he?)<<<<<

—Micro (15:32:45/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Not at all. I made the mistake of taking a job in Chico without checking out the place, and brought along a couple of buds to do the decking and some bodyguarding. They're both orks, the best I know in the biz. Anywhere else, they'd have been assets; in Chico, they turned into liabilities. Corin, the street sammy, couldn't go anywhere carrying so much as a squirtgun—despite the fact



that Chico-Oroville's gun laws are so lax that I, a human, could jander down the street swinging my FN-HAR and nobody'd look at me twice. And even I got in trouble the first day. We'd just arrived in town, and the bunch of us drove up to the window of the nearest Stuffer Shack to get some bites. The pasty-faced snot at the drive-thru declined to sell us our StufferBurgers when he saw two orks in the car; said something like, "We don't serve animals or their keepers. Take your livestock elsewhere." I took exception to this, and said so. Next thing I know, a black-and-white pulls up and six beefy cops in black uniforms get out. They weren't the Star, that's for sure. Two of 'em apiece hauled Corin and Hildegard out of the car, slammed them up against a wall, and started doing what they called a body search—every so often giving 'em a smack with a taser rod. Me and Hal, who also happens to be human, got treated in the meantime to a lecture—also punctuated with taser hits, though not as bad as it sounded like our friends were getting—from the other two cops on how it wasn't proper social etiquette for nice humans like us to be seen in public with refuse like orks. When the bully boys were done, they shoved Corin and Hilde into the back seat of our car like so much dirty laundry,

handed me a citation for "disturbing the peace," and demanded immediate payment of the legally required fine. Lucky for us I had the cred, so I paid it. We couldn't afford to make an issue of it—not with so much riding on our getting biz done later. As it was, we had to wait a couple days for Hildegard to recover from taser burn—we needed her in top condition to slip electrons and get what we'd come for. Every minute of those two extra days, we were all just waiting for a knock on the door. As soon as we could, we got the frag outta there. And I'm never going back, no matter how much some Johnson offers to pay me.)<<<<<

—Reality Czech (15:54:46/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Some friends and I had a similar experience in Fresno last year. The metahumans on our team didn't dare stick their noses outside our safehouse for fear of getting them shot off by some "citizen peace officer" protecting the general public from "metahuman criminals." And us humans couldn't go anywhere in our metahuman friends' company, not if we wanted to get any legwork done. Nobody'd talk to us if the metas were there. Hell, they wouldn't even let us buy them a decent drink. I tried once, and the mark I picked glared at me like I was a roach or something and poured the drink out on the floor. Slowly. Close enough to spatter my shoes with it. Our metahuman chummers were just so much dead weight in Fresno, and in the end we had to do the biz without them. Had to hire local, human talent at exorbitant prices, which cut into our eventual profits big-time. Also made us nervous as cats, because we didn't know how far we could trust our newly bought riggers. Would they hang in for the cred we'd promised, or would they help us so far and then turn us in for a fat reward? We didn't know, and the strain took a toll. So did the fact that our non-human friends had to depend on us for everything. They couldn't even go down to the local Stuffer Shack for a pack of smokes—they had to ask us to do it whenever we had the time. It was bad all around, let me tell you.

The worst thing about it was, all that stress brought out some stuff between us that would've better stayed buried. I lost what I thought were a couple of solid friendships because of that run.)<<<<<

—Lefty (17:12:45/02-19-57)

>>>>>(It ain't all bad here, you know. Some of us don't like this "humans-are-superior" drek one bit, and anyone from out of town can find a safe haven with us. (And surprise, surprise, some of us are humans.) We don't care how many different kindsa people you call friend—all we care about is making a living and sticking it to the "True Humanity Uber Alles" goons. If we can do both at the same time, so much the better!

For obvious reasons, I can't list names and addresses. Anyone thinkin' of comin' into town, drop me a line on Shadowland before you leave. Just use my name and give me a drop. I'll be in touch.)<<<<<

—Henreid (19:01:33/02-19-57)

CHICO-OROVILLE

Chico-Oroville—officially, the Chico-Oroville Great Metro Area, or COGMA—sits at the northern edge of government-controlled territory in the Free State, and sees itself as the vanguard of True Humanity against the metahuman hordes living between the Valley and the Tir border. (The fact that an awful lot of humans live in that same "uncivilized" region, apparently preferring it to the Valley's human-supremacist paradise, is roundly ignored.) Though Sacramento is the official seat of government, Chico-Oroville is actually more important to the prosperity and stability of the Central Valley because it is the site of Oroville Dam. This piece of engineering, the largest earth-filled dam in North America, gathers up water from the Feather River up north and shunts it throughout the Valley's irrigation canals for the benefit of agricorps great and small. Farmlands around Chico-Oroville are also a major center of the Valley's nut, citrus and kiwi growers. We're talking major money here, folks, and money always means power.

Reflecting this reality, the Native American Nations have all chosen to place their embassies in COGMA rather than Sacramento. (I suspect they also did this just to show the Sacramento government how powerless it really is by comparison.) The Inter-Tribal Council funds embassy offices for the Salish-Sidhe, Ute, Sioux and Tsimshian Nations, all clustered around the Ishi Memorial just east of Oroville proper.

>>>>>(Ishi Memorial? Who's Ishi?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (04:33:21/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Ishi was the last surviving member of the Yahi Indian tribe—everyone else got wiped out by white man's diseases. Ishi, sick and starving, came to the world's attention when he collapsed on some white farmer's land. Anthropologists went nuts over him—gosh, a real live Injun!—and snatched him up so they could study how "primitives" lived. All the while, of course, they were pumping him full of such modern-day poisons as nicotine and alcohol. He eventually died of tuberculosis. The memorial stands on the spot where the poor goob was first discovered—it's a museum dedicated to the memory of atrocities committed against Native Americans, with a special focus on the Yahi.)<<<<<

—Eponine (05:01:02/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Right there's another reason for putting the NAN embassies in COGMA. Sitting your embassy down at a memorial to atrocities committed against your people by the forebears of the present government officials sends a pretty strong message. "We don't like you or trust you, and you know why." Plus, certain Tribal Council big shots had reasons for avoiding Sacramento at the time the decision was made. They wanted to make nice with the Tir elves, and felt that placing embassies in the official capital of the CFS would tell the Tir that the NAN supported the Free State against the elven nation. That little piece of political calculation has since gone by the wayside, of course.)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (05:18:29/02-20-57)

The Tribal Council also owns and operates the Oroville Fish Hatchery, which breeds salmon for commercial consumption. Embassy security—provided by each represented Native American Nation on a rotating basis—safeguards the valuable hatchery from any locals who might want to frag with it or take it over.

Native Americans in general aren't real well liked in Chico-Oroville, but they rarely have to deal with anything worse than the occasional dirty look. Most Native Americans living in COGMA are attached to the embassies, and no one wants to do anything that might make California's powerful neighbors angry. The rest are administrators and foremen at the fish hatchery, a major source of jobs for poor non-Natives in COGMA. Local hires may resent their dependence on the Injuns, but they don't want them to pack up their hatchery and go home.

The ones who get it in the neck are metahumans, who have to contend with grass-roots and government expressions of bigotry. On the grass-roots level, the racist Native Californian policlub has its headquarters in Chico, and scuttlebutt says the NCs use the city as a staging base for raids against towns and farmsteads in the Northern Crescent. Law enforcement has never made a single move against the policlub; coincidentally (hah!), the few members actually arrested on suspicion of anything are always released due to "lack of credible evidence." Meanwhile, officialdom conducts its ceaseless vigilance against the criminal (read: metahuman) element at checkpoints all along every road into COGMA. At each one, visitors must state their names, destinations, and the purpose of their visit to COGMA. If the visitors are metahumans or are traveling with metahumans, they must declare all weapons; anything larger than a popgun is confiscated. (Humans on their own can carry any weapon they please.) Metahumans also have to pay a "peace fee" on the assumption that their very presence in COGMA may incite local citizens to violence and result in property damage. (The locals who actually start a ruckus don't pay a plugged nuyen.) Finally, the lucky metahuman and his "wrong-thinking" human companion get an official visitors' pass. The pass contains a magnetic strip that allows local cops to track the holder's movements. If you stray from the areas that the pass permits you to visit, it's a long night in the lockup for you. And believe me—the local cops loooove their work.

>>>>>(You'll have lots of pretty new bruises by morning. If they really like you, you may also have burns and broken bones.)<<<<<

—Boxer (06:34:44/02-20-57)

Getting the picture, folks? Still think you'd like to come here for a nice relaxing busman's holiday? Then make sure the pay's awful good—and consider bringing only human chummers with you. Otherwise, take my advice and stay away. A nice place to visit, it ain't. It sure ain't a nice place to live.

>>>>>(So let's get to what Mr. Gloom-and-Doom didn't tell us. Just where are the opportunities for biz in this burg?)<<<<<

—Pro (08:11:21/02-20-57)

>>>>>(COGMA's a major trade and transport hub, legit and illegit. Lots of free traders slip in here from the Crescent, carrying all kinds of stuff they've gotten from god-knows-where. They're always starved for goods, because there's so much they can't manufacture on their own. So there's quite a thriving black market in things like high-tech equipment and weapons between COGMA and the towns of the Crescent. The weapons market in particular is growing nicely, what with the Tir's recent attempt to take over Shasta Dam. Made a lot of folks nervous, that did.

Then there's Bidwell Park. Just north of Chico, Bidwell's the second-largest city-owned park in the Free State; the only one bigger is Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Big Chico Creek flows through lava tunnels in part of the park, and talismongers will pay dearly for untooled obsidian taken from the creek bed. Local authorities object strenuously to obsidian prospectors, but the money's just too good to pass up.

On the legitimate side, there's agribusiness setups all around the city centers of Chico and Oroville. The corps also pour a lot of money into the state university at Chico, paying professors to ensure that each year's crop of grads will be the perfect little wage slaves. Lots of research goes on at the university, some of which might be worth whopping cred to someone. Enough possibilities for you, or you want some more?)<<<<<

—Clocker (08:30:23/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Don't forget Thermalito Manufacturing. No word on what it's going to manufacture, of course. They started breaking ground for it last month. "Three hundred jobs at good wages" was all we heard about it. No one knows who's behind it, but word is it's Saeder-Krupp. They're technically not allowed to do business in the Free State, but corp money always talks.)<<<<<

—ChicoMan (08:49:09/02-20-57)

>>>>>(COGMA's a great location for illicit corp doings, provided the execs have paid off the right government flunkies. It's close enough to the dam that the corp forces stationed there will end up protecting it (whether they realize it or not), but also close enough to the chaos in the Crescent to hide less-acceptable operations. Want to bet half the go-gangs on the outskirts of Chico-Oroville are corp-sponsored?)<<<<<

—Diamond Girl (09:23:45/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Only half?)<<<<<

—Eponine (09:30:41/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Aztechnology recently bought out the California Rice Growers' Association. How's that for illicit corp doings? They're not supposed to do business here, either. Then there's Mitsuhama IAA Research in Richvale, Yamatetsu's proposal for a mini-arcology in Paradise, and everyone spying on everyone else's research at CFSU Chico. Gaia only knows how much more is going on that no one knows about yet.)<<<<<

—Green Man (11:21:32/02-20-57)



>>>>>(Anybody know anything about the magickers at the Buddhist temple in Oroville? I hear there's some kind of ork magical order operating outta there.)<<<<<

—Curious George (12:30:45/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Ork magicians in COGMA, stronghold of human bigots everywhere? Gimme a fragging break!)<<<<<

—Dreamchild (13:22:56/02-20-57)

>>>>>(No, it's true. I did some checking. The temple's been around for a couple of centuries, and all the stuff in it was supposedly shipped direct from China. White vandals almost destroyed it in the early 20th century, but in 1949 the city government of Oroville bought it and turned it into a tourist attraction. By 2001 they were running out of money to operate it, so they shut it down until 2031, when a rich ork by the name of Yee Chan bought it. No one knew much about him—still don't—but in the days before Secession and the California War, metahumans could still earn a living and operate pretty freely in Oroville. So Yee Chan paid the government a whack of cred for the temple—which they were real happy to get—and refurbished the place. He turned it into a school for the martial arts, and eventually gathered a group of shamans and physical adepts who call themselves the Golden Acorn Society. They still take students, as far as I know.

No one really knows what the Acorns are up to, but a lot of people figure they must be pretty powerful in order to operate as openly as they do in this town. Name me anywhere else in the Valley where a group headed by an ork, with lots and lots of metahumans in its ranks, is allowed to live and teach unmolested, and I'll eat my datajack. No one has ever attacked the temple, in spite of its being one of Oroville's most eye-catching public buildings. As far as I know, no one's ever assaulted any of the Acorns or their students, either—or if they did, they didn't live to tell about it.)<<<<<

—ChicoMan (14:03:45/02-20-57)

>>>>>(They're high-level initiates. Gotta be. Only major juju could be keeping Humanis and the Native Californians off their backs.)<<<<<

—Boz (14:07:46/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Could be. Like I said, no one knows.)<<<<<

—ChicoMan (14:10:36/02-20-57)

>>>>>(HOLD THE FRAGGING PHONE!! I just read through this entire post, and no one's said a word about Sacramento. It's the fragging state capital, people! There must be scads of biz going down there, and those of us who need to pay the rent could use a little info about the place. Or is there some deep dark reason why nobody knows nothin' about the fragging seat of government in CalFree?)<<<<<

—Marley (15:01:22/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Calm down, Marley. There's no deep dark about it. You're not used to reading between the lines, I guess, so I'll spell it out for you. The reason there's no "Hi, welcome to Sacramento, here's what's cooking" section in this post is that Sacramento's hardly worth mentioning. Yes, it's the capital—on paper. Yes, the governor warms his hoop there. Big fragging deal. The money's in Chico-Oroville, along with the agribusiness facilities that are actually worth breaking into. The only thing most corps have in Sacramento are branch PR offices. There's no data worth snatching, precious few wage slaves worth extracting, no fields to sow with nasty biobugs or research facilities to raid or installations to blow up. Just a town full of ordinary Joes with ordinary lives. Where's the biz in that?)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (15:20:43/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Not quite ordinary Joes ... which brings up a second reason why there's no biz worth having in Sacramento. As the state capital, this town takes a dimmer view of metahumans than any other place in the state. Any metahuman sticks out so far in a crowd that he might as well wear a big sandwich board that reads "Shadowrunner—Will Pull Any Illegal Job for Food." Or worse, one that reads "Walking Target." Any human in the company of a metahuman won't be able to stir a step without hostile people getting in his face, unless he's a local cop taking some poor halfer or someone in for a spot of torture. No runner team can possibly hope to get anything done in Sacramento unless every single one of them's human—and how many runners do you know who never work with metas?)<<<<<

—Boz (15:27:58/02-20-57)

>>>>>(It's best to visit Sac from a distance—the further the better—so polish up that deck or spread some nuyen to us Matrix Hounds and let us visit the place for ya. Anything you actually want or can use you can get from the 'trix. Paydata does exist, but you have to search through the freakish bizarre government security system. I've been there—it acts like it was designed by some slag hooped up on BTLs.)<<<<<

—Peg Leg (17:05:43/02-20-57)

>>>>>(You got that right, Peg Leg. Here's the skinny. Seems the government is suspicious of our big corp friends—so every so often (for "reasons of national security"—ain't that a gas?) they fire the security firm (which, I might add, always belongs to whatever big corp recently greased the governor's hand) and replace it with a new security firm (that greased the governor's hand a bit more).

So what this all means to my netsurfin' bros is, this place is like a museum of IC, nodes and datastores. Usually, the new sec team gets fired before they can locate all the old stuff and replace it—so every new sec team just dumps their own protection in without removing the old stuff. They create their own nodes and secure areas and then send people through the system on search-and-destroy missions. I opened up a novahot node once and thought I had enough paydata to buy myself one of those islands down Florida way. It took me weeks to decrypt it. So what was my big goldmine? Tax records for every citizen of a podunk town called Long Barn for the year 2012. Yippee. I burned most of my programs fighting a piece of the blackest IC I ever saw for this waste of MPs. So be careful in there.)<<<<<

—Indy (17:39:02/02-20-57)

>>>>>(From what I hear, being a new government security decker is one of the most dangerous jobs you can get. Those dudes have a shelf life of nanoseconds ... if the IC doesn't get them, their nerves are so shot from having to be "on" all the time that they just burn out.)<<<<<

—Paraquad (17:41:44/02-20-57)

>>>>>(So who has the honor of protecting the gummint's vast wasteland?)<<<<<

—Peg Leg (17:45:50/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Well, the governor's birthday was last month and he got a new gun from his good friend Mr. Knight. So Renraku Security's out and Knight Errant's in. Politics in the CFS—simple and elegant.)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (17:48:18/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, well, I got the word from some friends that Old Man Whitman has been seen dining with Fuchi execs lately. One of them just happened to be Tashaki Nogoma, the head of R&D at Fuchi CFS. His specialty—matrix security.)<<<<<

—Eslipper (18:09:50/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Ah, the wheels of government at work ...)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (18:11:36/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Don't forget the corps are all in Sacramento in one form or another. Mostly they've set up shell offices that act more like embassies or PR firms than arcologies or research establishments—you know, the places where we normally tend to "hang out"—but they're still worth something. You can get an idea of what might be going on in the deep background of a corp by rifling through its PR files. You have to think pretty hard to figure out what the corp skags aren't saying, so a lot of times this method of biz-hunting is more trouble than it's worth—but PR databases are a helluva lot easier to get at than more sensitive R&D datastores at HQ.)<<<<<

—Eslipper (19:02:30/02-20-57)

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



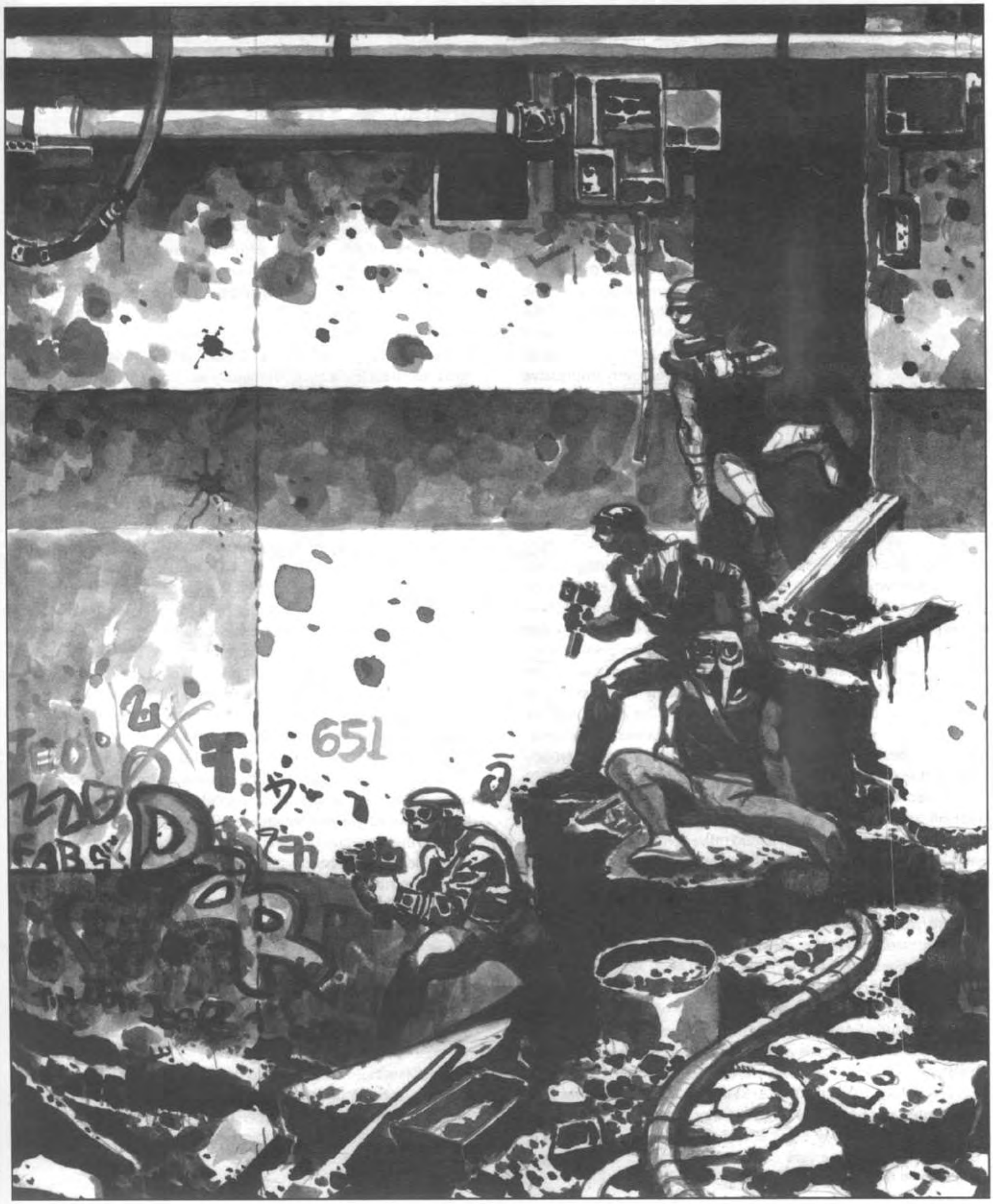
>>>>>(As a onetime resident of San Francisco before the Japanese occupation, I found this file particularly interesting. Also pretty fragging sad. You really can't go home again, can you? My thanks to a lady by the name of Bay Jewel, who leads off this file. You did a nice job, Bay, even if I didn't like the reading much.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (05:32:11/02-01-57)

I'd guess every potential reader of this post thinks they know a few things for sure about San Francisco and the Bay Area. First, San Francisco lies under the Imperial Japanese thumb like a squashed bug. Second, there are few metahumans living anywhere within the city limits. Third, the surrounding communities into which San Francisco's metahumans have been pushed—Oakland, Berkeley and other nearby towns—are full to bursting with metahumans, and as a result are either a) teeming hives of scum and villainy, or b) bastions of metahuman tolerance and enlightenment in which nobody hates or oppresses anybody except for the few humans of Japanese ancestry unlucky enough to get caught there. To be fair, there is a grain of truth in all that jetwash. San Fran is surely a Japanese city, at least so far as who runs the place. It's gotten the nickname "Tokyo West" for a reason. And there surely are a lot of metahumans in Oakland and environs, lots of them former residents of San Francisco who got pushed across the Bay when the Imperials arrived. Thing is, though, the whole picture is a lot more complex than the simple stereotype makes it look. And if you're considering coming here for biz, you need to know all the ins and outs.

Looks like I'm elected teacher. So listen up.

The San Francisco Bay area includes San Francisco proper, Oakland, Berkeley and a fair amount of surrounding real estate. Japanese Imperial troops and Japanese megacorporate money between them have managed to keep the city and its environs pretty stable for the past twenty-odd years, at least on the surface. Beneath the oh-so-polite-and-orderly facade, however, trouble's been brewing ever since the first Jap trooper set foot ashore. As the 2050s draw nearer to a close, the brew is getting ready to boil over—and god help the Japanese when it does. God help the rest of us, too, 'cause the explosion won't be pretty.



>>>>>(That's Orkland, not Oakland. Get the name right, lady!)<<<<<

—Orklander (00:02:34/02-14-57)

For the past two decades, San Francisco's megacorps and the anti-occupation underground centered in Oakland have been waging an undeclared war throughout the Bay Area. The Troubles, as locals call the conflict, have already claimed thousands of lives and seem destined to claim thousands more in the years to come. The Troubles affect almost all aspects of daily life around here, from the high-toned boardrooms in San Fran's glass towers to the meanest back alleys of Oakland and Berkeley. If you're here for biz, it's going to affect you too. First there's the obvious way—opportunities to make a little cred fighting for one side or the other. The underground's guerrilla soldiers and the corp counter-insurgency squads cut each other down like weeds on a regular basis, so both sides regularly hire runners to bolster their numbers. And the word is both sides offer pretty impressive nuyen.

>>>>>(Yeah, and the word is that lotsa runners who get involved in the Troubles never live to spend their nuyen.)<<<<<

—L. Sid (01:34:20/02-14-57)

Then there's less-obvious ways. Anti-metahuman prejudice makes it a real hassle for a metahuman runner to function in San Fran; the authorities are watching all the time, just waiting for you to put a foot wrong, and if you do they're on you like fungus on a rotting log. On the other side of the coin, the Japs' treatment of metas has made an awful lot of metahumans inside and outside San Fran resent humans like hell. All humans. They don't always take time to differentiate between Japanese and non-Japanese, or a corp suit and the street kid in synthleather who just wants to mind his own business. If you're human, you're presumed the enemy—and if you have any kind of Oriental ancestry, that presumption goes double. The upshot is, everybody hates everybody else. And that's a hell of a climate in which to do biz.

Of course, if you insist on working here (and I know most of you will, some time or another), opportunities abound. The Bay Area is home to Silicon Valley, a gold mine of microtech and cyberjunk like you've never seen. Local cyberweenies and the corp slags who own them turn out some of the most sought-after new cyber and computer hardware designs this side of Chiba City—nearly a hundred small design firms operate out of Silicon Valley alone, attracting some of the biggest megacorps in the business. Fuchi, Mitsuhama, Renraku, Shiawase—they're all here, along with lots of smaller corps no one's much heard of outside CalFree. They circle around like hungry sharks, waiting to gobble up the most promising new products from the talented nerd in the third garage on the left, and the competition is as keen as the edge of a monosword. Opportunity knocks for enterprising shadowrunners, if they're smart and lucky. That's the Bay Area in a nutshell—solid gold cred to be made, but only by sleazing your way into the heart of a slumbering volcano that may erupt at any time. You want my advice, I'd say hurry it up—the Japs can't hold it together much longer, even with all the money and troops in the world.

All the Japanese megacorporate power, plus a ruling council of Japanese megacorporate execs and a force of Imperial marines to keep order, have made the Japanese corporations the owners of San Francisco. Here's a little history lesson for all you young-n-hungry kids out there on how it got that way.

TURNING JAPANESE

In 2036, then-governor Nelson Treacle made a hasty decision with disastrous consequences for San Francisco and the entire Bay Area. To be fair, the poor skag was in desperate straits—kicked out of the UCAS, saddled with independence he didn't really want, and facing Tir and Aztlaner military forces on the march across California land. The Tir and the Azzies between them were gobbling up as much of the new Free State as they could choke down, and California's tiny, ill-equipped National Guard was fighting them off about as well as a house cat might fight off a pair of grizzlies. Treacle pleaded for military aid from the UCAS and CAS, but Washington and Atlanta pretty much left him on hold. "Don't call us, we'll call you" is not the kind of thing a head of state wants to hear when enemy troops look likely to conquer every foot of real estate he governs, and Treacle was scared to death of going down as the shortest-lived sovereign governor in history. So he took one of the few options he had left—he contacted the heads of several Japanese megacorps with San Francisco offices and asked them to convey a request for military aid to the Japanese government.

Even at the time, most folks around here realized that Treacle's request was a bluff designed to shake up the UCAS and CAS governments. If Treacle could convince those governments that he was really-and-for-true inviting the Japanese to install troops in California, the UCAS and CAS would trip over each other trying to get their boys in first and keep the Imperial army out—or so the thinking went. Unfortunately, the targets of the bluff couldn't move fast enough. Treacle, and California, lost the gamble big time. Before the UCAS or the CAS could agree to send so much as a single soldier boy, two Japanese Imperial marine light divisions landed at the Alameda Naval Air Station, which had been all but abandoned when the UCAS pulled out of the state following the Secession. More divisions followed in the next few days. Treacle tried to put the best face on the situation, organizing welcoming parades for the troops and telling anyone who would listen that "our noble Japanese allies" would soon be traveling to the northern and southern borders of California to drive the Tir and Aztlaner invaders back home with their tails between their legs. After a week, most everybody figured out that our noble Japanese allies had other plans. They made themselves comfortable, installed an Imperial Governor in the Presidio, and busily set about transforming San Francisco into a Tokyo clone.

>>>>>(Or as close as they could get to one. They still haven't managed to rub off all the city's American edges, though—and I doubt they ever will. To paraphrase my favorite poet, something there is that doesn't love a police state ...)<<<<<

—Mr. Frost (08:23:42/02-02-57)



>>>>>(I remember the welcoming parades. Treacle had his police round up thousands of people off the street and bus them to the parade routes. Anyone who objected got a taste of a rifle butt in his face and a couple hours in jail on disorderly conduct charges.)<<<<<

—Old Timer (10:21:33/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Anyone who wants to see what San Francisco is really about should come to town for the Liberation Day festivities on October 25. The Japanese corps hold a parade to commemorate the date the Japanese military forces arrived. Basically lotsa military hardware, crack troops, that kinda thing. Just don't get too close to the parade, and stay out of the corporate arcologies and any other places that attract crowds of suits—the anti-occupation groups like to observe the occasion by staging bombings or other attacks in the city. They all try to outdo one another. Last year, someone detonated a car bomb along the parade route—took out several Fuchi executives and a couple of Imperial marine platoons. And the Chinese gangs that still operate in the city create what they call "Hell Night." They set small fires throughout the city, then take sniping positions and wait for the authorities to arrive. Needless to say, the corps and military authorities maintain high security on Liberation Day—you can get your ass kicked just for smiling the wrong way at someone. And if you're coming in from Oakland, get into San Fran a day early—all entry points from Oakland are closed on October 25, and absolutely no metahumans are allowed in.)<<<<<

—Occidental Tourist (11:06:29/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Oakland and Berkeley are quite a sight on Liberation Day, too. All the day workers who normally travel to San Fran stay home and attend rallies sponsored by the anti-occupation groups. Many of these rallies have come to resemble festivals over the past few years, complete with free music, food and drink. Just about everyone's welcome, but if you're a human and you look Japanese you might have some problems.

Things turn more serious when the sun goes down. After all, in Oakland the idea is to celebrate the day the Japanese forces leave San Fran—which they obviously haven't done yet. And just in case anyone might start to forget that, groups of young sararimen from San Fran mark the day by putting on masks and venturing into Oakland to perform their annual "ear-collecting" tradition. In earlier times people called this kind of thing a pogrom. The groups come into Oakland in heavily armored vehicles and proceed to kill, rape and maim any residents unable to defend themselves. They loot stores, set fires and try to avoid the patrols organized by the anti-occupation groups. And they keep score by collecting ears—the pointed kind. It's sick. Each of the big megacorps in the city unofficially "sponsors" a "team." Then these teams see who can come back with the most "trophies." Even if you're not a metahuman, you're not necessarily safe from their attacks, because they figure that anyone who's in Oakland on Liberation Day is the enemy.)<<<<<

—I. Witness (11:32:04/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Teams of sararimen? Come on, how dangerous can they be?)<<<<<

—Greenhorn (11:46:03/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Plenty dangerous. The corps' security divisions always contribute personnel and equipment to the cause and often bolster their teams with shadowrunners. I've heard some corps will pay runners up to 5,000 nuyen for the night. Course, any runner who takes one of these contracts better make sure that none of his metahuman chummers ever finds out—and he'd better watch his step in Oakland.)<<<<<

—Basher (12:09:21/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Human runners only need apply, of course.)<<<<<

—Rabid (12:16:34/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek. The corps'll hire any bruiser willing to take the contract who looks like he might be able to do significant damage. They want to win the competition, and they don't care who risks dyin' as long as it ain't them. And before anyone gasps in horror at the notion that metahumans would go gunning for their own to make a bunch of human bigots happy, let me say two little words—cred talks.)<<<<<

—Kilroy (12:23:45/02-02-57)

>>>>>(We do not murder our own for filthy money, you lying smalltooth frag!)<<<<<

—Freedom Fighter (12:27:39/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Who you callin' smalltooth? I happen to be a troll. I also happen to fight the corp killers every year, and I'll keep doing it until they slit my throat ... if any of 'em can reach that high. I've been on the front lines of this war, chum. I know who my enemies are. Where have you been?)<<<<<

—Kilroy (12:31:05/02-02-57)

>>>>>(The San Francisco authorities have never condoned the excesses of Liberation Day, regardless of where such excesses originate. However, San Francisco authorities have no jurisdiction outside the city and are powerless to prosecute those who perpetrate such offenses.)<<<<<

—Flak (12:33:41/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Right. Hell, I've seen terror squads made up of Imperial troopers who don't even bother to remove their uniforms when they go rampaging.)<<<<<

—Skeptic (12:36:09/02-02-57)

Less than two weeks after showing up, the Japanese military commander declared martial law. To show us what a standup guy he was, he held a joint press conference with officials from the city's Japanese megacorps. The transcript is priceless, if you're a connoisseur of grim political humor. According to the Grand Imperial Pooh-Bah, the megacorps had "generously offered to help design and implement a transitional program" designed to "re-establish a safe and secure work environment for all San Franciscans." Even funnier, he promised that the new junta would remain in power "until stability has been restored and the former city authorities can resume their administrative duties." That remains the official line, but everyone knows that time will never come.

With frightening efficiency, the new sheriffs in town immediately set about transforming San Francisco. The Japanacorps and their pet Imperial troops grabbed the property and assets of individuals and rival corporations too weak to resist, constructed military checkpoints at all entrances to the city, and announced the first metahuman relocation and registration laws. As a "protective measure," metahuman residents were required to register with city authorities. Within weeks roving bands of off-duty troopers, Japanese policlub members and corporate thugs began to make nighttime visits to the businesses and homes of metahumans, vandalizing property and intimidating residents. Those metahumans who didn't check out of town after a few such warnings disappeared.

>>>>>(How could the city's population just stand by and watch this happen? I mean, these metahumans were their neighbors, after all.)<<<<<

—Tyro (12:43:01/02-02-57)

>>>>>(How many of your neighbors do you know by sight, Ty? Of those, how many do you know well enough to stick up for when that means a beating, or the loss of your job? Back then, just like now, most people hardly knew their neighbors. They kept themselves to themselves, and so had no overriding reason to object when the Imperials rounded up the elf family next door and shipped them off to Oakland. Hell, a lot of people probably didn't know there was an elf family next door. What did they care when the pointed ears were replaced by human faces with slanted eyes? They just shrugged and got on with their lives. They didn't fully understand what was going on, and they didn't want to understand because then they might have had to do something about it—at great cost to themselves and their families.)<<<<<

—Lizard (12:46:24/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Also, the corporate junta had assumed control of all the city's newspapers, broadcast and trideo stations, and all other means of mass communication. They used the media to keep hammering home the idea that metahumans just didn't belong in San Francisco, that they were too different to fit comfortably here. Classic propaganda techniques, sweetened for mass consumption; to make people swallow it, they passed a lot of this drek off as necessary to protect the "unique natures and cultural characteristics" of the metahuman races. How's that for doublespeak? The average citizen just didn't hear anyone saying that it was a bunch of bulldrek. And the large numbers of heavily armed Imperial troops stationed throughout the city certainly helped convince people to go along with the program.)<<<<<

—Chronicler (12:50:34/02-02-57)

>>>>>(You make it sound like the metahumans were all shipped off to some gulag as part of some sinister plot. But that didn't happen. The Imperial Governor and the corporations relocated them to their own culturally homogeneous enclaves throughout the Bay Area. So they had to leave one house or apartment in the city for another one just like it outside the city limits—so what? Certainly they must have felt sad to leave their homes behind, but it was for

their own good. It was also necessary to free up space for workers like me, who need to live close to corporate offices. I was relocated, too—I had no more choice in the matter than any metahuman. My boss told me that my family and I were to move to San Francisco, and that they would give us a house convenient to our workplace. They did so. Who am I to question their decision?)<<<<<

—Suit (13:01:34/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Bought the party line, I see. What's next—"I vass only following orderss"?)<<<<<

—Histobuff (13:14:55/02-02-57)

>>>>>(I hate to sound like I agree even a smidgen with a corp suit, but he's got a point buried in all that rationalization. Not the one he meant to make, I'm sure, but a valid one nonetheless. He says he was relocated, just like the metahumans. Well, so were a lot of humans who'd made their homes in San Francisco, but who weren't Japanese enough or corporate enough to please the city's new masters. The corps imported their own people in order to ensure maximum corp loyalty among the citizenry. Anyone who stood in the way of that—human or metahuman—got shoved across the Bay.)<<<<<

—Franny (13:20:33/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Not everyone stood by and watched, either. Lots of folks in Chinatown organized resistance groups right off the bat. The Japanacorps had decided to preserve Chinatown as a historical curiosity and as "testimony to its ethnic and racial tolerance," to quote the PR of the time—that turned out to be a bad move on their part. The Chinese have cordially hated the Japs' guts for most of their history, but especially since the Second World War when the Japanese stomped all over them—they weren't about to pass up the chance to stick the Japs in the eye. The tongs all over the city pitched in to help set up a resistance network, and they still do a lot toward keeping it going. Of course, it's not all historical bad blood on the tongs' part—they've got sound business reasons for supporting anything that frags off the Japanese. The yakuza started showing up in force not long after the Japanese takeover, and the tongs were afraid of getting squeezed out of the city's rackets. Anti-Japanese resistance crimps the yaks just as much as the corps. But the tongs stood with the metahumans when few others did, and the metahuman resistance movement has never forgotten that.)<<<<<

—Tuskadero (13:43:34/02-02-57)

Given such neighborly behavior on the part of the city's new overlords, metahumans began leaving San Francisco in droves. Most settled in Oakland and Berkeley, the two cities closest to San Francisco (where most of the displaced metas still worked, though at far worse-paid menial jobs). By 2042, metahumans made up less than 15 percent of San Francisco's population.

>>>>>(Orkland! It's Orkland!)<<<<<

—Orklander (13:50:24/02-02-57)

SAN FRANCISCO TODAY

Nowadays, San Francisco is more or less a Japanese megacorporate enclave. For the first few years of the occupation, the corps running the place actually organized and financed a puppet city government—but after awhile, when the Japanacorp Pooh-Bahs figured out that everyone knew who was really running the show, the city government quietly dissolved. Since 2040, a council of executives from the city's largest megacorps—Fuchi Industrial Electronics, Mitsuhama Computer Technologies, Renraku Computer Systems, Shiawase Corporation, and the Pacific Rim Bank and Financial Services Corporation—have been clearly and obviously in charge. Because the city officially remains under martial law, Japanese Imperial troops take care of security and law enforcement. The corps keep their own troops close to their arcologies and other installations. They've no need to police the city at large, since the Japanese military commander takes his orders from the corp council. Neat arrangement for the corporate skags—Tokyo pays the Imperial troops, and the corps save a bundle of cred on their own security bills.

>>>>>(The corp council also has a cozy relationship with several yakuza oyabun based in San Francisco. The council turns a blind eye to yakuza operations as long as they don't eat into corporate profits, and it prohibits any outside law-enforcement agencies from conducting anti-yakuza operations in San Francisco. In return, the yakuza organizations keep the council members informed of any developments in the shadow world that might threaten their control.)<<<<<

—Mobwatcher (14:10:33/02-02-57)

>>>>>(How can anyone possibly believe that scurrilous rumor? Where's the proof? Nowhere—because there isn't any. The corporations have a vested interest in an orderly, crime-free society—they are not protecting the yakuza, and they never will.)<<<<<

—Suit (14:25:24/02-02-57)

>>>>>(Hey, Suit—got any more rose-colored glasses where yours came from? I want a pair.)<<<<<

—Rags (14:30:44/02-02-57)

Not so nice for the rest of us, of course. Metahumans count themselves lucky to pass by the average Imperial soldier without getting kicked, spat on or cursed at—but even if you're human, the Imperials are folks to watch out for. They have a nasty tendency to stop anyone who isn't wearing the right clothes, or who just doesn't look right in some mysterious way. If a trooper's having a bad hair day, or got out of the wrong side of bed this morning, he and his chums will hassle people at random—even sararimen and tea ladies as Japanese-looking as rice noodles. The only people who are always safe from Imperial harassment are the corporators who look and act like high-paid big shots. Hassling them isn't worth the trouble, no matter how pissy a mood Soldier Boy Yamoto happens to be in.

Petty harassment aside, however, life in San Francisco is pretty comfortable if you work for one of the corps and you're



py the Bay. Most of the salt marshes in the North Bay are polluted as well, and supposedly at least one hive of insect spirits lives out there. Plenty of people have reported encounters with mosquito spirits, as well as with some bizarre kind of aquatic beetle spirits.)<<<<<

—Mr. Natural (16:42:03/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, and what were they slottin' at the time?)<<<<<

—Skeptic (16:50:23/02-07-57)

>>>>>(There's also some kind of mutant/toxic/Gaia-knows-what-else kind of leech out there. Last April, we were pulling a run to extract some un-playtested software from Mitsu when the corp's security caught up with us in the marsh. An HE near miss shook our boat up pretty bad and Ghoulie, our troll, went over the side. When she came up some kind of big, rubbery thing was attached to her back. What with all those damned little channels and our uninvited aerial escort continuing to make trouble, it took us a minute or so to get back to Ghoulie. By the time we did, she was on the bank, dead as concrete—with a hole the size of a hubcap gnawed right through her armor and her back. Not a drop of blood left in her body either.)<<<<<

—ShadowSlam (16:55:23/02-07-57)

There's a lot more drek where the pass laws came from, of course. Other cultural protection laws prevent metahumans from owning property in the city, fraternizing with humans (whatever that means—the definition gets damned flexible), owning businesses—in general, from doing anything to build any kind of meaningful life in San Francisco. The laws are designed to keep metahumans down, "mutual benefit" jetwash to the contrary. Worse yet, even the lowliest Imperial trooper can and will create a new "protection" law on the spot if he or any other skag in authority comes across some activity that's not already covered. Even the most novahot lawyer in the world can't fight City Hall on this one, because the corps control the courts like everything else.

THE ECONOMY—THE NEXT BATTLEGROUND

San Francisco and the Bay Area have two economies, in practice if not in theory. San Francisco's has the most cred floating around, of course. It includes the fattest ruling corps in the city—Fuchi, Mitsuhama, Renraku, Shiawase, Pacific Rim Bank, Kenshi Electronics, Nippon United, and Tokugawa Technologies. Most of these Japanacorps maintain their North American headquarters in San Fran, and each employs thousands of management, clerical, and technical personnel. Virtually all human and lots of them Japanese, these are the wageslaves who are doing OK in San Francisco. Some folks on the lower end of the scale, like the tea ladies, might accept a bribe if you catch them on the right day or offer it in just the right terms. Most, however, are company loyalists. They have to be—no loyalty, no job, and no job, no more decent life.

>>>>>(Running scared, the lot of 'em. If you figure on bribing one as part of your biz, better make it fraggin worth their risk.)<<<<<

—Pro (02:33:43/02-10-57)

The corps also employ thousands of metahumans in low-level positions—janitors at the arcologies and high-rise HQs, assembly-line workers at microtech manufacturing plants, or gutters and packers at the fish farms in San Francisco Bay and along the Pacific coast. The poor slots in these jobs work for poverty-level wages, often under inhumane and dangerous conditions. In recent years, local metahumans have gotten reluctant to work for the corps even though far too many of them must either take a corp job or starve. Which brings me to the second economy, the one that operates outside the city limits.

Five to seven years back, a long-term strategy of community investment by anti-occupation groups and their legions of sympathizers finally started to pay off. The idea was simple enough—all the people displaced by the occupation were encouraged to stick the Japanacorps in the eye by doing their level damnedest to keep their money out of San Francisco. Those who could manage it started up small businesses—restaurants, dry cleaners, hair salons, grocery stores. Those who didn't have start-up money went to work for the little businesses, and bought from them every payday. For quite a few years it wasn't easy—there just weren't enough local job openings to employ everyone who needed work, and the day workers who flocked to San Francisco couldn't always make a point of spending all their meager paysticks outside the city limits. Plus, the city corps profited off them through payroll taxes. Slowly but surely, however, the local economies grew. Since 2050 or so, mom-and-pop businesses of all kinds have sprouted up, and more and more local citizens are finding work in their own hometowns. Some local businesses have even gotten big enough to take on the smaller corps across the Bay, and they're working to cut into San Francisco's corporate markets. The corporations are treating this development like one big yawner so far, though they have started importing metahuman workers from outside the Bay Area. They're doing their usual terrific job of ensuring warm fuzzies toward the company (hah!) by treating the imports like so much dirt. Most "guest workers" become anti-occupation radicals within months of their arrival.

>>>>>(And the Resistance would like to thank the Japanacorps very much for their sterling work on our behalf!)<<<<<

—Mr. Rick (03:43:55/02-10-57)

One more word of interest to biz-seekers—San Francisco's corporations may cooperate to run the city, but that cooperation ends when it comes to business. The corps are especially competitive about their main business here—microtech. It's really funny, because the Japanacorps have a common corporate enemy—Ares Macrotech, which owns most of nearby Silicon Valley—but they can't work together long enough to put a dent in Ares's holdings. Instead, they're stuck with sniffing around the edges in various ways. They all maintain extensive research and design departments, as well as manufacturing plants where they churn out computer and cyber hardware products that they hope to god people will actually buy. They try like bastards to poach away personnel from the cutting-edge microtech firms in Silicon Valley, especially the people who might be responsible for the last great Ares product. They do not hesitate to buy—or steal—designs and designers from the Valley firms and from each other. Putting out the latest great piece of hardware or software means millions of nuyen in profits, so the stakes are pretty high. Anyone out there hear the credsticks clicking together yet? Datasteals, extractions, search-and-destroy operations (for those who like that kind of thing)—the microtech industry in the Bay Area offers lucrative opportunities for shadowrunners. The danger matches the money, of course—but if you don't know that by now, you *deserve* to end up dead.

>>>>>(Amen to that. The San Fran shadows sure ain't fer wussies.)<<<<<

—Bay City (05:06:33/02-10-57)

THE MOB WAR

The big boys on the block in San Francisco are the yakuza, as you might expect in a city that's become a Japanese preserve. Rumor has it that several yakuza oyabun operate in the city with the ruling corps' blessings, though no definitive proof of this allegation exists. (But then, it wouldn't—the corps would bury it too deep to ever be found. So draw your own conclusions.) Between the heavy yak presence and the Imperial jackboots all across the city, San Francisco actually has less organized-crime activity overall than you might expect. However, anyone who thinks the yaks are the only game in town is dead wrong. The Chinese tongs, Korean Seoulpa rings, and the Mafia all have at least a toehold in San Francisco's underground economy, and the non-Japanese gangs have been working mightily to knock the yaks off their pedestal ever since the occupation.

>>>>>(The corps have an arrangement with the yaks—they've got to. It's the only thing that makes any sense. I can even tell you why they did it. By inviting the yakuza into the city, the ruling corps hoped to check the power of the Chinese tongs, which were aiding anti-occupation guerrillas. In exchange, the corps agreed to turn a blind eye to yak operations that didn't cut into corp profits.)<<<<<

—Mobwatcher (02:44:53/02-11-57)

>>>>>(And the yaks took restrictions lying down?!)<<<<<

—Slicer (03:21:33/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Sure they did. You think any of them has enough firepower to stand up to the Imperial troops and special forces the corps can call on if the yaks get sticky? Not fragging likely.)<<<<<

—Mobwatcher (03:30:24/02-11-57)

>>>>>(Every now and then one of them needs to learn this the hard way, though. Take Johnny Takemura, for example. He's a runner, works a lot for the local yaks. Or maybe I should say "worked." A few years ago, a middling-level yak boss had Johnny's crew kidnap some wiz kid designer working out of the Valley—don't ask me what this yak flunky wanted with a hacker, 'cause I don't know. Well, it turns out Tokugawa Technologies had their eye on the kid and were planning their own little snatch when Johnny beat them to the punch. Tokugawa told Johnny to just turn

the kid over to 'em and they'd forget he existed—no hard feelings, no cement overshoes for spoiling their plans. But Johnny and his boys didn't want to turn the guy over. So Tokugawa offered to compensate Johnny and his crew for their work, but got pissed off when Johnny kept upping his price for the kid. Eventually, Tokugawa got tired of the game and told Johnny to give up the goods or else. Johnny said no. The next day he and his buds disappeared from the face of the earth.)<<<<<

—Drummond

(23:14:01/02-13-57)

>>>>>(The yaks also perform occasional errands for the ruling corps, like smuggling in certain items that a corp might not want to be linked to.)<<<<<

—Mad Hatter

(23:55:46/02-13-57)



The yaks make their major money by running the red-light district and controlling the bulk of the smuggling operations along the Bay. The red light district sprawls like a drunken sailor across what used to be Fisherman's Wharf, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a more depressing collection of throwaway people anywhere else in the Free State. (Except maybe El Infierno in Los Angeles, but that's another story.) Joygirls, joyboys, BTL chippers and dealers, sim parlors where you pay a little cred to wire yourself up in a darkened booth and experience somebody else's bone-dancing, seedy bars full of lap dancing, leather-clad trolls—name just about any pathetic way that bored and jaded wage slaves can come to slum it on the alleged wild side and the Wharf's got it. All carefully designed by its yak proprietors to look and feel thrillingly dangerous—by some unimaginative corporator's standards—without actually posing a threat to the midlevel accountant who comes here to pretend he's Living Dangerously. It's all a big setup, allowed by the corps because their employees and visitors can indulge a few deviant tastes without leaving the safety of the city limits. Plus, it gives them terrific opportunities to catch a little blackmail footage that just might come in handy sometime. (What's that, Mr. Smith? You think you deserve a fat raise because you doubled our profits this year? Tell you what—you forget about the raise and we'll forget about this trid recording of you with the three joygirls in the motel parking lot. Wakarimasu-ka?")

Lots of the poor slots who work in the district are lured to the city with promises of legitimate, high-paying corp positions. Once they arrive, they're put to work and virtually kept prisoner in the brothels and BTL dens. Word is, metahumans who work the district are abducted from their jobs in the city or from surrounding towns. Lately the Metahuman People's Army and a few other resistance groups have been staging "rescues" of alleged kidnap victims, with surprising success—or maybe not so surprising, considering the help they get from the yakuza's rivals.

>>>>>(Even in this wretched place the occupiers cannot extinguish the spirit of resistance. Remember Johanna Wilde!)<<<<<

—Abdul (01:21:44/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Who was Johanna Wilde?)<<<<<

—Occidental Tourist

(02:34:16/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Only one of the most famous heroines of the anti-occupation movement, that's who. Johanna was an elf who was abducted and forced into a yakuza brothel at the tender age of 14. One day she decided she couldn't stand it anymore, so she took justice into her own hands. She slit the throat of an Imperial trooper right after she finished servicing the slot. Turned out he wasn't just any old trooper, though—he was the commander of the Imperial occupation forces.)<<<<<

—Cadre (02:41:55/02-15-57)

With prostitution, BTLs and free trading pretty much tied up by the yakuza, the remaining crime syndicates have carved up the extortion and protection rackets between them. They really do share the takings, with only the occasional eruption of bad blood. The tongs, Seoulpas and Mafia all see the yakuza as the real enemy, and have managed to put aside their own differences in order to work against the Japanese mob. When they can't strike at

the yaks directly, they settle for not fragging each other over so there'll be more mob foot soldiers to fight the anti-yakuza war.

And it is a war—make no mistake about that. The Chinese tongs are the standard-bearers, as they're the ones with the longest-standing grudges against the Japanese. For them, it's more than just resentment over being shut out of profits. It's a whole lot of history and a whole lot of blood. The way they see it, the tongs are fighting for the entire Chinese people against a group of fellow Asians who've consistently tried to either harm or enslave them.

>>>>>(Whether the entire Chinese people agree with this view or not is immaterial.)<<<<<

—Deng (03:04:55/02-15-57)

>>>>>(The Seoulpas have similar reasons to hate the Japanese. Look up the Second World War in any decent history textbook—the Japanese did the Koreans a whole lot of dirt in the 1940s, and a lot of people in the modern-day Seoulpas take that part of history very seriously.)<<<<<

—Mr. Kim (03:21:34/02-15-57)

As part of their ongoing battle against the Japanese occupiers in general and the yakuza in particular, the San Francisco tongs have made common cause with the anti-occupation groups active in Oakland and Berkeley. (I'll talk more about them later on.) Lots of tongs keep safehouses in the city for all kinds of anti-occupation folks—humans and metahumans, guerrillas and plain-vanilla protesters. The tong-run safehouses are pretty much open to shadowrunners making runs against ruling corporations, as long as the run doesn't mess with tong business.

>>>>>(Some of 'em want to frag up the Japanacorps so bad, they'll even take hits in their own profits to do it. Hell, I've been with tong members who don't even ask what my biz is—all they need to know is that it'll mightily inconvenience Fuchi or Renraku or whoever, and they're at my service.)<<<<<

—Profitt (03:30:44/02-15-57)

Over the years, resistance groups and the organized-crime boys have developed a weird kind of symbiotic relationship based on their mutual loathing for the occupiers. The crime syndicates set up safehouses and e-mail drops, scrounge news from the corridors of corp power, and generally do everything possible to make life easier for resistance-group members inside San Fran's city limits. In return, the major resistance groups who pretty much run things across the Bay allow the tongs and their friends plenty of leeway in the Oakland/Berkeley 'plex, as long as they don't rook the locals. The tongs, Seoulpas and Mafia between them control most of Oakland/Berkeley's thriving black market, which is an excellent source of illegal weapons, stolen cyberware, vehicles and rigs, and stuff like that. The crime boys show their gratitude by refusing to take their customary cut from the anti-occupation groups' favorite cash-raising strategy—the occasional black-market sale of mil-spec gear that fell off the back of a truck.

>>>>>(I don't believe it! Organized crime working together and even turning down profits to benefit somebody's political cause? Since when did the mobs of the world turn into the good guys?)<<<<<

—Skeptic (04:11:34/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Since the bad guys started making everybody miserable. In a strange way, the yakuza and their corp buddies have ended up proving that there is honor among thieves.)<<<<<

—Pierre (04:32:54/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Good guys, nothin'. Ya think the mobs care a frag about justice for metahumans? Naah—they're just sick of watchin' the yaks eat up all their cred. If they kicked the yaks out but left the Japanacorps in charge, the tongs 'n' Seoulpas 'n' them would all quit helpin' the resistance real quick.)<<<<<

—Public Citizen (04:55:26/02-15-57)

>>>>>(The tongs run a small red-light district in Orkland—there's a couple of small-time BTL manufacturers and dens, plus a few brothels. Locals generally steer clear of the places—most of the clients are thrill seekers from San Francisco or out of town. The district's a good place to find Mr. Walter Mitty-Corp Suit who likes to rebel against his bosses by refusing to stay in the yak-run, "safe" red-light district in San Fran. Skags like this can be ideal sources of info if you're making a run on somebody; if they're indulging in a taste for rebellion by straying across the Bay, they're more likely to spill you a few beans about the Head Office. These are people who like to think of themselves as daring and dauntless—appeal to that vanity and you've got them in your pocket.)<<<<<

—Dexter (05:24:21/02-15-57)

>>>>>(The leaders of the big anti-occupation groups also don't mind that the tongs regularly smuggle BTL chips and counterfeit credsticks into San Francisco.)<<<<<

—Drummond (05:45:52/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Walter who?)<<<<<

—Sammy Boy (06:02:33/02-15-57)

>>>>>(You know—The Secret Life of Walter Mitty. A story about a nebbishy kind of guy who spent a lot of time fantasizing about all the adventures he never had. Haven't you heard of it?)<<<<<

—Dexter (06:10:33/02-15-57)

>>>>>(What's nebbishy?)<<<<<

—Sammy Boy (06:16:57/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Forget it.)<<<<<

—Dexter (06:21:33/02-15-57)

THE OAKLAND/BERKELEY SPRAWL

The Oakland/Berkeley metroplex is a few watery kilometers and a million light-years away from the clean-n-corporate city of San Francisco. Crowded to bursting, noisy, intensely alive and

fiercely proud of itself, the Oakland/Berkeley sprawl is home to one of the biggest metahuman populations in North America. No surprise that this burg is a major center for the Free State's metahuman-rights movement, is it? In some ways, the metahuman-rights and anti-occupation movements are just the latest chapters in the area's long history of struggle for social justice; today's political resisters and freedom fighters are the latter-day heirs of the 20th century's civil-rights and anti-war demonstrators. Local members of various resistance groups love to point out this parallel, largely because those long-ago protesters won most of their battles. What people forget is how much ground they lost as the 20th century drew to a close and the 21st revved up. Still, those of us working against the Japanese occupation and other injustices are a force to be reckoned with—and nearly everyone in Oakland and Berkeley is either an active member of some group or proudly supports its aims. For you out-of-towners, this sprawl is not the place to make disparaging remarks about trogs or daisy-chewers, or to start talking about what standup fellas the folks at Mitsuhama are. If you're lucky, you'll just be asked to leave. If you're unlucky, your ears will be handed to you on a plate ... and *then* you'll be asked to leave.

Local metahumans and non-Japanese humans, virtually all of whom can claim sad experience of bigotry at the hands of San Francisco's ruling corps, have created a culture of tolerance in the metroplex. People may not fall all over you like you're a long-lost chum, but generally they won't crack your skull without reason. The exception to this, predictably, is screaming corporate-suit types. If you're a corp employee with business in the 'plex, leave your suit, your car and your driver at home. Better yet, stay the hell away—we don't need you. Other than that, the only trouble a visitor is likely to run into is whatever he brings with him. The people in charge of Oakland/Berkeley, a loosely organized band of leaders from several anti-occupation guerrilla and political groups, run the place with an eye to keeping everybody happy with everybody else. No sense making the Japanese corporators happy by squabbling among ourselves, right?

Along with the larger and better organized resistance groups, the Oakland/Berkeley sprawl also attracts its share of utopian cults, small-scale radical polis (no Humanis goons need apply), and various shadowfolk like street mages, talismongers, fixers and riggers in need of fertile biz territory. Oakland and Berkeley are certainly fertile ground for all kinds of shady operations, but how well the local population regards runners generally depends on the kind of jobs they take. Lots of people are ambivalent about runners, unsure whether any given runner is a bad guy working for a Japanacorp or a good guy working against them.

>>>>>(I've known runners who regularly serve with corporate anti-guerrilla squads; also some who've taken pay from the San Francisco corps to infiltrate Oakland's anti-occupation groups. I've also known runners to take on jobs that trashed the corps or otherwise helped our cause. On balance, I'd say more runners are good guys than bad guys—but my statistical sample may be way skewed. After all, who's going to come to my attention if they're looking to do a job for Fuchi?)<<<<<

—Freedom Fixer (08:45:36/02-17-57)

>>>>>(In certain areas of Oakland, humans aren't welcome under any circumstances. Ork Town, which covers the old Alameda Naval Air Station and runs up into what used to be Emeryville, is the largest such area and probably the most dangerous for unescorted humans. Not all of Ork Town's residents will want to geek you on sight, but some will. If you have business in the area, find a metahuman guide to show you around.)<<<<<

—Tuskadero (10:32:44/02-17-57)

Racial tolerance aside, the Oakland/Berkeley sprawl isn't exactly a vacation spot. It's not just shadowrunners and out-of-towners we're ambivalent about, either. Sometimes we're ambivalent—or worse—about each other. There are tensions in this town, just like everywhere else in the Free State, and life around the 'plex gets a little nervous sometimes. Those are the wages of living in an overcrowded semi-slum where most people have a tough time making ends meet without some kind of money from the hated but powerful San Francisco corps; sometimes money talks louder than justice or rights or morality or decency. We've been doing better in recent years about making sure we can take care of our own, so that the Japanacorps won't have that leverage against our people any more—but we've still got a ways to go.

Sporadic violence doesn't help things any. Violent incidents erupt fairly regularly—not one race against another, but the San Fran corps against the occupation-resisters. The corps know full well that Oakland/Berkeley is the center of operations for just about every anti-occupation, anti-Japanese, and metahuman-rights group throughout the Bay Area. So whenever some guerrilla group or other bombs a corp arcology, nails some suit at the Liberation Day parade, pulls some Matrix scam that hits corporate stockholders in the pocketbook, or even just slaps up a few posters of the Imperial Governor sporting ork tusks and elf ears, a corporate black-ops team retaliates. Brutally. With maximum collateral damage. The object of this bloody game is to terrorize the resisters into giving up or turn local opinion against them, or both. It's been going on like this for twenty years, and it hasn't worked very well. All it's done is harden local resolve not to give a centimeter. Instead of terrifying people into submission, the corporations' tactics have given people a whole new reason to fight—for the sake of the honored dead, whose blood cries out for vengeance. It's no coincidence that after every corporate strike in the sprawl, the membership rolls of major resistance groups leap into the stratosphere.

>>>>>(Metahumans who sell out their own for a corp credstick are an even bigger problem than the lady who wrote this may realize. Sure, a fair number of folks hate the occupiers and want to see metas get a fair deal—but there's also those people who don't care about anyone but themselves, plus folks who have families to feed and no steady paystick to do it with. Either of these makes a ripe target for some corp Johnson who says, "All you have to do is watch So-and-So for a week and tell me where he goes. I'll give you a thousand nuyen for it. We got a deal?" There's lots of poor and jobless in Oakland/Berkeley, and I'm betting there always will be. You think these people are going to turn down large offers of

cred just because the payer is a San Fran corp? Not likely. They'll find some way to fool themselves into thinking that what they're doing isn't really going to hurt anyone, and they'll pocket the cred faster than you can slot a chip. Moral of the story—don't come here thinking you can trust this contact or that fixer just because he or she is a metahuman like you, or has reason to hate the corps. Neither of those things is any guarantee against a double-cross, if the corps make the pay high enough.)<<<<<

—Berzerkely (11:24:21/02-17-57)

METAHUMAN RIGHTS AND RESISTANCE GROUPS

The two largest anti-occupation, metahuman-rights groups in the Oakland/Berkeley area are the October 25 Alliance and the Metahuman People's Army (MPA). Last time anyone bothered to count, there were about twenty-five to thirty smaller groups as well, almost all affiliated with the Alliance or the MPA. Occasional tension flares up between the two groups, usually because of competition for new recruits or funding, but in general they present a united front.

>>>>>(All the serious tensions that have arisen between the Alliance and the People's Army have been caused by agents of the Japanese occupiers. The Resistance presents a unified front against the oppressors and will continue to do so until the mega-corps and their lackeys are driven from San Francisco and metahumans can again live in peace and dignity.)<<<<<

—Commander Zero (21:41:56/02-20-57)

The MPA is best known for daring attacks against targets in San Francisco—usually Imperial troop transports and installations, corporate facilities and corporate personnel. Sabotage, bombings and assassinations are the three favorites; they also like a spot of kidnapping here and there because it brings in cred. (Can't run a resistance army without funds to buy the guns and bullets and plastique and all the other tools of the trade, now can you? To say nothing of the humanitarian aid that goes to the families of MPA members killed in guerrilla attacks.) Occasionally, MPA guerrillas snatch a highly placed corporate or military official and hold the poor slot for ransom or trades him (or her) for metahuman prisoners held by San Francisco authorities. The MPA calls it "taking the war to the enemy."

>>>>>(These attacks have prompted the authorities to undertake their own little program of "taking the war to the enemy." They send anti-guerrilla squads on search-and-destroy missions in Oakland/Berkeley. Of course, the MPA guerrillas blend in real good and lotsa folks help hide them when necessary, so the squads almost never find the guerrillas they're looking for. That don't stop them, though. They just grab metahumans off the street, and the poor fraggers are never seen again. Sometimes they hold "trials" in San Fran for the victims of the latest roundup, who are always found guilty and summarily executed. This, of course, shows the good citizens of San Francisco just how well the authorities are protecting them from the forces of metahuman-inspired anarchy. Lately, people are beginning to wonder why the MPA attacks continue, since so many miscreants have supposedly been brought to justice. But no one wonders too loudly.)<<<<<

—Chompsky (22:03:12/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Some of us in San Fran wonder why so many people have to die to keep us "safe." We're not all pro-Japanese, anti-metahuman sheep; we're sick of this bloodletting in our city, and we'd like everyone to be able to live a normal life no matter what his or her appearance. We're doing our best to wake people up to the horror and injustice of it all, hastening the day when the decent people of San Francisco rise up and throw the conquerors into the sea.)<<<<<

—Weisse Rose (22:07:46/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Even the Imperial military forces know these anti-guerrilla missions are a scam. No one really believes they're having any effect on the resistance movement, other than to inspire greater hatred for the authorities and win recruits to the anti-occupation cause. Few troopers volunteer for these missions, and few commanders are willing to lead them. As a result, most of these squads include the most sadistic, undisciplined troopers and are led by the most fanatical corp hit men. The corps regularly hire shadowrunners to bolster these squads as well, although only the desperate accept these contracts.)<<<<<

—Tiku (22:12:30/02-22-57)

>>>>>(The guerrillas have gotten better at tracking and hitting the search-and-destroy squads, too. It's gotten pretty rare for a squad to make it back into San Francisco without suffering casualties.)<<<<<

—Observer (22:15:19/02-22-57)

>>>>>(And we're getting better at it everyday. Pretty soon the corps won't be able to find anyone willing to venture into Oakland.)<<<<<

—Korp Killer (22:20:07/02-22-57)

>>>>>(I'm sick of all this macho bulldrek. There's no fraggin' way in hell we're ever gonna defeat the San Fran corps by slugging it out with them. We can't hope to match their resources. If we've got guns, they have cannons. If we have cannons, they have tanks. If we get tanks, they'll have aircraft. And no matter how many corp squads we destroy, the corps'll always have enough nuyen to persuade some poor slots to replace them.)<<<<<

—Katya (22:36:12/02-22-57)

>>>>>(You don't understand, Katya. We don't have to defeat them militarily to win the war. With every successful action we take in San Francisco, with each building we bomb and each exec we geek, the corps spend a little more on security measures and all the surviving wage slaves become a little less confident that their employers can protect them. All we have to do is hang on. Some corps already pay their employees bonuses for working in San Francisco. Eventually, the day will come when the corps decide that the benefits of their San Francisco operations are not worth the nuyen they're spending on security measures and employee bonuses. They'll either abandon their "cultural protection" laws or leave San Francisco altogether. That will be our victory.)<<<<<

—Trotsky (22:41:38/02-22-57)

>>>>>(But can the people of Oakland and Berkeley hold out that long? Already some say that the MPA attacks only bring corporate retribution against innocent people.)<<<<<

—Lady Sally (22:45:29/02-22-57)

>>>>>(I believe we can and will hold out longer than the corps. Each of the ruling corps maintains operations in hundreds of other cities. But San Francisco is our only home. For generations our families have lived and died here. We must endure. We must win. We have no other choice.)<<<<<

—Simón (22:50:12/02-22-57)

On the more political side of the spectrum, there's the October 25 Alliance. This group's founders—of whom I have the privilege to be one—believe that violence alone won't solve the "Japanacorp problem"; guerrilla war may ensure the end of the occupation, but it won't do a thing toward building a just and equitable society once the Japanese corps and Imperial troops are gone. For that you need politics, and the Alliance functions mainly as a political action group. (All right, yes, we do carry out guerrilla operations of our own; a few bombs and guns can do wonders if applied properly. But you can't make people's everyday lives better with explosives—and we care as much about everyday lives as about sticking it to the Japanese. So guerrilla warfare is actually a small part of what we're about.)

>>>>>(And there's a big source of the "differences" between the Alliance and the MPA in a nutshell—namely, that the Alliance people think they're superior because they only get their hands a little bit dirty.)<<<<<

—MPAer (23:12:44/02-22-57)

>>>>>(And then there's MPA people who think they're superior because they "just know" that politics is bulldrek and real power goes to the guy with the biggest bang-bang. Pity the rest of us naive folk, who still think we can accomplish something good without bombs or bullets.)<<<<<

—Tiku (23:30:22/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Hey—can't we all just get along? At least long enough to get the Japanese out of our hair?)<<<<<

—Commoner (24:01:02/02-22-57)

The Alliance does a variety of things to frag off the San Francisco corps, much of it without resorting to tit-for-tat violence. To give you a few examples, we send experts crawling through the Bay Area tax codes looking for loopholes that local businesses can exploit. After all, the more local jobs we create, the less poverty and suffering there'll be in our own backyards, and the fewer people will have to work for the Japanacorps. (Fewer people will be tempted to work against their own people for a desperately needed credstick, too. Altruism works best with a little profit on the side, that's what I say.) We also finance and run health clinics, co-op tenements, and schools for all grade levels. The Alliance—and, lately, the MPA on a smaller scale—uses its money and manpower to supply all the social services that once upon a time came from the Sacramento state house, but dried up after the Secession. (Someone's got to do it, and the San Francisco authorities sure won't. If not us, then who?)

THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITY

The Alliance was the driving force behind the formation of the People's University in Berkeley. The university is probably the most important piece of our long-term strategy for improving the lives of everyone in the sprawl and eventually beyond; this is where people learn everything from vital job skills that let them keep food on the family table, to the real reasons behind corporate power in the Bay Area and how best to fight it. The People's University isn't so much a place as a group of people and an attitude, a loosely organized group of instructors and other individuals who give the people of Oakland and Berkeley an opportunity for higher education that the vast majority of the area's metahumans would never have otherwise.

The university runs a medical clinic and several food pantries—these are the only parts of the university that actually have fixed addresses. More people than I care to count depend on these places, and everyone in the area knows about them. The clinic provides medical care free of charge, no questions asked, to anyone who needs it. The food pantries provide staple food items to anyone who requests them. Both of these services have gone a long way toward alleviating the chronic poverty of the Oakland/Berkeley metroplex.

The university's classes "float" between various locations in the 'plex to protect both students and instructors, who are favored targets for corporate terror squads. The university offers a wide range of courses, including classes in basic literacy skills, computer technology, metahuman history, radical politics, medicine, law and sociology. For interested students, the Alliance offers political forums and discussion groups through the university, where potential recruits to the movement can learn everything they need to know about the Alliance and like-minded political action groups. Workshop classes run by the Neo-Anarchists are perennial favorites—they include how to run a successful political campaign, publishing political journals and pamphlets, getting around libel laws, making extraterritoriality laws work for you, and writing effective public speeches. Students can also take classes in such "specialized" subjects as weapons handling and technology, demolitions, hand-to-hand combat, tactical magic, decking, rigging, intelligence gathering, espionage, and urban guerrilla-warfare techniques. In fact, the university often arranges lodgings for runners, deckers and riggers willing to teach such classes.

>>>>>(If you plan on doing any running in Oakland/Berkeley, I suggest you consider teaching at the university. The movement is always grateful for help and doesn't forget its friends.)<<<<<

—Huntress (21:56:06/02-19-57)

The corps don't have much use for the People's University, of course. They haven't yet resorted to hitting the food pantries or the clinic, but some of us figure it's only a matter of time until they do. If we had such a thing as a campus, the Japanacorps would

have tried to burn it down at least a hundred times by now. As it is, the best they can do is slip a few corp ringers into the student body and hope their spies can learn enough concrete details to make a pre-emptive strike possible. The university's loose structure has so far frustrated every corp effort—all they can ever find out is when the next session of Conversational Japanese 101 is meeting, and a single classroom isn't spectacular enough to be worth hitting.

>>>>>(People in Orkland/Berkeley take Japanese?! WHY, for frag's sake?!)<<<<<

—Proud Mary (22:03:44/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Ever heard the phrase "know your enemy"? That's why.)<<<<<

—Solon (22:14:55/02-19-57)

>>>>>(Rumor has it that the Alliance and the MPA receive aid from Tir Tairngire, as well as from several midsized corps that would like to see their Japanese mega-rivals booted out of San Francisco.)<<<<<

—Digger (24:03:51/02-19-57)

>>>>>(In addition to providing city services, the Alliance and the MPA act as law enforcement in the Oakland/Berkeley sprawl. Their people's tribunals can be pretty hard on lawbreakers, so I'd advise any runners visiting the 'plex to refrain from messing with the locals. Operations directed against corps or other San Francisco authorities aren't really considered crimes here, because those folks are the enemy.)<<<<<

—Drummond (24:15:56/02-19-57)

OUTLYING AREAS

The outlands around the San Fran and Oakland/Berkeley sprawls are a weird mix of middling-well-off bedroom communities and go-gang territory. Luckily for non-corp travelers through these parts, the go-gangs tend to view the San Francisco corps as their main enemy. If you don't look or act like a suit, chances are they'll leave you alone. Unfortunately, some of the metahuman-only go-gangs are so vociferously anti-human that they'll hassle any human who crosses their path. The real bigots are few, but go-gang turf has a tendency to shift a lot depending on who found the last conveniently lost shipment of major ordnance. So if you're a human from out of town, make sure you get up-to-the-minute information about the safest way to get where you're going. In general, the gangs tend to operate outside the city limits of the bedroom communities, though they're encroaching on a few of the less prosperous wage slave towns. The corporations whose money largely financed the expansion of the bedroom communities regard the ones with less well-off inhabitants as way down the priority list for any kind of real protection. The Alliance and the MPA do their best to compensate, but we've only got so much manpower and funding to go around.

>>>>>(Some of the go-gangs are allied with the MPA and the October 25 Alliance. Matter of fact, it's the go-gangs who carry out most of the Alliance's guerrilla strikes.)<<<<<

—Observer (15:46:27/02-17-57)

>>>>>(I wouldn't say the gangs are allied with us. It's more like they don't hassle us and we don't hassle them unless they do something disruptive enough to make it necessary.)<<<<<

—MPAer (16:22:11/02-17-57)

The bedroom communities include outlying towns like Walnut Creek, Concord, Orinda and others in the Diablo Valley. These are the not-so-gilded cages inhabited by the corps' non-Japanese middle-level employees, metahuman grunt workers and their families. To protect these towns from roving go-gangs, the corporations provide middling to mediocre security forces, the quality of which depends on the average salary of the residents. The better-paid get more, the worse-paid get less. Walnut Creek, home to many of the highest level of midmanagement execs, has pretty good security augmented by Japanese military advisers. Money talks, neh?

All the bedroom communities, even the one where the janitors and tea ladies live, are linked to San Francisco by heavily guarded, armored maglev train lines operated by the corps. Generally, these rail lines follow the old interstate highways. Go-gangs have been known to sabotage the tracks and attack the trains, intent on robbing passengers or taking hostages they can hold for ransom. They don't usually succeed, but so far that hasn't stopped them trying.

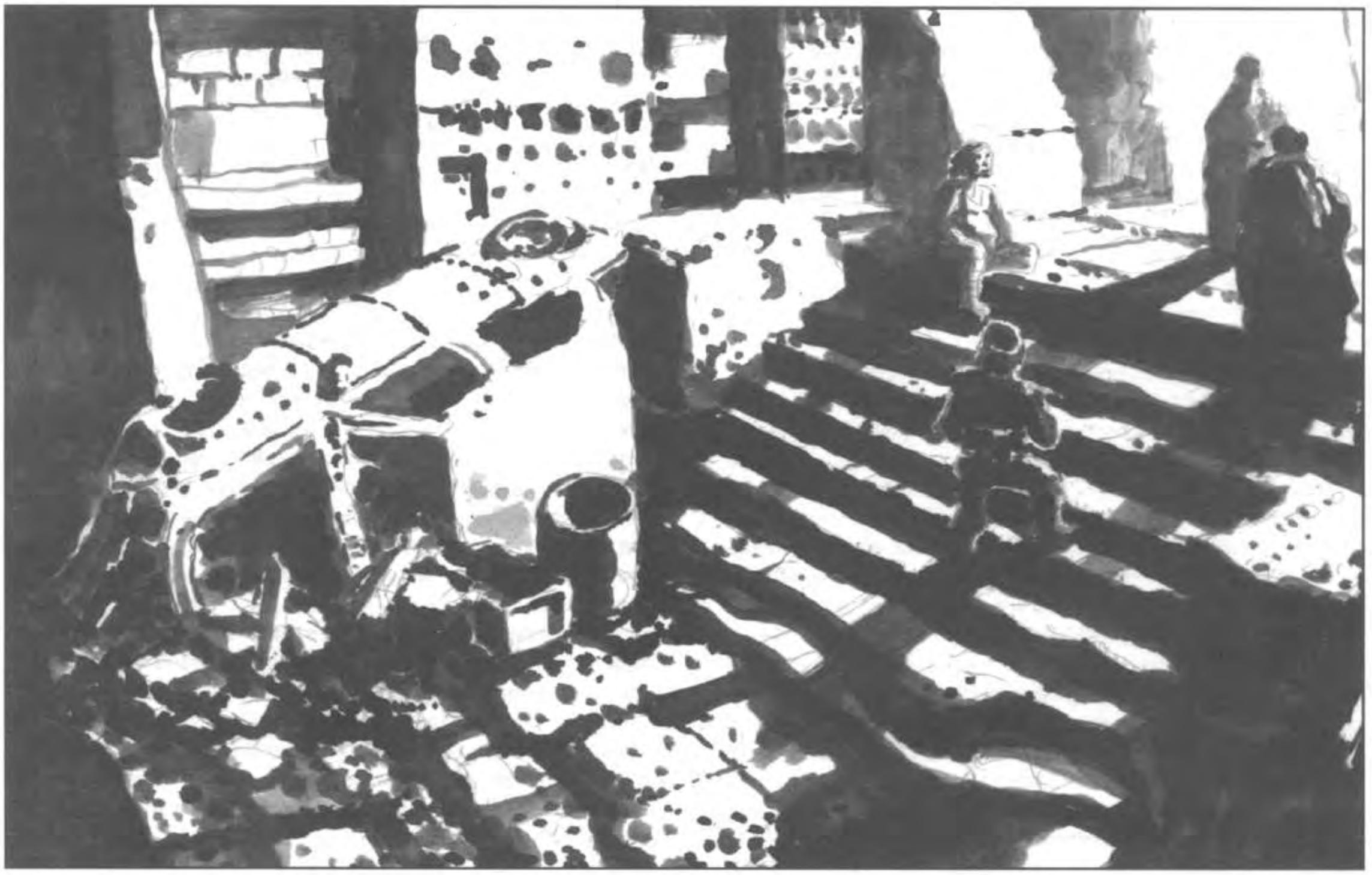
>>>>>(These fraggin' go-gangs are fraggin' nuts. Imperial troops man automatic weapons mounted on each train car, and corp helicopter gunships patrol along the rail lines as well. The gangs take severe casualties nearly every time they attack a train, but they keep doing it anyway.)<<<<<

—Mercman (17:23:44/02-17-57)

The main rail line runs through Oakland on its approach to San Francisco. The corps have heavily fortified this narrow corridor and stationed troops along it in guard towers. These precautions, however, haven't done much good. The corridor, known as "the Gauntlet," is just too tempting a target for a lot of angry people with no love for corp suits of any kind. Stone-throwing children and snipers regularly target the troopers whenever they venture outside their fortified guard houses, and metahuman guerrillas armed with mobile surface-to-air missiles have downed several helicopter gunships sent to ride escort over trains passing through the corridor. Understandably, few troopers relish assignment to the Gauntlet, and so the San Francisco authorities regularly recruit shadowrunners for this duty.

EAST BAY DWARFS

Scattered around the bedroom communities, from near Walnut Creek almost down to Fremont and extending eastward toward Livermore, are a motley collection of survivalist dwarfs living in caves dug out of the hills surrounding San Francisco Bay.



The first settlers in this area fled from San Francisco shortly after the Japanese marines arrived in 2037, apparently intending to build a dwarf homeland in the Diablo Valley. That dream remains alive, so much so that the dwarfs of the East Bay have taken the joking nickname bestowed on their territory and made it a point of pride. When the average troll or ork or elf resident of Oakland/Berkeley talks about "Halferville," he may or may not be sneering. When an East Bay dwarf calls Halferville his home, he says the word with a proud gleam in his eye that just dares you to make something of it. Having been there, I can tell you that the average citizen of Halferville has reason to be proud. For twenty years, the East Bay dwarfs have been quietly but steadily turning their underground territory from a pile of dirt and rock into a livable and oddly beautiful city—if you're built like a dwarf, that is. Those of us with a bit more height spend a lot of time stooped over—but the sheer aesthetic pleasure of a short visit is worth a few back and shoulder cramps.

Take it from me, the caves of Halferville are a lot more than rock-lined holes in the ground. They're works of art and feats of engineering that would make the builders of the Golden Gate Bridge drool. The ceilings of many caves reach dizzying heights, braced by cathedral-style fan-webbing that vanishes into pools of shadow farther overhead than the eye can see. Vast caverns used as private residences and public spaces are linked to each other by a network of dwarf-sized tunnels so enormous and complex that your average mole would soon give up trying to map it out. The dwarfs, by the way, claim that none of them has ever gotten lost anywhere in the tunnels. Almost every wall is covered with elegant, beautiful and slightly strange carved designs—the kind of half geometric, half-organic pattern that you'd swear you've seen in some tome on ancient art somewhere, only you can't quite place the culture. Animal and bird shapes abound, elongated and twisted into curves and loops and elaborate knots. The dwarf builders have even managed to set up indirect lighting that makes the walls themselves appear to glow from within. Humans may find the light a little hard to see by, as we're virtually the only race without extra sensitivity to the infrared spectrum, but if anything the lower light levels make the place seem even more beautiful and eerie. The wash of light in the tunnels and caverns looks like the glow of a banked fire and makes fascinating shadow patterns in the carvings on the walls. Every so often, the eye is caught by the glitter of a mineral deposit, or even a vein of silver or copper, painstakingly uncovered by the dwarfs and left intact as a decoration.

>>>>>(You mean they leave valuable minerals and metal sitting in the fragging rock just 'cause it looks pretty? Me, I'd take the pay dirt and run!)<<<<<

—Rock Hound (02:33:21/02-13-57)

>>>>>(You're not a dwarf, are you?)<<<<<
—Halfpint (02:41:22/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Actually, I am. What's it to you?)<<<<<
—Rock Hound (02:50:32/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Them East Bay halfers are really weird. I tossed off a few drinks with one once, in a bar in Orinda. I was there on biz, and I had reason to believe the little guy could help me. Well, the drunker he got, the more he went on and on about "the mystic beauties of the earth" and "the great blueprint of the Universe." He kept calling the dwarfs "the master builders" and telling me that the rest of us should try to be more like them 'cause then we could build a perfect world faster. If he hadn't been so plowed when he said it, I'd've punched his little lights out. Then he said everything in the world was actually a giant stone in the wall of the Cavern of Life. So I asked him with a straight face, "Does that include carpet lint?" He gives me this plastered-owl look, like drunk people get when they're gonna tell you something Real Important and Secret, and said, "Abso-fragging-lutely." Then he winks at me. Talk about a waste of my time!)<<<<<
—Mister Tusk (04:11:45/02-13-57)

As none of this gorgeous strangeness shows above the surface, it's not surprising that few people took notice of the dwarfs until the Great Bay Quake of 2048. Although the quake was not the "Big One" seismologists have been predicting for the past few decades, it caused considerable damage. The Caldecott Tunnel, which joins corp-controlled Diablo Valley towns like Walnut Creek, Concord and Orinda with San Francisco, was virtually wrecked by the shaking earth. The California Transportation Authority, one of the last surviving branches of the national government in the Bay Area, assessed the damage and opened negotiations with San Francisco's ruling corps about repair costs, but moved things along at the snail's pace you might expect whenever a bunch of big operations with a lot of money sit down to talk about who has to spend what. The corps and CalTrans fiddled, Rome kept burning with the aftershocks, and the East Bay dwarfs did something absolutely unprecedented. They acted. Three days after the corporations and CalTrans formed their Joint Commission to Assess and Consider the Financial and Practical Implications of the Putative Revitalization of the Caldecott Thru-Way (that was its full, formal name—I am not making this up), the dwarfs had repaired the tunnel.

They refused to open the tunnel, however, until they got paid for their work. Predictably, CalTrans pleaded poverty, so the San Francisco corps offered to cover the repair costs in exchange for proprietary rights to the tunnel. The rest of the Free State government, prodded by this outrageous demand into remembering that it still technically held jurisdiction over the Bay Area, said nothing doing. For their own reasons, the East Bay dwarfs said likewise. Rather than give in to the corps, the Free State government executed a quick end-run around them; they agreed to cede mineral, access, and all other rights to former national and state park lands in the Bay Area to the dwarfs if the dwarfs agreed to maintain the tunnel and pay the government a modest mineral tax. The dwarfs accepted the deal, leaving the San Fran corps fuming but impotent. They needed that tunnel open more than anything, and could do nothing to assure that except to give in.

To this day, the East Bay dwarfs retain undisputed control over the tunnel, allowing the corporations to run their armored commuter rail lines through it for a modest fee. No corporation or anyone else has challenged the dwarf claim to the ceded lands, almost all of which now contain dwarf settlements. With every new settlement carved out of the ground, the dwarfs' underground city is slowly but surely expanding through the East Bay area. Some people, reacting with the kind of paranoia that's become normal in these troubled times, find the notion of an expanding Halferville frightening—though most of them can't say why, if pressed for proof that the dwarfs constitute a threat. It's true that the dwarfs have an impressive arsenal protecting the Caldecott Tunnel, including heavy artillery, mortar and rocket emplacements—but that's only prudent, considering how much the well-armed and rich corporations of San Fran would love to take the dwarfs' tunnel away from them. In the past nine years the East Bay dwarfs have fought regular skirmishes with nobody but a few mostly ork go-gangs in the area. In general, they keep to themselves, and no one I trust has seen any evidence that they intend to do otherwise.

>>>>>(Death to the dwarfs! I got yer proof—these fraggin' little half-pints are the San Fran corps' lapdogs. While the corps are killing metahumans in Oakland and Berkeley, these little dreks are taking money and weapons from those same corps. And then they turn their guns on metahuman go-gangs! When we finally kick the corps out, we'll be coming after these little dreks. Then we'll see how tough they really are!)<<<<<
—Liberator (19:01:23/02-13-57)

SILICON VALLEY

Silicon Valley is the heart of California's microtech industry, and it's prime territory for low-level intercorporate shenanigans. Things stay low-level because nobody wants to mess with the merchandise—in this case, lots of boy- and girl-genius netheads who can program hot code in their sleep but who aren't exactly your archetypal corp team players. But the jockeying for power, influence, and talented wage slaves is no less intense than, say, the agribusiness wars simmering across the Central Valley. It's just a little less scorched-earth.

There's another reason, too, why corporate maneuvering is so subtle in these parts. One megacorp—Ares Macrotechnology—is top hound in Silicon Valley, and its rivals don't want to mess with it too blatantly for fear of large-scale retaliation against their holdings elsewhere. So if rival megacorps and local midsizers want to take a chunk of what Ares owns in the microtech biz—and believe me, they all want that so badly they're slavering for it—they have to get ahead by guile and stealth instead of by force. What that means in practical terms is, no extractions and no bombing runs. Instead, poach a brilliant temp programmer from your rival so you get the killer IC code he's working on. Or if you can't manage that, hire the nerd your rival just discarded and hope he's got another hotter-than-drek program in him where the last top seller came from. With all the

corps willing to pay through the nose for nerdboys with the right stuff, personal fortunes can be made and lost in Silicon Valley overnight. Meanwhile, Ares sits at the top of the heap and rakes in profits by keeping its permanent staff low, its temp turnover high, and its products on the cutting edge.

Located just outside San Francisco, the Valley was once home to nearly 100 small microtech design and manufacturing companies, mostly one- and two-person operations headquartered in their owners' garages. These little one-horse wonders turned out some of the most innovative computer hardware and software in the world, making the place a mecca for bright dweebs and dweebettes dreaming of striking it rich with their talents. Over the past sixty years or so, things have changed in Silicon Valley ... and also remained the same, only more so. The garages are still there, and herds of compu-nerds still flock to the Valley in search of untold wealth. Also in search of the one place on earth where other people will finally, thankfully, understand them. There's no one in the universe quite as lonely as the lone nethead, surrounded by people who don't slip the electrons and think object-oriented programming has something to do with product placement in popular trid shows. To these people, Silicon Valley is Heaven's waiting room. It's where they go to while away some happy time before shuffling off to Eternal Cyberspace.

What's different is that 100 or so little independent firms that used to exist got gobbled up by Damien Knight of Ares Macrotechnology. No one I know is precisely sure how or when Ares managed this feat, but the most persistent rumor says Knight got some kind of inside warning. Being a smart little corporate fragger, he moved fast and got the prize. Made the Japanacorps madder than hell, all the more so because they couldn't do drek about it. The whole point to their gobbling up San Fran in the first place was to get their greedy mitts on Silicon Valley, and here some gaijin beats them to the punch. Poor Japanese CEOs—doesn't your heart just bleed for them?

Since taking over the place, Ares has generally maintained a hands-off policy toward its Silicon Valley subsidiaries so that its own corporate bureaucracy won't stifle the creativity of the designers. The designers themselves are almost exclusively contract workers rather than full-time employees. The full-timers at the Ares subsidiaries tend to be paper shufflers of one kind or another—skeleton staffs, doing the maximum with the minimum number of people so the parent corp can save a bundle on operating expenses. The nerds in the garages who do the real profit-making work are one-shot jobbers, hired on contingency to work their hardware or software magic for a single project. When the project's over, they're gone. No severance pay, no benefits, no pensions, no sick days, certainly no profit-sharing plans. Just a steady hourly pay rate or flat fee for the duration of the project, then oblivion until the next time Ares needs something done that lies within a particular netdweeb's area of expertise.

>>>>>(So they let 'em live after they've finished coming up with that great new chunk of killer IC code? Surprise, surprise.)<<<<<

—Masters (05:31:22/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Why bother killing a golden goose when you might need him again? Remember, your average nethead in Silicon Valley isn't the type to go posting his code on the public boards. All he cares about is exercising his brain on new computer puzzles. Ares and the other corps allow him to do that at a very nice salary, albeit an intermittent one. No nethead is going to do anything to mess that up. Besides, who could he possibly spill the beans to that would make him any kind of threat? Other corps? Big fragging deal—they're out hunting for another netdweeb to improve on the first guy's code almost as soon as he's out the door, on the assumption that the SOTA never stands still. The government? They all live off corp money, plus the extraterritorial corps can legally get away with whatever they want. What's the government going to do if a corp uses IC or something that's technically illegal? Wag a finger at them? Oooo, big threat. As for John Q. Public, he's not going to understand the poor fragger anyway. All around, it's more convenient to let the guys in the garage live than to spend the money to geek them.)<<<<<

—NetRider (05:48:29/02-07-57)

This arrangement suits Ares for financial reasons. It also allows the other megacorps their only real way of getting a toehold in the microtech biz, but Ares is confident enough of its own position to consider the savings worth the risk. (I'd say may they be proved wrong big-time, except that I suspect any change in Silicon Valley won't be for the better.) Relations between the corporations that operate in the Valley are cutthroat, sometimes literally. Almost all of the major San Francisco corps—Fuchi, Mitsuhama, Renraku, Shiawase, Kenshi and Tokugawa—as well as Ares and about twenty smaller firms devoted exclusively to microtech, constantly monitor what's going on with the software and hardware designers. Most often, the corps try to sign the dweeb in the garage to an exclusive contract, under which the corp supplies the nethead with nuyen and equipment for a specific time period in exchange for rights to any designs the poor slot produces during that time period. The corps love it because they get the goods at what they consider a cut-rate price—plus, they get a shot at beating Ares to the punch with a hot product. The 'ware nerds also like these deals because a wealthy corp can supply them with equipment and funding they could never get on their own. Promised a theoretically unlimited budget to develop a revolutionary piece of headware, your average nethead isn't going to quibble about not getting the day after Thanksgiving as a paid holiday. Corps also contract designers to produce specific items, like new and deadlier kinds of cascading IC or the latest new-and-improved generation of skillsofts. Corp competition gets really intense when an independent designer produces an innovative, potentially revolutionary prototype of something. In these rare instances, the corps engage in a bidding war that can make the lucky designer a billionaire overnight.

>>>>>(And if someone comes up with something that is truly earth-shattering, you can bet that no corp is going to risk losing a bidding war. In those instances, an unlucky designer can end up dead.)<<<<<

—Egghead (20:31:29/02-07-57)

>>>>>(The corps can be very protective of a designer under contract to them, too. Tokugawa is probably the worst. Hell, even after your contract runs out they act like they own you, like you can't work for anyone else.)<<<<<

—Brainiac (20:48:22/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, it sure ain't like it used to be. Designers still act like buddies in the same exclusive club, but don't ask to see what your "friend" has been working on lately. People are paranoid, and who can blame them? Almost everyone hires runners now just to hang around the fourth garage on the right and keep an eye out for trouble. And lots of the so-called designers popping up lately aren't designers at all—they're corporate agents, keeping tabs on everyone and waiting for a chance to steal your latest breakthrough.)<<<<<

—Orville (21:03:57/02-07-57)

>>>>>(So what's all the fuss about? How the hell could some piece of hardware or software be so novahot that folks are willing to lie, cheat, steal and kill for it?)<<<<<

—Wonderer (23:41:09/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Would you consider psychotropic IC worth lying, cheating or killing for if you could be the first on your block to have it? Until somebody else independently catches up with the SOTA, you've got a defensive edge with teeth to it. Just think about how much profit the corp with this baby makes just by using it to keep other corps from running successful datasnatches or sabotage runs against Corp A's operations for even a lousy month. And that's just one example. I'm sure there's a thousand more out there that I don't know enough about the subject to dream of.)<<<<<

—Whistler (23:57:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(These guys really do make fortunes overnight. Stories still make the rounds at all the decker hangouts about Terrible Tony, the teenage 'trix wizard who made a pile of cred with a trace program so arcane that nobody else in the fragging universe could even begin to understand it ... then went to work for the Renraku skags who offered him the highest price for it. That was eight years ago, and the guy ain't even thirty yet. He's got years of work left in him, and he's so good at coming up with wiz code that everything he touches turns to credsticks. You want to know where Tony came from? The Harbor Barrens in L.A. Arrived in Silicon Valley when he was barely fifteen, stowed away in the back of a truck carrying metahuman migrants from the Barrens to the San Fran fish farms. Tony got off a little ahead of schedule, headed for the nearest decker bar, and hung around until a local garage wizard bought him a drink out of pity. Turns out the garage wizard in question knew somebody at Stanford, who knew somebody in some high-level Nerd Theory Department, and inside of a week Tony was enrolled in college. Graduated with a Ph.D. in record time, got another six months later, and the rest (as they say) is history. Silicon Valley's full of hungry youngsters—and some not so young—just like him, who think they've got some hot stuff to trot and are just waiting for their Big Break.)<<<<<

—Net Jockey (24:10:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Sounds like old Hollywood, or Broadway.)<<<<<

—Curious George (24:16:47/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Not a bad analogy.)<<<<<

—Net Jockey (24:27:12/02-14-57)

>>>>>(The Valley's also home to several hacker entrepreneurs who turn out new software nearly every week. Some of this drek is really out there. The Shoggoth crash program with DINAB that's been getting a lot of good word-of-mouth lately came from Hacker House, which is based in Silicon Valley So did a great attack program with a real creepy bugs theme—I hear the guy who designed that one came here last year from a rough neighborhood inside the Chicago Containment Zone. Guess he saw some things that gave him ideas. I hear there's some people working on some kind of newfangled attack program that works like the psychotropic IC that's been popping up in corp systems—I'm not sure how well they're doing, but they're supposedly making progress. And that's just for starters.)<<<<<

—Fat Man (01:24:54/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Thanks to certain people with loose lips, Hacker House is off-line until further notice.)<<<<<

—Netword (06:24:53/02-15-57)

>>>>>(Okay, enough about all the wiz drek goin' down in the Valley. People seem to forget that all this wonderful technological "progress" has its downside, too. All these designers and manufacturers dump their waste products illegally, which is why the local water table is full of solvents and heavy metals. If you doubt it, go ahead and drink some of the swill—there are few surer ways of geeking yourself. And breathing the brown smog that passes for air here ain't much better. In the summer, a temperature-inversion layer holds in the drek for days at a time, until it gets so thick you can cut it with a monosword.)<<<<<

—Green Girl (14:53:27/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Watch out for the Net Monsters, man. They'll eat ya alive. Glowing red eyes and sharp teeth and claws drippin' with poison, that's what they got. They touch you, you're dead.)<<<<<

—Hackmeister (17:22:14/02-25-57)

>>>>>(What's that, an attack program or something? Sounds wiz!)<<<<<

—Byteman (17:45:32/02-25-57)

>>>>>(They ain't no program, man. Nobody made 'em. They just showed up. Don't let 'em even see you, man. They'll follow you inta your dreams. Every time I close my eyes now, I see one comin' at me.)<<<<<

—Hackmeister (17:51:22/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Hack, ol' bud, I think you need some serious therapy ...)<<<<<

—Byteman (18:01:44/02-25-57)

BIG SUR COAST



>>>>>(Here's a real fun place to spend quality time—judging by the contents of this file, from a gentleman (and he is, too) by the name of Silent Runner. Read and learn (for once).)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (06:24:11/02-01-57)

The Big Sur Coast—and that's a lot more than the teeny-tiny spot marked "Big Sur" on most maps, for all you foreigners—runs the gamut from a drekheap so chock-full of poison that it makes Chernobyl look like a garden spot to some of the most gorgeous and unspoiled coastline in the California Free State. (Hell, anywhere in the world, IMHO.) Up northways around Santa Cruz, Monterey and Salinas, the land is mostly unfit for (meta)human habitation, with the exception of a few farming communes founded by local people who've managed to detoxify things some. Those reclaimed enclaves are one big battleground in some of the fiercest guerrilla warfare in California—corporations on one side, conservationists and small farmers on the other, and hired guns on every side in between. Southwards from about the middle of the Los Padres National Forest down to Santa Barbara, the Big Sur Coast is clean and corp-free. Sound ideal? Think again. No big corporate presence means there's no one to keep away the only real power in this sparsely populated area—the free-trader barons and other pirate types who've turned Big Sur into their own version of the Barbary Coast in the years since the Secession.

Once upon a time, Big Sur was a better place—for those with money, that is. Anyone ever read any old descriptions of little towns like Carmel, renowned for scenic beauty and well-to-do inhabitants who made it their vacation idyll? Most of the Big Sur Coast used to be like that. The scenery was beautiful, the cities were well off, and there was enough arable land to sustain local economies through farming. Agribusiness and tourism were the two big draws, and for a long time the region remained California's loveliest getaway spot.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, shortsighted agribusiness corporations based in Salinas and Monterey had managed to buy up all the arable land in the area. In their drive to reap maximum profit from it, the agricorps used irrigation techniques and chemical pesticides that eventually contaminated the local water table beyond redemption. By 2030,



agribusiness enviro-poisoning had left the once-fertile land sterile. No longer able to make a buck off their Big Sur holdings, the agricorps—along with California's central government, which pretty much danced to the agricorps' tune—abandoned the northern end of the coast. Within a few years, toxic critters and plants had become almost the sole inhabitants of northern Big Sur. With no one left to check the spread of these critters, the area became a virtual toxic wasteland.

>>>>>(Typical corporate arrogance and wastefulness. They squeeze all the profits they can out of a community to enhance their short-term gains, with no consideration of the long-term effects of their actions. Then they pull out and leave it up to someone else to clean up their mess.)<<<<<

—Green Girl (19:18:43/03-09-57)

>>>>>(Grass and trees are all dead and brown and blasted looking. The few living plants look like something out of a horror simmaker's BTL-induced nightmares. Some of the toxic plants move, and I'm told others have a taste for meat. Just imagine—giant, toxin-mutated versions of the Venus's-flytrap. Wasn't it nice of the corps to make those possible? The air smells yellow—and not a nice pretty canary yellow, either. More of a thin, greasy, greenish-yellow, like something a radioactive monster might throw up. Sometimes I swear to god the sky actually turns that color. The soil around here used to be a rich, dark brown—almost black. Since the agro-poisons started doing their dirty work, all the essential minerals and stuff have been leeched away, and the earth's turned a pale, sickly tan. Looks just like a bruise on an apple. Feels funny when you pick it up, too—slick and spongy. Thank you, Renraku Agrotech and all your corporate friends.)<<<<<

—Coast Guard (19:24:35/03-09-57)

Meanwhile, the southern stretches of Big Sur were having their own problems. Never as heavily populated as the region to the north, much of the southern coastal area was of little use to the corps except as a retreat for the occasional megarich corp exec who wanted a spectacular view. When the UCAS pulled the rug out from under California and forced the Secession, the newly independent state government had enough troubles just keeping the Tir elves, the Aztlan hordes, and the Yellow Peril in San Francisco from overrunning the fledgling nation—or so the thinking went at the time. The old US Army pulled out of big bases like the Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation and Camp Roberts, and no California National Guard troops came to replace them. With no major corp installations to protect, corporate security was awfully thin on the ground as well. The rich and semi-rich left right behind the US government troops, not caring to become targets for any band of gangers or malcontents who happened to wander by their elegant mansions. While all this was going on, gangs and crooks and down-and-outers were getting pushed out of the San Francisco sprawl by the Japanese and out of the Central Valley region by the Free State government. Plenty of them made their way to Big Sur, where they either settled down and tried to live a quiet life or else took over the nearest town and started setting up their own criminal empires. Fearful and abandoned, most law-abiding residents fled to safer areas. That left most of the Big Sur Coast in the hands of the lawless.

RECOVERY AND WAR

In the early 2040s, a few hardy souls armed with some kind of heavy-duty nature magic came to the toxic wasteland along the Salinas and Carmel rivers and started detoxifying the soil and water. On every small parcel of land they reclaimed, they built small farming communes. Over the past fifteen years or so, around fifty communes have sprung up along the two rivers, as well as farmsteads in the foothills of the Sierra de Salinas, Santa Lucia and Gabilan mountains.

>>>>>(Very few people have the power to restore toxic land like that. If more people did, the agricorps would be doing it all over California. What gives?)<<<<<

—Skarekrow (19:32:56/03-09-57)

>>>>>(According to the buzz I've heard—and keep in mind I have no idea whether it's true—the sodbusters receive magical help from some kind of transplanted druid magicians.)<<<<<

—BlackStone (22:14:29/03-09-57)

>>>>>(Pure disinformation. The sodbusters get their magical help from the Tir elves, who view the farmers as natural allies in their attempts to heal the land. The sodbusters are understandably tight-lipped about this arrangement, considering the sentiments most Californians harbor toward the elves.)<<<<<

—Green Girl (23:51:27/03-09-57)

As might be expected, the success of the farming communes attracted the attention of the agribusiness corporations who'd drekked up the area a decade or so earlier. They smelled profit, and they wanted their land back. Legally, the corporations still owned every foot of farmland in northern Big Sur, so they figured they had a right to take it from the people who'd cleaned up their mess. The corps tried the buyout route, but the farmers politely told them where to stick it. Then they tried threats of prosecution, which didn't work any better.

Having failed at softball tactics, the corps got rougher. They attempted to persuade the central government to remove the communes from their farmsteads, knowing that the government lacked the resources to mount the military-style campaign that would ultimately prove necessary. Just as the agricorps had hoped, the government declined to intervene ... but gave corporate forces carte blanche to roust the communes themselves.

>>>>>(Normally, the agricorps would never have bothered to go to the bureaucrats at all. But the communes had attracted attention from environmental groups like Sierra Inc., and so the corps wanted to take some of the heat off themselves.)<<<<<

—Watchman (05:34:12/03-11-57)

Within days of meeting with Sacramento officials, the agricorps hired mercenaries and shadowrunners and formed paramilitary

squads, then sent these squads out to hammer the sodbusters. The corps' hired guns expected to defeat the farmers easily. Instead, they got a nasty surprise. The "simple farmers" defended their cleaned-up land with an impressive arsenal, mostly magical. In the face of a dizzying onslaught of spells that they hadn't come equipped to fight, the corporate troops retreated.

>>>>>(They fraggin' slaughtered us! I was in one of those first squads, and I'm telling you it was not a pretty sight. The sodbusters must have had combat mages helping them, because somehow they knew exactly where and when we were coming. We had armored personnel carriers, helicopters, mil-spec weaponry—it didn't make a fraggin' difference. They cut us down like we were flocks of sheep. Fireballs were popping everywhere, platoons got separated and lost. And our fraggin' employer never bothered to send anyone in to evacuate us. The corp just left us hanging out to dry. To top it all off, we ran into some nasty toxic spirit as we made our way back to Salinas. I watched Butcher and Sleazy die before I hightailed it outta there.)<<<<<

—Pug (09:27:14/03-11-57)

Ever since that first assault, several Monterey- and Salinas-based agricorps have kept up their attempts to dislodge the communes and take the land back. If anything, their initial failure has only made them more determined to succeed. Corp suits hate to be bested by ordinary folks, and the higher-level the suit is, the more humiliating he finds it. A lot of upper-management execs got their noses rubbed in drek, and they'll go to almost any lengths to avenge the slight. The only thing they won't do is resort to tactics that'll wreck the land; bad for profits, you know. Meanwhile, the farmer boys are fighting back just as hard. Low-level skirmishes erupt almost nightly in the area, and casualties tend to be high on both sides. Despite their losses, neither side appears willing to give in any time soon.

>>>>>(No drek. Both sides have lost too many people to give up now. In the agricorp boardrooms this whole thing might still be about land. But down in the proverbial trenches, it's about revenge. It's about killing as many of the enemy as possible.)<<<<<

—Marlowe (10:01:33/03-11-57)

>>>>>(There seems to be a bit more than that going on, Marloboy. Think about it—where are a bunch of sodbusters going to come up with enough mojo, firepower and know-how to hold their own against the best hitters nuyen can buy? We've all heard the rumors about the Tir elves helping the sodbusters. Well, they're not the only ones pitching in. TerraFirst! has quietly been sending "humanitarian supplies" to the area, and the metahuman resistance up in Oakland seems to be helping out with advisers. All of these groups must have it in for the agricorps for some reason, and all of them hope to gain something out of the conflict. The question is what.)<<<<<

—Inquiring Mind (10:17:28/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Don't forget Sierra Inc. They've been funneling membership dues from unsuspecting goobs who just want a Big Book O' Backpacking Trails into buying ordnance—mundane and magical—for the communes.)<<<<<

—Snoop (10:21:34/03-11-57)

>>>>>(There is absolutely no evidence that Sierra Inc. funds any group of eco-terrorists. All they do is maintain Free State parks and lobby the Assembly for decent environmental legislation—which we hardly ever get.)<<<<<

—Backpacker (10:30:35/03-11-57)

>>>>>(How dare you call us eco-terrorists? We're fighting for our land, not for enviro-politics!)<<<<<

—Farmer Joe (10:36:45/03-11-57)

>>>>>(All I know is that both sides have been hiring runners. The pay may not be very good, but I know a few people who've taken contracts with the sodbusters when they need to get out of the city and lay low for a while.)<<<<<

—Rex (10:41:45/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Well, it may get you out of the city, but it sure ain't no vacation. It's fragging crazy out there. The corp squads are gunning for the sodbusters, the busters are gunning for the corp squads, and the toxic critters and shamans are gunning for everyone. And to top it all off, the corp squads are bringing in anti-metahuman policlubbers in to help. Once the policlubbers hear that the Tir elves are helping the sodbusters, the clubbers start falling over themselves to get in on the action. It's a fragging wonder anyone can keep track of who's an enemy and who's an ally.)<<<<<

—Dazed and Confused (11:05:29/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Whatever you do, watch out for the spitting spiders. They're everywhere, and they're nasty. I don't know what kind of spider they started out as, but they've adapted to their toxic environment in a particularly horrible way. The smallest one I've seen had a body as long as my pinkie—the biggest was almost as big as the palm of my hand. And I'm a troll, just to give you an idea of scale. These spiders don't make webs, either, so there won't be any nice big pinwheel of spider silk to tip you off that one's close by. They're like wolf spiders—they lie in wait and ambush their prey. Only they don't jump out and catch dinner as it flies by. They chuck a gob of toxic spit at it, immobilize it, and then suck its vital fluids out at their leisure. Lucky for us (meta)humans, we've all got enough body mass that the toxic spit won't paralyze us. It will, however, make you sick as a dog for quite some time if it hits your bare skin. Even if it hits your clothes or lightweight armor, I'd advise scraping it off before it seeps through. The spiders seem to instinctively aim for bare flesh, so even real thick body armor might not save you. The critter'll aim for your face or something. The toxin takes effect in seconds—you'll start feeling dizzy and disoriented, and your muscles won't work just right. About five minutes later, you get stomach cramps like someone's sticking a serrated knife in your gut. Pretty soon after that you'll probably collapse from the pain



and dizziness—so make sure your chummers can drag you far away from the spider that nailed you.)<<<<<
—Zack (11:20:11/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Hey, Zack ... do these things ever hunt in packs?)<<<<<
—XenoBio (11:24:54/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Spirits, I hope not ...)<<<<<
—Zack (11:33:45/03-11-57)

>>>>>(There's scarier things than spitting spiders in Big Sur. Like the toxic shaman who lives around the foot of Fremont Peak, near Santa Rita. I heard his story from local people who remember him from when he was harmless—just a nice nature writer and Dog shaman who wanted to live in the country. This guy used to picket agricorp farm tracts back in the 2010s and 2020s, not long after the corps bought out most of the small farmers. He'd turn up at the gates of this or that agricorp installation every morning, carrying a protest sign, shouting stuff at passing workers like, "Please don't hurt Mother Earth any more. Dog doesn't like it." They tolerated him for a while—just a harmless crank, seemed to be the verdict—until he made the mistake of yelling his slogan to a visiting exec from Tokyo. Seems the exec took this poor skag's protest as a personal insult and had a bunch of corp goons hound him off the premises. Not only that, but more corp goons started paying visits to this guy's house. They tried to burn it down at least three times, dropped drek in the guy's little garden plot, slashed his tires, hassled his wife and little girl ... the whole nine yards. After a few months of escalating harassment, the wife packed up the kid and left. Two days after that, some corp goon cut up the guy's dog and left it bleeding to death on the front porch. The guy went a little nuts after the dog incident—went wandering down the streets of Santa Rita, button-holing people at random and ranting about killing the corporate destroyers of life. Well, some corp slag got wind of this and sent a squad over to arrest the guy. Only he'd disappeared.

A week or so later, the corp's main building burned to the ground. From the background count in the area, corp wage mages figured the fire was magical in origin. Then the crops on corp land quit growing—whole fields full of healthy plants turned black with rot by morning. The corp couldn't fight back real well, not knowing exactly who the culprit was or where to find him. After a few quarters of declining profits, they decided the land wasn't worth holding on to and they left.

Fast forward a few years, to when the sodbusters are starting to have some success reclaiming the poisoned land. Does this toxic Dog shaman try to help, or even applaud their efforts? Nope. He nails a little commune by Fremont Peak, leaving behind a rambling, incoherent statement on chip in which he accuses the sodbusters of being "Earth destroyers" because their cleanup efforts have attracted the agricorps' attention back to the area. The good guys are really the bad guys, because the really bad guys wouldn't be sniffing around if the good guys hadn't tried to clean up the bad guys' mess. Get it? Me neither.

Anyway, I saw what this skag did to the people who set up that commune. Some kind of magical fire that I don't want to know anything about—the corpses all looked like they'd burned

to death from the inside. The few animals they'd brought with them were dead, too, but not burned. They'd had their throats torn out by something that left marks a lot like a wolf's.)<<<<<

—Buster Brown (11:40:32/03-11-57)

>>>>>(There's more where that guy came from, too. I hear toxics from all over the Free State are drawn to Big Sur like flies to rotting meat.)<<<<<

—Roscoe (11:53:55/03-11-57)

AQUACULTURE

Outside the land-war zone, a whole bunch of agricorps are still pouring cred into one of the few profit-making concerns that they have left in the Big Sur region—the aquaculture biz. Agricorporations large and small, as well as a few other companies specializing in this industry, operate the so-called fish farms scattered throughout Monterey Bay and down along parts of the southern Big Sur Coast. The fish farms produce thousands of pounds of seafood daily, which is exported to San Francisco, Los Angeles and major cities outside California.

>>>>>(They're growing fish in Monterey Bay? I thought Monterey was a pool of toxic sludge!)<<<<<

—Lucas (12:10:34/03-11-57)

>>>>>(It is. Don't think about what's in the seafood that comes out of those fish farms—it'll only give you nightmares.)<<<<<

—Green Girl (12:18:22/03-11-57)

>>>>>(I may never eat gefilte fish again.)<<<<<

—Aleph (12:30:44/03-11-57)

This industry really got started when improved biotechnology made genetic engineering easy enough to be profitable. People who love anything that can increase the world's food supply hailed the development of aquaculture as yet another giant step in the Long March of Progress. All the tinkering with Nature's blueprints, however, combined with the corporate mentality that insists on doing things quick and cheap no matter how potentially horrendous the consequences, has only added to the eco-nightmare of Big Sur. There's hardly an aquaculture station around these parts that hasn't been the target of some attempt at sabotage, either the blatant high-explosive kind or the subtler bug-in-the-matrix-system kind. More than a few rumors also hint that some of the attacks are the work of toxic shamans, drawn to avenge the virtual extinction of the creatures their totems represent. And to top it all off, there's the ... interesting ... beasties with which corporate gengineers have gifted us. Oh, some people claim that the assortment of odd critters turning up in Big Sur's coastal waters are just the latest natural manifestations of the Awakening—and in some cases they may even be right. Me, I figure a conservative estimate makes the aquacultures responsible for at least half of the problem—and frankly, that's probably generous.

>>>>>(Here we go again. Another variation on the all-corporations-are-evil theme. Has anyone considered that corporations and the suits who run them create needed jobs?)<<<<<

—Newt II (12:40:22/03-11-57)

>>>>>(I wouldn't say all. Just 99 percent or so. As for the jobs, what price employment? Ever considered that?)<<<<<

—Pollitt (12:46:47/03-11-57)

The fish farms yield an awful lot of fish fillets, but the corps have found the farms expensive to run. In a classic example of getting your just deserts, all those years of unregulated industrial dumping by countless corporate divisions have made the waters along the northern coast region a nice toxic soup, and so the corps are forced to rely on high-cost magical techniques as well as generous amounts of steroids, growth hormones and antibiotics to produce fish that can just barely be called edible. Then there's the security bill. Eco-terrorist and toxic shaman assaults aside, the corps spend drekloads on heavy security around their fish farms just to hold off the sea critters who see the huge tanks of cultivated fish as a giant "All-You-Can-Eat" sign. Aquaculture personnel have reported attacks by torpedo sharks, sea drakes, mermaids and even saltwater serpents—and those are just the stories in the official records. Spend some time in a tavern in one of the aquacities where the fish-tenders live and work and listen to the stories they tell when a little alcohol has loosened their tongues. There's some *verrry* weird drek out there under the waves, and it's getting weirder all the time.

>>>>>(There's groups of merrows in the bay now. These things may not be as big as a serpent or as ferocious as a sea drake, but they can fragging THINK! Those other species just come around to raid the fish pens. But the merrows have declared fragging war against the fish farms. I've seen packs of them ripping holes in pen fences, clogging the intakes of submersibles. At least ten workers have already died this year as a result of what the corps call "work-related accidents." Believe me, there was nothing accidental about any of those deaths.)<<<<<

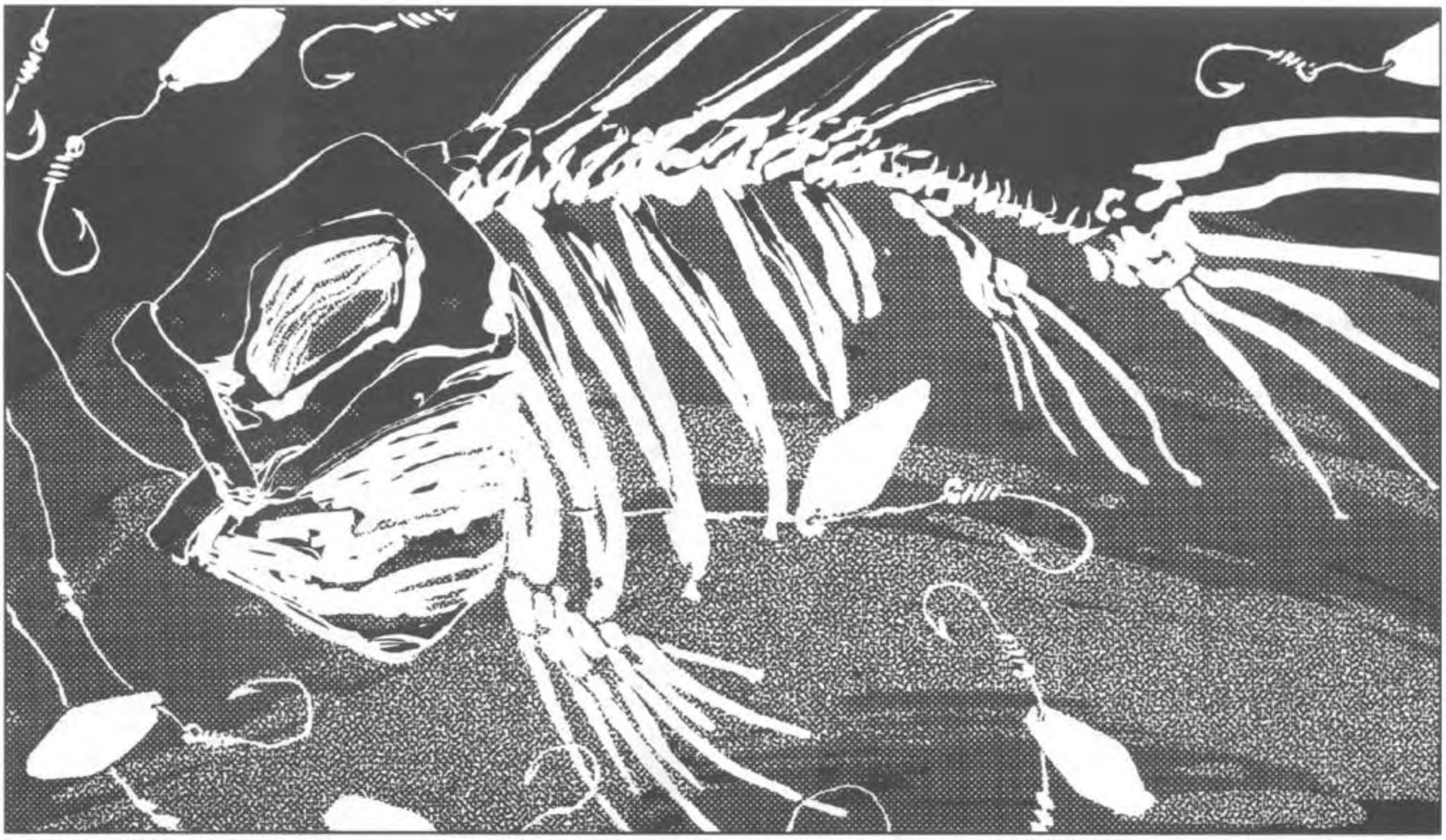
—Walrus (13:37:19/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Merrows, genetically altered monsters, toxic water spirits—the bay's become a pretty dangerous place, all right. Now say you got yourself a nice little aquasphere down in the middle of all that drek. Makes the perfect place to stash away that employee everyone's trying to hire away from you, don't it?)<<<<<

—Aqua Vitae (14:02:43/03-11-57)

>>>>>(The corporate exploitation of Monterey Bay is a crime against the sea and against all residents of our planet. That's why we at Save Our Seas work with polluters and others to find alternatives to destructive practices. Anyone who wants to help the planet and themselves can contact us at our Monterey office.)<<<<<

—Save Our Seas (14:49:34/03-11-57)



KALAMARI INCORPORATED

The centerpiece of the Big Sur aquaculture industry is Kalamari Incorporated's aquasphere, located just off the old town of Pacific Grove. This is one huge fragger of a place, by far the biggest installation anywhere in Big Sur waters. The aquasphere is a self-contained underwater city that can hold up to 15,000 people—bigger than a lot of small towns, just to give you an idea. "Squid City," as some local wit once dubbed it, serves as the headquarters for Kalamari's aquacultural facilities and contains a state-of-the-art genetic-engineering lab, where Kalamari's staff cooks up such products as a 60-pound salmon, 20-pound squid, a sea urchin as big as a troll's head, and a 15-pound prawn.

>>>>>(Man, just think of throwing that shrimp on your barby!)<<<<<

—Krok (15:45:44/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, the wonders of genetic engineering just never cease. And those are just the specimens that Kalamari has publicly acknowledged. Lots of people are pretty suspicious of the Kalamari genetic lab. I know some folks who live along the coast. They've told me some pretty strange things wash up on the bay's beaches every now and then.)<<<<<

—Bebop (15:52:29/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Come on, I didn't think anyone believed in sea monsters anymore.)<<<<<

—Skeptic (16:03:27/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Laugh all you want. I've seen one of those things. Happened one day when a couple of us were riding by the Salinas River beach. We saw some big something laying out there, so we went out to investigate. It had fins and scales, but that was the only way you could tell it was a fish. By the smell of it, we figured the thing was dead, so we got closer. Then suddenly a spasm shook the thing and WHOMP! The next thing we knew, Moondog's legs were stiicking out of its business end, kicking and shaking. Took three grenades to kill the damn thing.)<<<<<

—Winkelman (16:12:47/03-11-57)

AQUA ARCANA

On the other side of the spectrum from the giant Kalamari Inc. is Aqua Arcana, the smallest of the companies involved in the aquaculture business. Don't let its size fool you—the people at Aqua Arcana are making major inroads into the aquaculture market because this tiny company provides a unique and vital service. Aqua Arcana specializes in dealing quickly, easily, and most often peacefully with Awakened sea creatures, through a combination of magic and diplomacy. Got a problem with a hostile Awakened sea critter that your best mil-spec weapons can't handle? Call the magicians at Aqua Arcana—they'll come soothe the critter and convince it to move elsewhere. Then they'll work a little water mojo to make sure it doesn't come back. And all this without dumping anything drekky into the water—like depth charges, say—or shedding any more blood than is absolutely necessary. They prefer that bloodshed not be necessary at all, which makes them unusual for a profit-making business.

According to official records, Aqua Arcana has thirty-five employees or so, and they make wads of cred keeping sea monsters from eating coastal traders, negotiating trade pacts with the sentient merrow, and fighting other such brushfires along the coast and in the harbors. The biggest feather in AA's cap was its successful negotiation of a treaty between Kalamari Inc. and the merrow clans who had regularly attacked Kalamari's fish farms. By the simple expedient of treating the merrow like people instead of hostile vermin, the magicians at Aqua Arcana uncovered the motive behind the merrow assaults—food. Kalamari unfortunately built its huge aquacity right on top of the merrow clans' hunting grounds, and so the merrow figured it was only fair to tear open the fish pens and eat the contents. Finding new hunting grounds wasn't an option—the merrow clans are incredibly territorial, and any attempt to move where there were still free-range fish would have embroiled these particular clans in a nasty turf war. So they did the easy thing, which also just happened to appeal to their sense of outraged justice—they stole from the people who'd stolen from them.

Armed with this knowledge, AA's magicians dragged the Kalamari CEOs to the bargaining table and explained things to them. After two days of intensive dickering, the magicians got both sides to sign an agreement in which the merrow clans would act as an underwater security force for Kalamari in return for permanent residence around the fish pens, a limited percentage of each harvest as needed to sustain the clans, and the culls from all experiments. The merrow clans got living room and plenty of food, the corp got an underwater security force second to none, and Aqua Arcana got a big PR boost along with its paysticks. After the Kalamari incident, other aquacorporations started beating a path to AA's door. Now they solve all kinds of problems, from casting spells to keep torpedo sharks away to driving off the giant monster with tentacles that swallowed last week's shipment of salmon to Los Angeles.

>>>>>(If Kalamari's deal with the merrow is so great, how do you explain the drek I saw when I cleaned up after a merrow attack on a Kalamari platform off Piedras Blancas Point? The merrow fragging killed everybody!)<<<<<

—Coast Guard (18:01:22/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Poor communications, for one thing. The platform employees didn't know the treaty had been signed, and some of the ork workers were trapping and eating any merrow they could catch. The merrow retaliated, as you might expect. It took us three months to calm the merrow down.)<<<<<

—Mageboy (18:23:43/03-11-57)

Only about ten or eleven of the workers are magically active; the rest are ship pilots, deckers and hired guns on hand in case an operation turns nasty. Aqua Arcana operates out of a small aquacity just off San Simeon Point, in the cleaner part of Big Sur's coastal waters, but unlike its larger counterparts it doesn't grow or process fish. Apparently, it built a half-underwater, half above-ground city just because the workers like living there. Maybe all the magically active personnel are shamans of various sea-creature totems, I don't know. I just know that some of the Arcanans live underwater, some by the water's edge, and that they all seem pretty happy together.

>>>>>(There's another strange thing about Aqua Arcana—it appears to be genuinely employee-owned. No shells, no weird little legal twists that make it employee-owned on paper but the CEO's personal cash cow in practice. From all I've been able to gather, Aqua Arcana's employee-ownership provisions are straightforward and legit.)<<<<<

—Corp Watcher (20:1:34/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Which just goes to prove what I said earlier; all corporations are not evil.)<<<<<

—Newt II (20:24:55/03-11-57)

>>>>>(I heard one of the owners is a porpoise. They call him Flipper, Flipper ...)<<<<<

—TridVid (22:00:32/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek.)<<<<<

—Skeptic (22:31:45/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Actually, one of the owners is a Porpoise shaman. Another's an Orca shaman, and a third one's an elemental adept who's wizbang at water magics. I haven't found out about the other magicians yet.)<<<<<

—Corp Watcher (22:45:56/03-11-57)

>>>>>(They're rolling in cred, and they've got a pretty decent fleet of boats: two Otters, a GMC Riverine, and a custom-modified H&C Classique Yacht. That last one's their flagship. They make most of their wad off contracts with coastal shippers—not just the ones in CalFree, but some of the big shipping companies in the Tir too.)<<<<<

—Green Girl (23:18:45/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Any truth to the rumor that Aqua Arcana's startup funds came from a few underwater treasure-hunting excursions for which certain people paid them a drekload of cred? No proof as yet of who the treasure-seekers may have been—or what they might have found—but if I had as many friends among the water-breathers as the folks at AA seem to, I'd find it awfully easy to lead a hunting party to the Lost Spanish Galleon or whatever. Especially for the amount of money they seem to have gotten.)<<<<<

—Inquiring Mind (23:43:21/03-11-57)

>>>>>(I don't know about treasure-hunters, but AA's got a standing contract with Kalamari. They also work with Save Our Seas a lot. Weird combination of clients, neh?)<<<<<

—Bay Lady (24:35:02/03-11-57)

SOUTHERN BIG SUR—PIRATE'S HAVEN

The long southern stretch of Big Sur is a whole different kettle of fish from the toxic north (pun most definitely intended).

Except for occasional fish farms built on platforms a fair distance from the shoreline, southern Big Sur has virtually no corporate or government or other "legitimate" presence. It doesn't even have many ordinary people; most of the local residents left in the chaotic wake of the Secession, and only a few hardy souls dared stay on. Some have moved back in the two decades since independence, but most emigrants hear all the eco-horror stories about northern Big Sur and assume the south coast is just as bad. So in this long, narrow stretch of sparsely populated real estate, with ocean on one side and mountains on the other, the movers and shakers are the pirate kings who control the profitable freetrading biz. There's also a few military units who've gone independent and holed up in a couple of abandoned military bases—they tend to serve as extremely erratic law enforcement, taking on waterjackers and other foes of public order according to the momentary whim of the unit commander.

As readers may have guessed, this is not exactly a recipe for a stable and law-abiding society. Until recently, however, if you wanted stable *without* the law-abiding, you could've done worse than southern Big Sur. The land's real pretty—rocky bluffs, reasonably clean 'n' sparkling ocean, green hillsides, and smog-free skies full of warm sunshine. The perfect place to get away from it all, neh? Unfortunately, in this drekked-up world we've created, scenic beauty is a novahot commodity. A lot of rich people have started to notice the unspoiled south coast lately, and are willing to pay plenty of cred for a few acres here. A lot more will pay almost as handsomely for tanks full of clean water from local rivers and creeks. Between the waterjackers, the corporate location scouts and the freetraders who figure they own this land, southern Big Sur is fast degenerating into the Free State's next hot war zone.

>>>>>("Corporate location scouts"? Location scouts for what? Studio City types looking for backdrops for the latest soon-to-be-hot trid show?)<<<<<

—Curious George (02:33:11/03-13-57)

>>>>>(On occasion, maybe. A lot more often, cred-happy corporate CEOs get a yen to spend quality time in an idyllic coastal retreat. You know, a nice big mansion on a cliff top from which they can watch the sun set into the ocean. Problem is, said CEOs don't have one. So they send out teams of surveyors and landscapers and architects—accompanied by drekloads of well-armed security—to fly around the coast in a copter and scout out the perfect building site. Needless to say, the freetraders are less than thrilled about the flybys. They tend to express their displeasure with heavy weapons, which prompts the CEO back in safe territory to order the miscreants punished with even heavier weapons, which prompts the freetraders to ... you get the idea.)<<<<<

—Water Rat (02:46:27/03-13-57)

>>>>>(This whole region's a prime target for waterjackers, 'cause people are scattered so few and far between. Even the pirates who run things can't be everywhere at once, and they tend to keep most of their muscle close to their own strongholds anyway. You think Queen Grania O'Malley is gonna send a team of her razor-boys to sit guard duty on some little babbling brook, you've got a lot to learn. The jackers scout out the territory by copter real quick-like, then fly the whole team in over the Coast Range. They land, siphon the water, and haul out. Even if somebody with a little ordnance spots the fraggers comin', chances are the waterjackers will be in and gone before any real opposing force shows up.)<<<<<

—Little Jack (04:22:13/03-13-57)

O'MALLEY'S EMPIRE

As far as anyone can tell at this point, three pirate kings pretty much control freetrading operations along the coast. Any number of smaller-scale operators exist, of course, some working for the bigger ones and some trying to take their own slice of market share—but the Big Three are so far keeping a fairly tight lid on the smuggling economy. The richest of the three pirate kings is actually a pirate queen—one Grania O'Malley, whose real name is rumored to be something utterly pedestrian like Smith. Grania owes her prominence to a combination of smart dealing and prime location—her stronghold covers most of what used to be Vandenburg Air Force Base, and she controls territory north and east up to the town of Santa Maria. Grania's patch of ground also includes the Oak Knolls airfield. Respectably sized and in reasonable repair, Oak Knolls is one of Big Sur's major drop-off points for t-bird jammers and other airborne smugglers.

>>>>>(So how'd this Grania biff end up with Vandenburg AFB? She go in with a fragging army, or what?)<<<<<

—Silver Sammy (06:12:13/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Who was the "army" going to fight—the rats? Vandenburg was abandoned along with all the other land belonging to the UCAS military when Prez McAlister shoved California out of the club. Grania didn't have to fight anybody for it. All she had to do was be the first to walk in. As for how she held on to it ... well, let's just say the former tenants of Vandenburg left quite a few useful things behind. A couple of Johnny-come-lately smuggler barons tried to dislodge Grania from her base of operations, and both of them ended up dead.)<<<<<

—Histobuff (06:21:14/03-13-57)

No one's quite sure where Grania came from, though rumor has it she fled to Big Sur from some coastal town in Tir Tairngire. Being a dwarf, she wasn't exactly welcome in the elven paradise. I've heard other rumors that she was the head honcho at a small shipping concern, and was "persuaded" to leave the Tir soon after her firm started doing well enough to cut into the profits of a much larger shipping conglomerate reportedly owned by close relatives of High Prince Aithne Oakforest. A few enterprising souls who've gone looking for Grania's antecedents in the Tir shipping biz have come up dry, because Oakforest's kin or someone connected to them seem to have wiped all but the most perfunctory records of independent shipping companies that they've taken over since the elven nation's formation.

>>>>>(Interesting coincidence, neh?)<<<<<

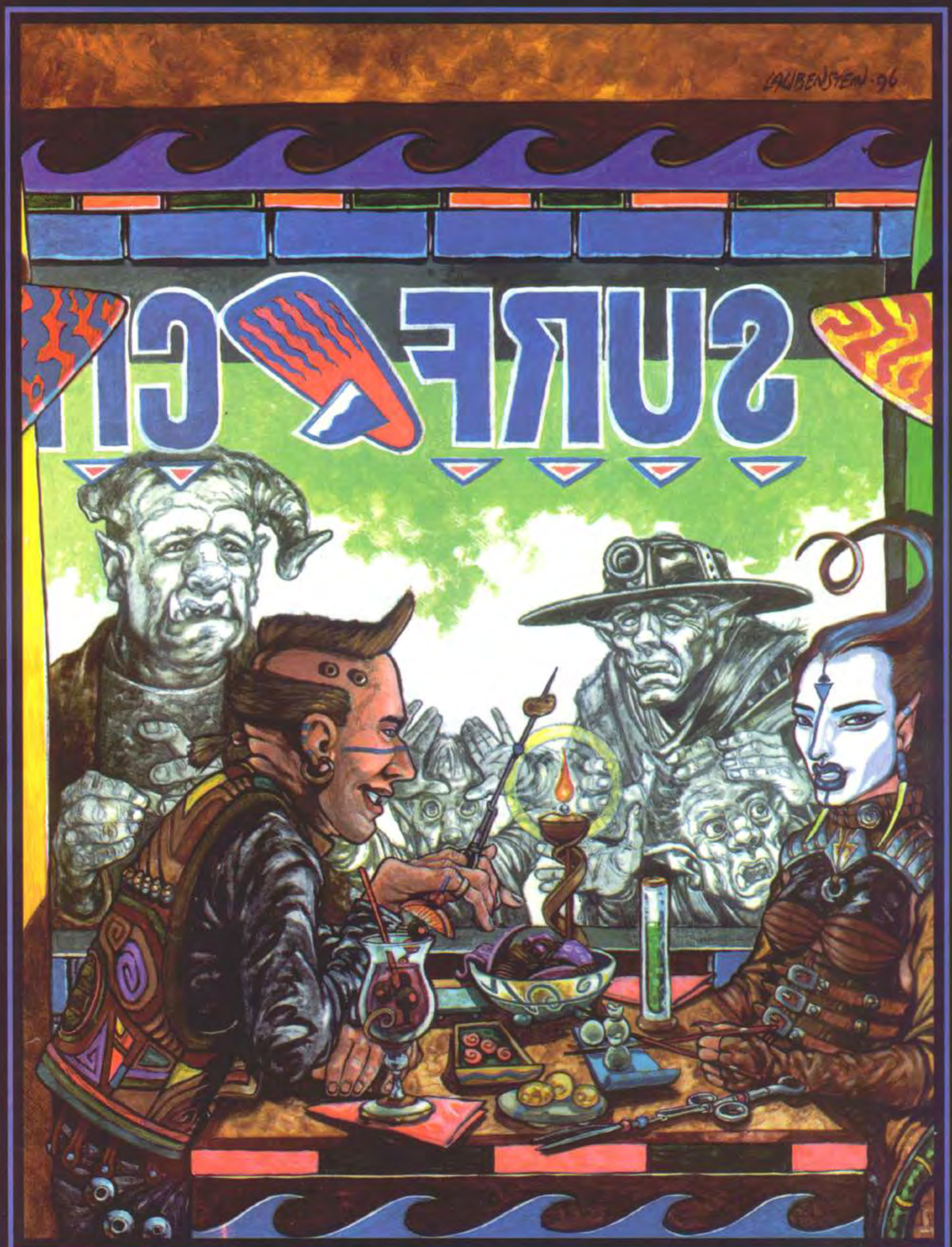
—Corp Watcher (06:42:11/03-13-57)

SCENES FROM THE CALIFORNIA FREE STATE



Death comes in many forms in the California Free State.

Paintings by Doug Andersen



Surf City Bistro, Venice Beach: fab gab, neon sushi, and compassion a la carte.



Gypsy shamans conjure Spirits of Man to protect their tribe.

Painting by Larry MacDougall



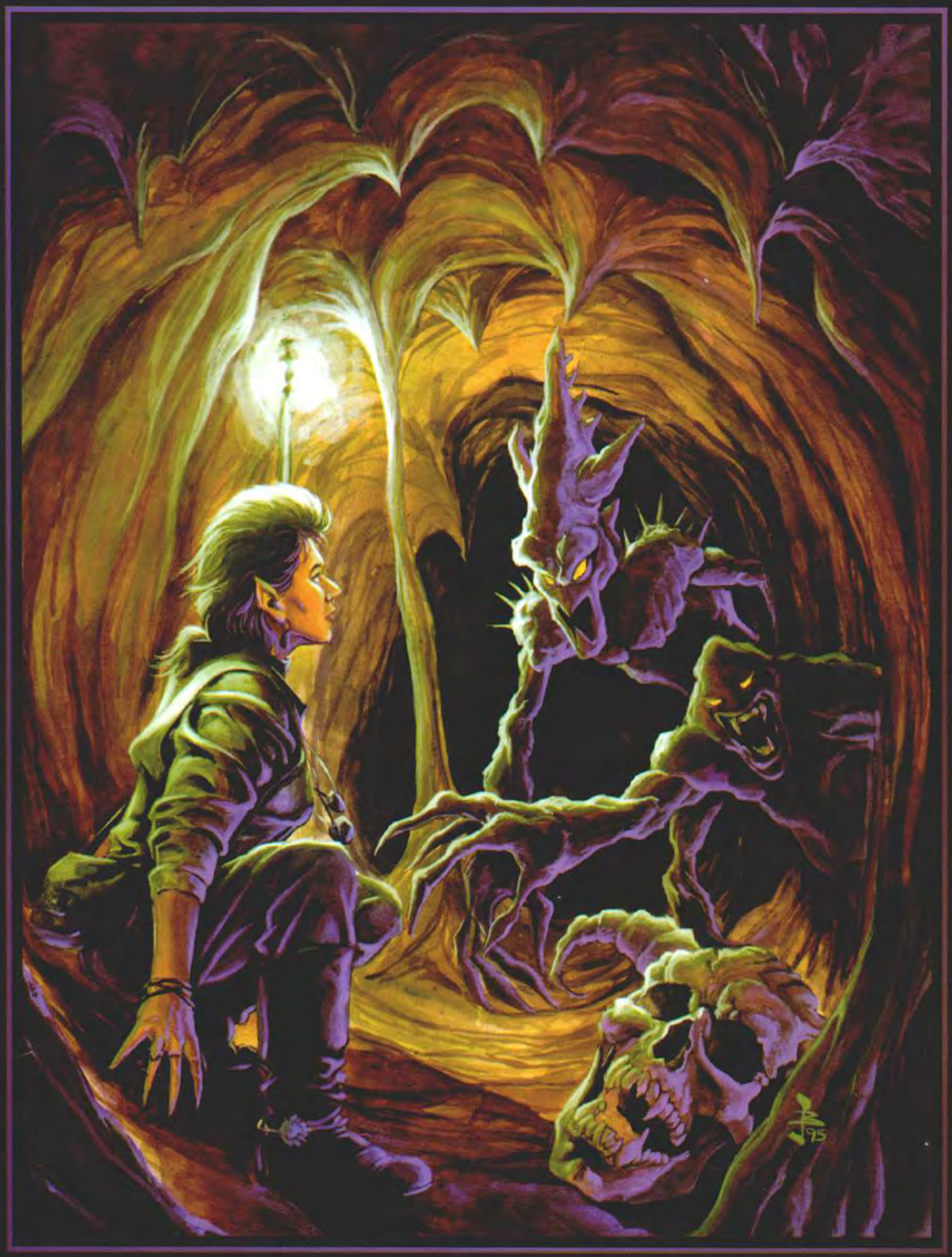
Painting by Tom Baxa

Survival of the fittest, Anasazi style.



Paintings by Tom Baxa

Yak attack!



Mountain spirits protect the secrets of the Lost Mine.



Painting by Joel Biske

A toxic shaman conjures a toxic spirit in a chemical dumping ground near Salinas.



Artist's impression of Hestaby, spawn of evil.

>>>>>(Grania O'Malley is really Anna Smythe, youngest daughter of cruise-line owner Marcus Edward Smythe. She's the family black sheep—has been ever since she ran off to join some Greenie policlub not long after the California War. She hails originally from Astoria, way up on the northwest coast of the Tir near the Salish-Sidhe border. According to my information, she's never run a business in her life—but Daddy used to take her along to board meetings even when she was a tender tyke, so I'd wager she learned her savvy at the parental knee. Her former Greenie comrades-in-arms are now the "inner circle" of her pirate empire.)<<<<<

—Hazeldean (06:55:10/03-13-57)

>>>>>(I'd say your information is just a tad wrong. Anna Smythe died in what the news media refer to as a "protest incident" at a Telestrian Industries installation outside Eugene. Papa Marcus had her death hushed up—didn't care for the scandal.)<<<<<

—Lyta (07:12:16/03-13-57)

>>>>>(You're both full of drek. Grania O'Malley is really Grace Tallchief, a Nootka-Irish halfbreed out of Salish-Sidhe. Being half pinkskin and a dwarf to boot, you can guess what kind of life she had in Salish. She struck out on her own as soon as she could, and ended up in Big Sur after a long while running the shadows. I know because I worked with her a time or two back when she called herself Amazing Grace. She had a crazy temper, but she could sling juju better than anyone I know.)<<<<<

—Earp (07:18:14/03-13-57)

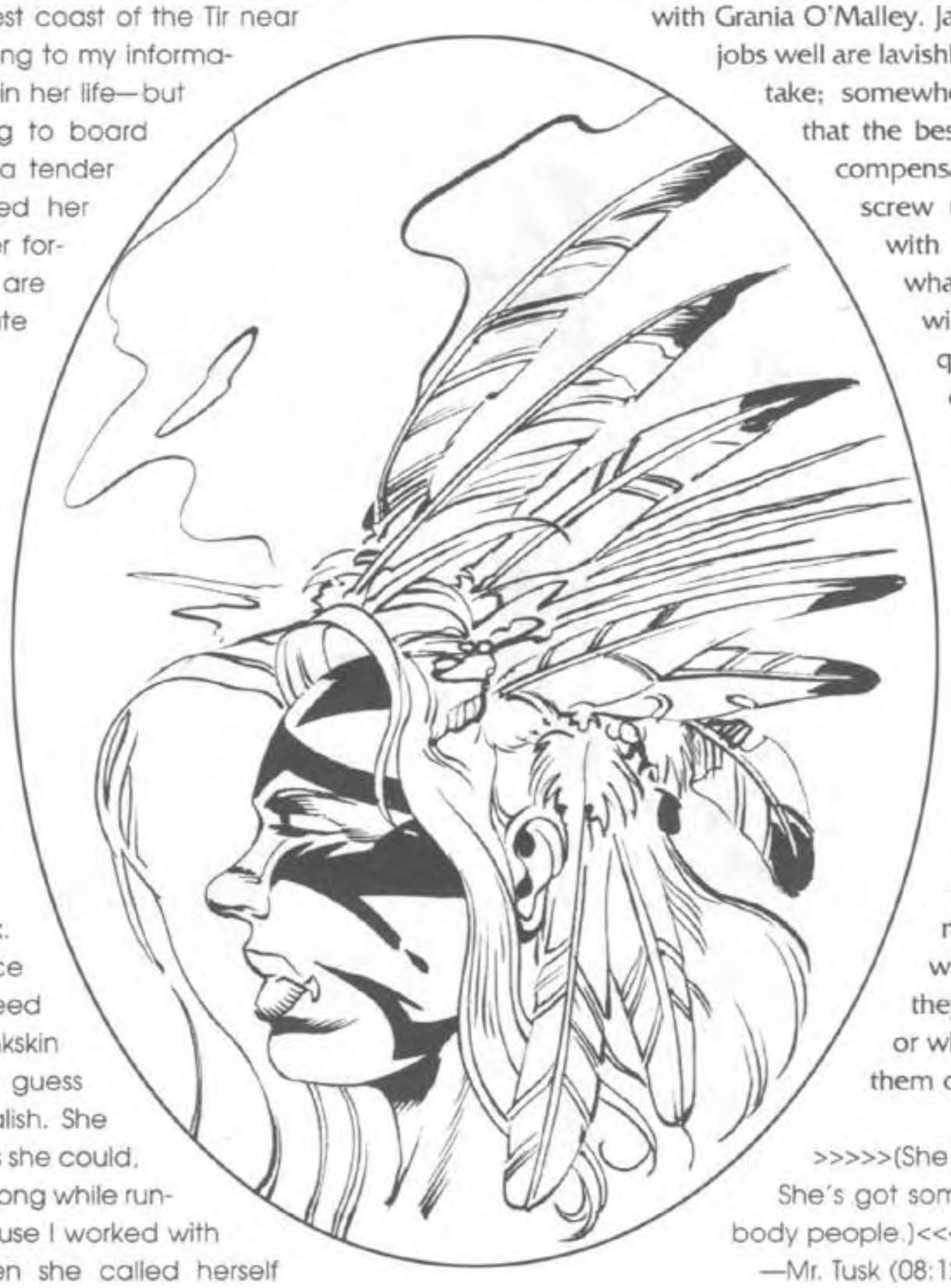
>>>>>(And I bet "Amazing Grace" herself just so happened to give you the real story, Mr. E.—during a long and imtimate night, perhaps?)<<<<<

—Skeptic (07:22:03/03-13-57)

>>>>>(That's Ms. E. to you. And it was definitely a long night ... though I wouldn't call guarding a decker's back while he slipped the electrons in a high-security corp research installation "intimate.")<<<<<

—Earp (07:27:13/03-13-57)

Whatever the truth of the rumor, Grania O'Malley has proved herself one sharp businesswoman. No t-bird jammer or other freetrader I know of who's ever worked for her—and I know plenty—has crossed her. That's unusual in the smuggling business. No matter how well a freetrader boss may treat the pilots working for him, there's almost always one or two who figure they can do better with a little skimming off the top. No one, however, has pulled this with Grania O'Malley. Jammers and others who do their jobs well are lavishly recompensed for the risks they take; somewhere, Grania learned the lesson that the best way to keep good help is to compensate them decently. Those who screw up don't get a second chance with her. The mildest stories about what happens to screw-ups tell of wild rages, in which the pirate queen swears nonstop at the top of her lungs and throws around any object at hand—books, shoes, potted plants, once even a coffee table. People not good at dodging have reportedly come out of Grania's "office" after one of these tirades with bruises, lacerations and even the occasional broken bone. As for major screw-ups, they disappear. Permanently. Not even a body is left behind. The rumor mill is oddly quiet on the victims' ultimate fate—it seems no one wants to speculate on whether they end up dead and well hidden, or whether Grania's enforcers just run them out of the region.



>>>>>(She uses magic on 'em, chums. She's got some kind of spell that can disembody people.)<<<<<

—Mr. Tusk (08:12:33/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek. There is no such spell.)<<<<<

—Mageboy (08:34:54/03-13-57)

>>>>>(I heard she feeds 'em to her pet wendigo.)<<<<<

—Pasquale (09:23:42/03-13-57)

>>>>>(What a bunch of paranoids. I've seen people who once worked for O'Malley doing biz in the shadows of L.A. and Denver, and they're probably in lots of other places too. Grania runs them out to keep them from going over to her rivals, and lets them know that crossing back into Big Sur will get them dead. She may be one tough halfer, but she's not psycho.)<<<<<

—Reality Czech (09:44:43/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Those are the smalltime screw-ups, Czechie. Major boneheads get a one-way ticket to Heaven.)<<<<<

—Lord Jim (09:51:46/03-13-57)

Grania remains Big Sur's pre-eminent pirate queen despite the best efforts of her two main rivals, Captain Monday and Paco Ramirez. They'd both love to take over her profitable empire but are too busy nipping at each other's heels to do anything effective. Grania, meanwhile, takes advantage of the boys' mutual enmity to stay at the top of the pyramid. She plays them off against each other expertly, aiding first the one and then the other in their attempts to frag with each other's business. Neither of the gentlemen has ever called her on this double-crossing, because each hopes to be the beneficiary of Grania's largesse in *the* critical operation that will once and for all cripple the other one. Meanwhile, Grania O'Malley is laughing all the way to the proverbial bank.



MONDAY OF MORRO BAY

Captain Monday, the pirate king of Morro Bay, runs his smuggling operations out of the Bay and the city of San Luis Obispo. For several years, Monday and O'Malley split freetrading in the area between them; Grania controlled the airborne end of things, while Monday controlled smuggling by sea. Only when their territory and activities started bumping elbows with each other did they become serious rivals, and even then they didn't dare frag with each other too seriously because neither really had the power to knock the other one out of the water. So for years Captain Monday and Grania O'Malley have been angling for subtle ways to get an edge over each other while outwardly acting like friendly heads of state.

Like Grania O'Malley, Captain Monday used to be someone else. Twenty years ago he was Joseph McCabe, onetime mayor of San Luis Obispo. After the Secession, Mayor McCabe stayed on and somehow managed to keep things going in the face of horrendous neglect from the Free State government. Though no one can pinpoint the exact year in which McCabe became a major freetrader and changed his name to Monday, the story is that black-market money from the sale of smuggled goods has been keeping San Luis Obispo afloat since the early 2040s. McCabe has most certainly been Captain Monday since 2046, when a few friends of mine went to work for him.

By all accounts Monday is an odd bird. He's a devotee of old Errol Flynn flatvids, and appears to have deliberately modeled himself after the classic Flynn swashbuckler. He carries an SMG in addition to pistols and a monosword, but other than that he pretty much fits the pirate profile—shirts with ruffled sleeves, a patch over one eye, hobnailed boots, and even a parrot on one shoulder.

>>>>>(It's not a parrot. It's some weird kind of miniature eyekiller, probably gengineered. Monday uses its electrical projection power to keep potential troublemakers in line. I've heard he also has some kind of magical link to it that lets him see and hear whatever it sees and hears. That's how he always knows when one of his underlings is planning trouble.)<<<<<

—Rex (10:21:46/03-13-57)

>>>>>(I don't know about the whole eyekiller story, but the magical link part has got to be bulldrek. I don't think you can use an Awakened critter like that.)<<<<<

—Father Thyme (10:52:36/03-13-57)

>>>>>(You should see this guy's house. You could fit an army in it and still have room left over for an apartment block full of people. It's all built of wood—or something that looks like it, anyway—and there's a fragging ship's prow sticking out of the facade dead center. The thing looks like a cross between a Roman villa and Noah's ark. All the windows and French doors are made of bulletproof glass, and I hear a lot of them are one-way glass too. Keeps people from seeing things to chuck spells at, I guess. The thing sits on Point Buchon, right near Morro Bay. You can see across the water for klicks and klicks.)<<<<<

—Pug (11:11:43/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Can you say, "perfect air assault target"?)<<<<<

—Mean Machine (11:31:46/03-13-57)

>>>>>(No such luck. Monday's antiaircraft defenses are formidable. Paco tried that once, early on—supposedly, Grania gave him the idea. Nobody could prove it was them, of course. According to Grania's "independent investigation," which she launched as a "favor" for her good friend and colleague Captain Monday, the real culprit was the CEO of some little corp in Fresno who wanted to build his own house on Monday's acreage. Grania and Paco both were ever-so-helpful about sending a few people to crack the said CEO's skull. Ain't honor among thieves grand?)<<<<<

—Rex (11:42:26/03-13-57)

His eccentricities, however, don't interfere a whit with his competence. Despite losing a share of the sea-smuggling business to Paco Ramirez in recent years, Monday is still a significant power in southern Big Sur. According to my chummers, he's keeping tight control over San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay. Just a couple of years ago, he forced a small pack of Paco's boats away from the Bay by chucking a Sidewinder at them. The missile hit the lead boat amidships and blew it to drek—apparently it was carrying several tons of hard-to-get ammo. Monday then let the remaining three ships know there were more Sidewinders where that came from, and told them to tell Paco he could stay out of Morro Bay or go to war—his choice. Paco wisely declined to commence hostilities, and Captain Monday retains undisputed control over Morro Bay.

>>>>>(Not for long. Paco's biding his time and building himself up. When he's ready, he'll take Monday out.)<<<

—Smee
(11:54:46/03-13-57)



DREAD PIRATE PACO

Paco Ramirez is a latecomer to the Big Sur smuggling business, and has the distinction of having survived long enough to take a respectable chunk of it away from Captain Monday. He spent a few years working for Monday, and by all accounts was a model employee until the day he figured he could do better on his own. Paco made his break in 2051, hijacking a fully loaded fleet of fast-running boats to a deserted beach near his home town of Concepcion. Monday couldn't retaliate without passing through Grania O'Malley's territory one way or another, and O'Malley refused to give permission for flybys, drive-bys, sail-bys, or anything else. She and Monday had recently had hard words over something or other, and Grania seems to have felt that any rival of his was a friend of hers. So Paco got away with his little coup, and built himself an impressive base of operations at Concepcion practically overnight. He must have gotten hefty cred and resources from somewhere to accomplish that so quickly, but no one knows from where. Monday's people are all convinced that Grania backed the upstart, though they can't prove anything. Paco and his gang have so far kept their mouths shut.

>>>>>(Of course he got cred and weapons from Grania. She and Paco were lovers. She knew him from all the way back to their poli-club days.)<<<<<

—Hazeldean (03:24:55/03-14-57)

>>>>>(Why would a savvy lady like O'Malley finance a potential rival? One competitor wasn't challenging enough? Naw. She didn't give Paco a penny—he got money and mil-spec hardware from Kalamari Inc. They wanted a chunk of the Sur's black market, so they set up their own pet pirate.)<<<<<

—Water Rat (03:42:56/03-14-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek. He got cred from selling what he stole from Monday, and the mil-spec hardware from a buddy of his in the Sons of Liberty. The Liberty boys wanted to start a pirate war so's they'd all kill each other off and leave the people in peace.)<<<<<

—Locke (04:34:12/03-14-57)

Though Paco started out as Captain Monday's headache, he's begun casting a covetous eye on smuggling oerations by air. That's Grania's bailiwick, so Paco may be headed for trouble. Paco's people have recently moved onto the grounds of Isla Vista airfield and are slowly making repairs to the hangars and outbuildings. Control of an airfield would give Paco the opening wedge he needs to cut into the airplane and t-jammer end of the biz, which could touch off one nasty fight between all three pirate empires. Thus far, Grania seems to think that Paco's usefulness in keeping Monday off balance outweighs his potential threat to her profits. If her thinking changes, however, the uneasy peace in southern Big Sur could explode into the ultimate hostile takeover.

>>>>>(Talk about a bidding war ...)<<<<<

—Little Jack (05:01:24/03-14-57)

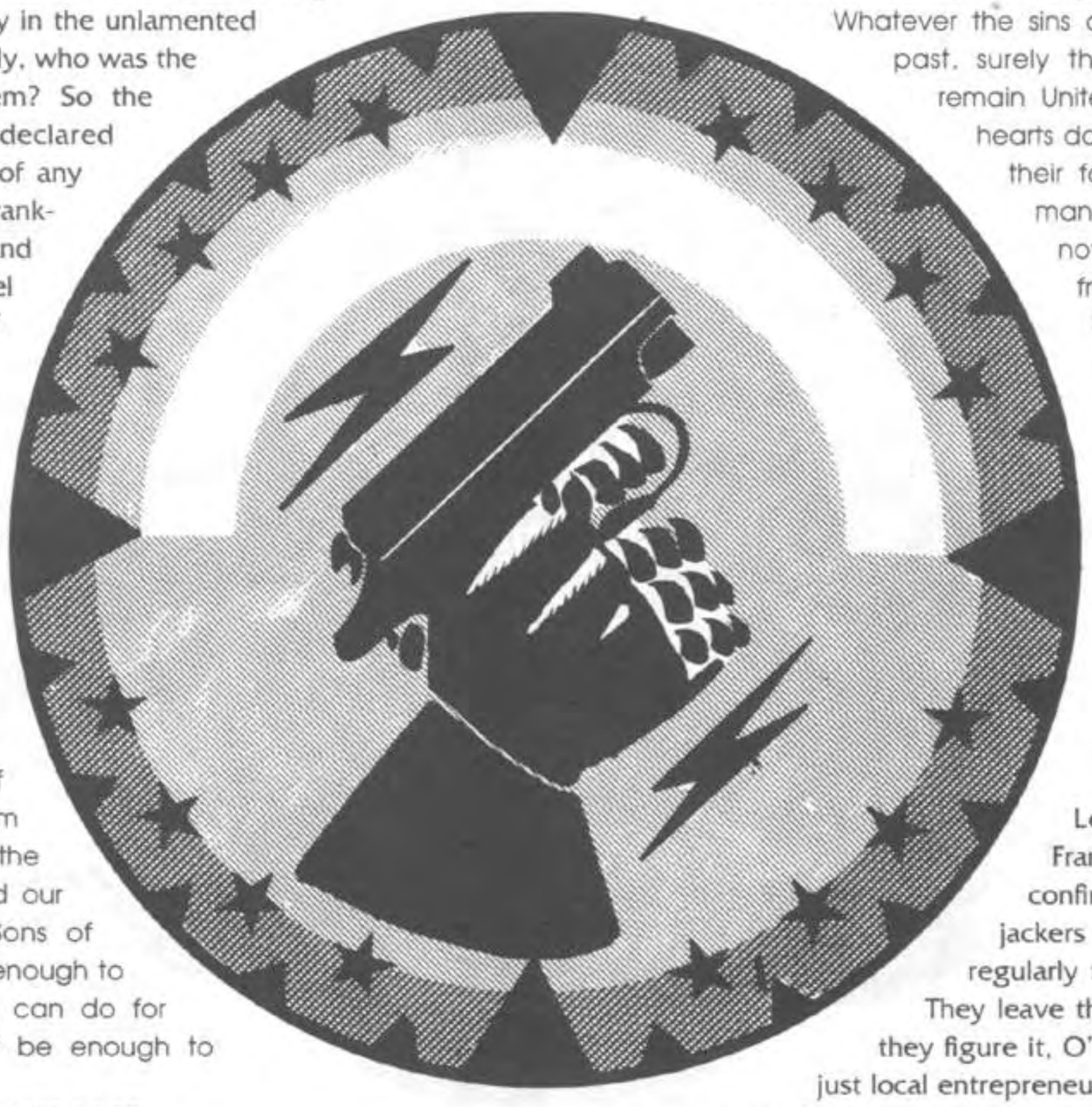
>>>>>(It'd also cost Her Ladyship a pretty CFS dollar to wipe Paco out. She may figure it isn't worth the expense just yet ... or maybe she thinks she can manipulate Monday into taking Paco out for her. Monday'd likely get bad hurt in the process, which wouldn't bother Grania O'Malley a damn.)<<<<<

—Rex (06:22:34/03-14-57)

INDEPENDENT TROOPS

The wild cards in Big Sur are the soldier boys living at Hunter-Ligett and Camp Roberts military reservations. The Hunter-Ligett crowd call themselves the Sons of Liberty, and the boys at Camp Roberts go by the name of the California Legion. Both groups are

made up of former US army soldiers who took exception to the evacuation from California, and the Sons of Liberty weren't any too happy about the UCAS merger either. When the orders came down to leave the newly independent California Free State, the Sons of Liberty and the California Legion refused to go. Instead, they hunkered down at Hunter-Ligett and Camp Roberts and waited for the fireworks to begin. Of course, since there weren't too many of them and they didn't have any top-secret military equipment, the UCAS government saw no point in sending in their fellow troopers to make them leave. If a bunch of dogfaces really wanted to stay in the unlamented state of California that badly, who was the UCAS army to stop them? So the stragglers stayed put, declared themselves independent of any authority save that of the ranking officer among them, and have since done their level best to keep some kind of order in Big Sur. Given their small numbers and the amount of ground there is to cover, it shouldn't surprise anyone that their "best" hasn't amounted to much.



>>>>>(Tell that to my family. The Sons of Liberty showed up in the nick of time to save our truck farm from waterjackers. Shot the jackers dead. They saved our lives—because of the Sons of Liberty, my kids will have enough to eat this year. Anything I can do for those soldier boys won't be enough to repay them.)<<<<<

—Santa Maria (06:44:35/03-14-57)

In the case of the Sons of Liberty, another big reason for their spotty law enforcement record is the apparent inability of their leader to decide if the pirates are good guys or bad guys. The leader of the Sons of Liberty is Major Samuel Hackett, a flamboyant type given to carrying around a copy of the US Constitution in his pocket and reading aloud from it at random moments. Hackett also has an immense library on United States history, and seems to change his attitude toward the pirates depending on which volume he's read lately. If he's been perusing a tome on the Whiskey Rebellion, he sees the pirates as free Americans and pioneering spirits whose commercial activities should not be interfered with by any higher authority. If he's been reading material on organized crime in America, the pirates become Big Sur's local version of th Mob. Off with their heads, and all that. Hackett and his boys are much more consistent in battling waterjackers, whom they regard as the scum of the earth. According to one popular story, Hackett even sent a message to the UCAS Joint Chiefs of Staff requesting that they send additional troops to Big Sur in order to wipe out the waterjackers once and for all. The Joint Chiefs declined to reply.

>>>>>(The message said, and I quote: "Although you chose to turn your backs on the loyal American citizens of California, they and we are nonetheless willing to forgive your perfidy if you will atone for it by sending us reinforcements now. Whatever the sins of political leaders in the past, surely the ordinary people who remain United States citizens in their hearts do not deserve to be left to their fate. If there is a decent man among you, let him act now on our behalf. Save us from this criminal scourge!" Who could resist such a politely phrased proposal?)<<<<<

—Eslipper (07:34:22/03-14-57)

>>>>>(The guy is right around the fragging twist ...)<<<<<

—Silver Sammy (07:39:45/03-14-57)

The California Legion, led by Captain Frances Hobbs, pretty much confines itself to fighting waterjackers and roving go-gangs that regularly traverse southern Big Sur. They leave the pirates alone—the way they figure it, O'Malley and the others are just local entrepreneurs doing business the only way they can. As long as the pirates' activities don't hurt lots of people, the Legion has no reason to interfere. In a trashed economy with no legitimate political power center or government, smuggling and black-marketeering aren't really crimes—especially not if they're the only thing keeping food and goods accessible to Joe Citizen. The real enemies of the people, by their book, are the ordinary lowlifes who rob and sometimes kill if the whim strikes them. Rumors persist that Captain Hobbs is in the pay of Grania O'Malley, but so far no one's produced convincing evidence.

>>>>>(As if the Pirate Queen would provide any. She doesn't even have to pay off Hobbs in cred. All she has to do is order her people to "conveniently" run across Hobbs out on patrol and hand her a nice little package of some hard-to-get item. A bribe is a bribe is a bribe, no matter what form it comes in.)<<<<<

—CalGirl (08:01:35/03-14-57)

LOS ANGELES



>>>>>(Here's a few choice words from my good friend Urban Critter on the city he calls home, followed by the informed opinion of many of Urban's chums. Read and enjoy ... if that's the phrase I'm after ...)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (20:32:11/02-01-57)

Shaken by earthquakes, poisoned by toxic spills, wracked by gang warfare, and struggling to survive under leaden, smog-filled skies, Los Angeles has gone from the City of Dreams to a city of nightmares. A lucky few still make fortunes here; too many others come here to die. Outside the walled compounds where the well-heeled live, most Angelenos spend all their strength on the daily battle for survival. They live hand-to-mouth and day-to-day, and the dead are soon forgotten.

>>>>>(Welcome to the City of Angels. May your stay be mercifully brief.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (08:14:22/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Oh, come on. I've lived here for almost five years now. It's not that bad.)<<<<<

—UCLAer (08:24:22/02-17-57)

>>>>>(How many times have you left the university grounds, kid?)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (08:28:22/02-17-57)

Los Angeles is a Free City, mainly because the central government in Sacramento decided in 2046 that the city's vast numbers of poor and struggling residents weren't worth the trouble of spending state moneys on. Certainly not worth the trouble of collecting meager taxes from. The only folks in L.A. who had enough money to tempt state government officials were the movers and shakers in showbiz, and they'd taken full advantage of corporate extraterritoriality in the wake of the Shiawase decision. No revenues there. So Sacramento granted Los Angeles the status of Free City, renamed the mayor and a ragbag of city officials the Los Angeles City

Authority, saddled them with complete responsibility for keeping the city running, and since then has given not a thought to L.A. The City Authority rose to the challenge as well as might have been expected, which is to say not at all. Successive mayors and administrators have spent the past dozen years making nice with the CEOs of showbiz and aerospace, kowtowed to California branches of the megacorps, done the minimum to ensure the constant recycling of the city's meager water supply, lined their pockets with as much of the city's tax revenues as they dared, and largely ignored their responsibility to provide such basic services as competent law enforcement and decent medical care. They do as little as they can get away with, giving the best to those who can pay for it and letting everyone else go hang.

Nice picture, ain't it? Wait till you see the close-up shots. As they say, the devil is in the details.

WHERE THE BETTER HALF LIVES

by WilE Coyote

Los Angeles is a city of contrasts, the sharpest being the one between the fat cats and everybody else. You can find megapulses of data about the rotten parts of Los Angeles (most of the city, now that I think of it) in a gazillion libraries under the heading "Social Decay, Classic Examples of." I'm here to tell you a bit about the other side of L.A., where those lucky people live who're still making packets of money off the dream-peddling business. After all, who's gonna go to the barrio in search of paydata or other sources of quick cred? You want to know where the money is, don't ya?

Moneyed Angelenos live in a select few scattered enclaves across the L.A. sprawl: Hollywood, Mulholland Drive, Westside, the UCLA campus and its immediate environs, and Fun City. Every last one of these is literally walled off from the sea of urban blight surrounding it. Who wants to look at crumbling streets, burned-out tenements, dead cars, and unwashed people in threadbare coats pawing through the garbage cans? Do you have any idea what a bad view does to property values? Having to look at depressing drek like that will do nothing for resale, I can guarantee you. Much better to shut it out, if you've got the money to do that. Out of sight, out of mind.

>>>>>(Them walls is unbelievable. I ain't tried breakin' into Fun City yet, but I've scoped out all the other fancy-antsy places, and gettin' over the fraggin' wall alive takes some doin.' First off, the plascrete's so thick that a fraggin' tank prob'ly couldn't bust through it. Then they got guys standin' three deep on top, behind little pillbox walls that have tiny holes in 'em specially for firin' thru. Not to mention a thousand million cameras, seein'-eye drones, sensors and other electronic drek all over the walls that'll show you up to the security skags as a nice fat target before you even get close enough to be a threat. The gates ain't no pushover, either. Two gates, front and back, both crawlin' with security types cybered for bear. Plus cameras and sensors and that whole bit. At Mulholland Drive, a coupla resident mages've whistled up an earth elemental to keep magical party crashers away from the fat wallets. It's one scary scene, let me tell ya.)<<<<<

—Stoker (08:34:21/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Anybody thinkin' of diggin' underneath, think twice. Around Studio City they got a wire mesh as thick as a troll's pinky, dug down about eight feet into the dirt, with an electrical charge runnin' through it that'll fry you till your eyes pop.)<<<<<

—Hitman (08:40:12/02-17-57)

Instead, feast your eyes on the carefully sculpted pretty scenery inside your little walled Eden. Fish ponds full of imported carp, dwarf fruit trees loaded with nice-smelling blossoms (so nice for masking the odor of burning tires that sometimes comes over the wall!), Japanese gardens in your backyard, and wide green lawns sweeping down to artistically paved boulevards. All this surrounding gorgeous houses that the average Angeleno would call palatial—though the people who actually live in them have been known to complain about how small they are. (I mean, only four bedrooms! Really! What kind of a mansion is that? And two lousy bathrooms, because local recycling regs won't allow for three. You call that a privileged lifestyle?) That's life in L.A.'s fast lane, folks. Wallowing in beauty and comfort that most people have forgotten how to dream of, yet constantly fretting because It's Just Not Enough.

>>>>>(Here's my favorite example of the I-want-I-want mentality: the megarich slots who wallow in these gilded pigsties actually bitch about being able to get water "only" twenty hours out of every twenty-four. Four lousy hours without running water, between 2 and 6 a.m., when normal people are in bed anyway, and they complain. Never mind that their twenty-hour-a-day consumption means that everyone else in L.A. and surrounding towns has barely enough water to keep clean with. They consider it their God-given right to be able to take a shower at 4 a.m. if the whim strikes them, and if that means some ork kid in the projects a few miles away goes thirsty for several hours, so be it. Their proposed solution to this terrible problem? Build more cold-fusion reactors—but not with their taxes, if you please.)<<<<<

—Whistler (09:14:22/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Where's the city gonna put more reactors? The coastline's already bristling with 'em, and the by-products are wracking up the local environment something awful.)<<<<<

—Tin Lizzie (09:50:25/02-17-57)

To keep themselves even further insulated from the realities of life outside the enclaves, the entertainment moguls and others who financed them made a point of building the walls around their places of business. You live in an enclave, you work there too. No need to go outside the walls for anything. The enclaves contain the offices and studios and soundstages where everyone works, all the little businesses like coffee shops and dry cleaners that people need to keep their lives running smoothly, and residences ranging from decent to decadent for all the people living and working there. (The woman who owns the dry cleaners has a cute little house, two bedrooms at most; the head of Amalgamated Studios has a mansion.) As you might guess, the enclaves can get pretty sizable. The biggest one by far, of course, is Studio City.

STUDIO CITY

Studio City includes West Hollywood, Universal City and Beverly Hills. (East Hollywood, a porno district full of BTL junkies and cyberwhores, lies outside the Studio City wall. So much for that old Hollywood magic, neh?) California highways 101 and 134 run by it on the north, Interstate 5 on the east, Interstate 10 on the south, and Beverly Glen Boulevard—just east of Stone Canyon Reservoir—on the west. It got the name Studio City because the area includes oodles and oodles of video, trideo and simsense studios, plus all the necessary supporting industries. Those lucky visitors actually allowed inside the walls will also find such classic old-Hollywood tourist attractions as the Walk of Fame, Griffith Park, Universal Studios, Mann's Chinese Theatre, and the Hollywood Wax Museum. Performers, including most of the really major stars, live here cheek by jowl with even more important people in the business: technicians and support personnel. (Somewhat lesser artist types who work for smaller outfits live in similar walled enclaves like Mulholland Drive and Westside, where the studios and backlots they work on are located. Nobody ever goes outside the walls if they can possibly help it.)

It's a weird place, Studio City; half residential haven, half giant studio lot. Amalgamated Studios, the biggest fragging gorilla in the whole entertainment biz, actually owns most of the land in Studio City—however, on paper it owns only studios and production facilities. Its residential properties belong to various "independent" realty companies, plus the occasional megarich simsense star. The residential areas are crawling with Metro police, and emergency call boxes sprout on the corners like metal weeds. (The rich are very paranoid—they've got a lot more to lose than normal people.) On "official" studio property, the cops are less obvious but no less present. (You don't want a cop wandering across camera at the wrong moment, but you want to make sure he's around to keep your various golden geese safe from extraction teams.)

>>>>>(Or assassins. Sometimes, if a competitor knows he has no hope of snatching the golden goose, he'll slaughter it instead. Either way, your profits nosedive and he wins.)<<<<<
—Slicer (10:11:45/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Rich paranoids do real strange things. The latest craze among 'em now is to have their very own pet shadowrunners as added "protection" from the real thing. These pinkies are all the little goobers with no brains who normally get geeked the first or second time out, or are jaded vets—you know, they knocked over a Stuffer Shack once—only they've been lucky enough to snag the attention of some rich Hollyweird skag who thinks he needs a "real street samurai" bodyguard or some dumb thing. So what Mr. Rich Skag does is, he comes up to the punk kid shadowbaby and offers him a fat contract to live in Studio City or wherever and do "real live shadowrunner stuff" like start his car for him every morning so that the pinkie gets blown up if anyone's booby-trapped it. Or maybe pinkie just hangs around his boss all day, packing a slick designer pistol and looking wiz in synthleather and shades. Or he sits guard on the boss's personal computer system, ready to defend Bossman's porno collection against legions of potential datathieves (yeah, right). Funniest thing I've ever seen, let me tell you.)<<<<<
—Mack the Knife (10:16:33/02-17-57)

>>>>>(That's not funny. That's pathetic.)<<<<<
—Butterfly (10:20:11/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Query: pinkies?)<<<<<
—Curious George (10:23:45/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Yeah; you know, soft and pink ...)<<<<<
—Mack the Knife (10:26:43/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Hey, I ran the shadows once. I just choose not to suck pavement like you freaks. I got the big job, the golden egg. Face it—it's the job you dream of every night before you doze off in your rat-infested flophouse.)<<<<<
—Slick from SC (10:34:06/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Ladies and gentlemen ... let me introduce to you a real live pinkie! You really hone those street skills sipping cocktails by the pool, don't you, Slick?)<<<<<
—Mack the Knife (10:38:43/02-17-57)

As you might expect from the sheer amount of money sloshing around, Studio City is the Land of Excess. Houses are bigger and more opulent, swimming pools are larger, streets are wider and lined with more palm trees, and there are more Fun Places to Go (and pay higher prices at) than any other stinking-rich haven in the City of Angels.

>>>>>(Of course, all the nuyen in the world can't keep the famous Los Angeles smog from drifting through Studio City's skies. Atmospheric pollutants kill the palm trees on a regular basis, and the Studio City Municipal Council keeps replacing them. Over a few years, that's gobs of cred down the tubes.)<<<<<
—CandyApple (10:43:40/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Want to see something funny? Take a good look at the Studio City wall sometime. To keep from reminding the residents too graphically of the fact that they're living in a gilded prison, the nobs at Amalgamated used extra oodles of city money to design the wall like medieval castle battlements. They even got some stonemasons to carve shallow lines in the plascrete to make it look like big blocks of dressed stone. I've heard they hang tapestries on the inside.)<<<<<
—Working Girl (10:47:41/02-17-57)

>>>>>(I don't know about that one, but I do know they've planted trees right close to the wall in a lot of spots so the pretty leaves would hide all that ugly gray plascrete. Most of the trees can support a body of average human weight or less ...)<<<<<
—Slicer (10:52:15/02-17-57)

You don't know what "decadence" means until you've come here and seen the mansion belonging to Winona Flying Horse,

simsense starlet extraordinaire. (Did I say mansion? "Palace" doesn't even come close.) The front lawn's the size of half a football field, a shimmering emerald carpet of perfect grass. Not a weed in sight—the weeds don't dare show their faces. The vast facade is fronted with endless square meters of Italian marble, the rarest kind with the pale pink veins (imported at huge expense). Rumor has it that Winona's place has enough bedrooms to comfortably bunk an army, each with its own private bathroom. Gold-plated fixtures everywhere you look, plus a huge sunken tub in Winona's personal master bath. To top it all off, our Winnie recently commissioned an addition to the back of the house—a "sweat lodge" paneled entirely in redwood (for which she must have bribed an army of Tir officials at a truly staggering price). According to the press schtick (yes, the local screamsheets report anything and everything about the Stars as if it was real news), Winnie felt she needed "a special place to get in touch with my Native American identity." So naturally, she spent the gross national product of a small country to fulfill this one particular desire. Meanwhile, a few thousand more kids in El Infierno died of malnutrition and disease—but hey, who am I to judge how Beautiful People spend their cred?

>>>>>(Winnie is not Native American. She just passes for one. Her real name is Winifred Ernst, and she hails from some godforsaken Barrens in New Jersey.)<<<<<

—Snooper (11:21:45/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Sez who? Cinnabar Carter, Winona's principal rival?)<<<<<

—Wystan (11:34:25/02-17-57)

That's what it's like here. Granted, Winona Flying Horse represents the extreme, but everyone else is trying like crazy to imitate her. If their houses are slightly smaller and fractionally less opulent, it's only because their credsticks won't stretch quite as far. But they get as close as they can, even if it means living the rest of their days in hock to Amalgamated Studios because they've managed to run up hundreds of thousands of nuyen in debt playing the richer-than-thou game.

>>>>>(It never ceases to amaze me how someone whose weekly net pay—net, mind you!—climbs into the million-nuyen range can possibly be in debt. How do you spend that much cred? What do they do, gold-plate their toilet seats every other week?)<<<<<

—Clair de Lune (12:32:49/02-17-57)

>>>>>(You'd be surprised. Add yourself to one of the carefully limited tours of Studio City sometime and ask the guide about Johnny Tasz's collection of shoes.)<<<<<

—CandyApple (12:37:41/02-17-57)

>>>>>(How about the ultrarich slags in Bel Air and the Palisades who rebuilt their ritz-bitz mansions on the cliffs after the tsunami of '45 swept them away? All that cred to put your fragging house back up in the exact same spot where Nature just graphically let you know she didn't want a mansion. I guess they figure if they spend enough, they can even tell the ocean where to get off.)<<<<<

—Diamond Jim (12:43:19/02-17-57)

Mirroring the decadence of home is the decadence of the workplace. You have to understand that for the average skag in showbiz, "work" doesn't just mean the time you spend actually creating a trid episode or a simchip. Show-business people work all the time, most often at parties. They love to give parties—that way they can stuff their faces, parade around in their chicest outfits, and pretend to have a harmless good time while sucking up to the top dogs and back stabbing potential rivals. More real business gets done at parties than anywhere else, whether the party is a couple of producers drinking lunch together or half of Studio City nobbing and noshing at a big bash.

>>>>>(Because so much information and so many favors change hands at the average Studio City shindig, anyone who wants to be anyone someday will try to crash the party. Take advantage of this, people—you can make big cred fast if you know how to play the game. Behave like you belong and no one's likely to notice that you don't. Bring a few California hots and they'll love you. Just make sure you've really got the novahot stuff; last week's chips are old news. And nothing stinks worse to a Hollywood nose than old news.)<<<<<

—Working Girl (12:50:49/02-17-57)

>>>>>(A great place to go for a meet is the Sunset Serenade, at 6523 Sunset, near Vine. This is what Sunset Boulevard's all about—music, dancing and illicit substances. Because so many well-heeled people come here to unwind, it's a recognized safe zone. So meet your Johnson here if you want to avoid a nasty setup, but don't work in the Serenade. The patrons tend to object. Violently.)<<<<<

—Jade (12:59:01/02-17-57)

The atmosphere at the average Studio City party is a cross between a rave, a wake and an assassins' convention. They're all pretending to enjoy themselves *waaay* too hard, and it shows. The desperation in the air is so thick you can cut it, because every guest knows that if you don't get the job today, you're history. Even for "established" stars like Winnie Flying Horse or Murray Hopper, there's always the nagging fear that the next simchip might not sell as well as the last one, and if that happens, it could be the beginning of the dreaded downward slide toward oblivion. Big stars worry; up-and-comers are terrified. Studio City doesn't give you many chances, and if you miss one you may never get another. So you nerve yourself up to do whatever it takes to stay ahead of the game. You sell whatever you have to sell, stomp on whomever you have to stomp on, and never mind about being able to look yourself in the face the next morning. Nice girls finish last, or in black sim.

In an atmosphere like that, trust is a luxury and real friendship is nonexistent. So Studio City people console themselves with the only thing they have left: conspicuous consumption. Of everything. They've sold their souls for a fat credstick—or a shot at one—so they might as well spend what they've got. Full pockets and empty souls, that's the name of the game. The tables at all the parties are loaded with material comforts—food and liquor in quantities too vast to contemplate, including delicacies that cost

the average wage slave's weekly salary for a single serving. And when you're done eating and drinking, there's dessert in the form of just about any mind bender you can think of and some you can't. If you want a little company, you can buy a warm and attractive body to go home with ... or enjoy right where you are, possibly in full public view if that's how your tastes are bent. You can have anything you can buy in Studio City if you've got the cred and you know where to go. What you can't have are the intangibles: friends, contentment, peace of mind.

>>>>>(What WIIE's saying here goes for all of L.A. Most people in this city, rich or poor or in-between, don't believe they'll see tomorrow—so they have no incentive to think about the future. For a runner, that means your usual leverage in dealing with new contacts is gone. Fixers and other necessary biz people here don't have to deal straight with you in order to get your business the next time around, because they don't believe there'll be a next time. If someone comes along and offers them more cred than you did to sell you out, they'll sell you without a second thought. All they care about is the here-and-now, because that's all they can be sure of.)<<<<<

—LAAngel (13:22:49/02-17-57)

>>>>>(The chippie culture can make Studio City easy pickings for paydata—if you know what you're doing. The way things work around here, technicians and scriptwriters and other creative types spend most of their waking hours blasted round the bend. If making deadline means staying up for five days straight, they stay up for five days straight. If some hack writer's got to turn in a script in eight hours and he doesn't have a word down on paper, he's got to jump-start the creative juices. A little hallucinogenic or psychedelic sim is often just the thing—and a mark high on novahots is an easy mark to take.)<<<<<

—Whistler (13:30:45/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Unfortunately, local cops and security guards don't tend to chip. Before hiring, they undergo stringent personality testing to make sure they're stone cold sober and capable of staying that way. So if you go after some hot tech for advance data on Amalgamated's upcoming sim releases, don't count on the secboys being slotted up on something. Your mark may be—they likely won't.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (13:44:19/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Of all the parties to crash, the ongoing event known as the Party is your best bet. You need to know anything about anyone in Studio City, some skag at the Party can probably tell you. The Party moves around Westside, Studio City and Mulholland. Young directors, aspiring stars and wannabes abound. Really big-name people attend off and on; when they're not around, the rest of the guests are only too willing to talk about them.)<<<<<

—AnonyMouse (16:23:45/02-17-57)

Amalgamated Studios

Amalgamated Studios (AS) is a big part of the reason life in Studio City is such a zero-sum game. For those on whom



Amalgamated smiles, life is good ... as long as the smiling lasts. Lots and lots of cred, with all the wonderful things it can buy ... but watch your step and guard those good looks, because the minute you're no longer raking it in for Amalgamated, you're gone. AS pays top nuyen, but it's practically the only game in town. In Studio City, it's AS or nobody. Sure, you can always move to Westside or Palo Alto and work for Affiliated Artists or Boromaker—but they don't pay as well, and word in the business says it's only a matter of time before Amalgamated buys them out anyway. So anyone who wants to work in vid, trid or sim knows they have to make nice to Amalgamated if they want to keep their ritz lifestyles.

The chief execs at Amalgamated have set things up real nice to keep their various peons properly nervous and subservient. The overall organization pooled its assets in the 2030s in order to buy up huge tracts of land, national parks and other resources out of the reach of any single studio. They also combined their various film archives, or "morgues," into one big one at Moorpark and Colfax—saves mucho cred on maintenance and utilities. On the creative end, however, all the smaller studios that joined Amalgamated technically remain independent. Amalgamated started out as a number of smaller studios, and they still operate that way. They have access to the same wizbang facilities, but in terms of profits and losses they're treated as separate entities. If one studio makes

a blockbuster, it doesn't show up on another studio's balance sheet. This means that if the studios want to keep their masters in the CEO's office happy, they have to make sure their profits are larger and their losses smaller than those of their fellow studios.

>>>>>(Here's a list of the players, for anyone who's interested. The biggest piece of Amalgamated is Taylor Satellite Services (TSS), run by Cyrus Taylor. TSS does mostly daily and weekly shows, with some news coverage. Next comes Pegasus Productions, headed by Steve Greenleaf: mostly trideo drama, with a few action shows. The lion's share of action trideo gets produced by E.T. Studios, headed by Ford Clements. WorldVision, headed by Robin Taylor, does the bulk of the news coverage. MagicMind, headed by Darin Levinhoff, takes care of the simsense market. Below these major players are smaller companies: Galaxy, Global, LivingWord Productions (religious programming), Concert Sims and about a dozen others.)<<<<<

—Trivia Buff (12:02:49/02-18-57)

>>>>>(So who actually runs Amalgamated as a whole? Who's the head shark?)<<<<<

—Masters (12:12:44/02-18-57)

>>>>>(No one knows.)<<<<<

—Trivia Buff (12:14:10/02-18-57)

Dirty tricks are frowned on by the Head Office as wasteful expenditures, so the only way the studios come out ahead is to keep topping themselves. This means brilliantly creative technical experts are worth their weight in gold. Even more than performers, technicians can ensure a studio's success or failure. After all, half the so-called actors in 21st-century sim and trid are just attractive faces and bodies—a dime a dozen, as my granddad used to say. But good techs are harder to come by. Any studio lucky enough to get its hands on a brilliant one isn't going to let him or her go, not at any price. Then there's longevity. A novahot sim star lasts two to five years on average, until age or audience boredom turns him into a has-been. A good tech has at least a dozen years of inventive genius to offer. A great tech has twenty. So stars are well protected and well paid while they last—techs are hidden so carefully that lots of folks don't even know they exist.

>>>>>(That's why extractions are so lucrative in this burg—and so dangerous.)<<<<<

—Daredevil (12:38:47/02-18-57)

To protect all these valuable assets, Amalgamated has turned Studio City into an armed camp. If you thought the security on the walls and gates and the scads of police in residential areas were serious drek, take a look at the backlots. Sensors, cybered-to-the-teeth guards, guard critters, and automatic defensive systems are on a par with the stuff you'd expect to find at a paranoid megacorp's most secret installation—and that's just for starters. Connections to the Matrix are ICed six ways from Sunday, with drek-hot roving deckers watching around the clock to make sure everyone stays on the straight and narrow.

>>>>>(AS's tame deckers are masters of illusion. The route that looks safest may be exactly what it looks like, or a killer trap. Flip a coin.)<<<<<

—Byteman (18:30:39/02-18-57)

>>>>>(A good place to get yourself inside the studio world is through Amalgamated's hiring hall at Hollywood and Oak. The hiring hall exists so that folks looking to hire warm bodies can meet people desperate for work (which takes in most residents of Hollyweird). The hall handles technical staff, extras, stunt doubles, wannabe starlets, and so on. It costs 100 nuyen a month to join. If you need to get on set or inside someone's production facilities, of course, you've still got to hustle a director into hiring you.)<<<<<

—Daredevil (19:32:49/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Don't people like cameramen work for a studio?)<<<<<

—Curious George (19:35:29/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Maybe they used to. Not nowadays. The cameraman (or whoever) works for a director on a show and is employed at that director's whim. If some drekhead says, "Get off the set and don't come back," that's that. No appeal.)<<<<<

—Daredevil (19:41:48/02-18-57)

With security like that, no one much gets out of Amalgamated Studios' little entertainment empire. Of course, nobody much really wants out of Studio City. The way they see it, there's nowhere to go from there but down—and they're right.

>>>>>(Not true that no one wants out. Some of us believe in creative freedom, and we'd take a pay cut for a chance at it. You want to know the real reason so little talent ever quits working for AS? Fear. Most are afraid that Amalgamated will make sure they never work in this town again (to use the famous cliché). The few really sharp people who might have contemplated a career move have the example of Hayden Green to warn them. Hayden used to work for TSS, until Affiliated Artists offered him creative control at a slightly lower salary. The morning after he let them know he was interested in dickering, he was found in his private recording studio. Still alive, but with most of his memory and intelligence burned away. Supposedly out of the kindness of its corporate heart, Amalgamated pays for round-the-clock nurses to feed Hayden, dress him, and take him for occasional walks. I'm told he's quite happy, in a dim sort of way.)<<<<<

—Capra II (20:31:49/02-18-57)

>>>>>(That sounds like the kind of thing Cy Taylor would do. He's a hundred if he's a day, and has all the moral fiber of a rabid weasel. If he smiles at you, start looking for the knife blade. He's the only one of the honchos at AS who doesn't live in Studio City—he lives out in Montecito, in a mansion that rivals Winnie Flying Horse's for sheer overdoneness. Taylor telecommutes from the comfort of his own home—nobody at TSS can remember the last time they actually saw him in the flesh.)<<<<<

—Whistler (20:43:50/02-18-57)

>>>>>(That's really hincky ...)<<<<<
—Curious George (21:13:46/02-18-57)

>>>>>(The head of WorldVision is Cy's niece. (All in the family—nice, huh?) If Uncle Cy's a weasel, little Robin is a shark—and she's got sharp teeth. Rumor has it she personally geeked some feckless reporter whose writings about WorldVision she didn't like. She never stirs a step outside her office without Max Rymer, her personal bodyguard—he's allegedly a physical adept. According to scuttlebutt, she spends an awful lot of time in her office with Marcellus Morgan, the oh-so-tridogenic anchorboy with a voice sweet enough to melt steel.)<<<<<
—Working Girl (21:32:14/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Then there's Stephen Greenleaf at Pegasus. Nice guy—everyone says so. To date, no one has ever heard of him pulling any dirty tricks on anyone, despite his privileged position as the head of a major studio. What this says to me is, little pointy-eared Stevie is better at hiding his tracks than other people. Ten to one he's holding onto his cushy job because he has the goods on all of Amalgamated's other top studio execs. Any takers?)<<<<<
—Criss Cross (22:16:49/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Thought not.)<<<<<
—Criss Cross (23:32:15/02-18-57)

>>>>>(How about Levinhoff, the halfer who runs MagicMind? There's a guy who stays where he is through sheer talent for piling up cred. He looks real silly sitting at the big conference table, but he's pulling in money hand over fist. Puts out top-grade stuff, and always comes in under deadline.)<<<<<
—TriviaBuff (23:38:49/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Because he's got Logan St. James working for him, that's why. Little techno-whiz elf can do just about anything the bosses want—computers, electronics, cybertech, demolitions, whatever. Several luckless people have attempted to liberate Logan from his ironclad, twenty-year exclusive contract with MagicMind—all have ended up dead.)<<<<<
—Daredevil (23:42:20/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Want to see the top techs and stars in Amalgamated's empire? Drop in on the Aerie some night—if you can get in. Most everybody'll wander in eventually—Johnny Tasz, Murray Hopper, Winona Flying Horse, Josie Taylor of simsense-romance fame, and so on down the list. The Aerie is a private club, admittance by invitation only. Door security resembles a hostile border crossing, and hefty back up is never far away. It's worth getting inside if you can manage it, and not just because of the clientele. The Aerie combines all the best features of a great bar, a gambling club, and a high-class restaurant. The decor is unbelievably posh, and the food tastes like it was never anywhere near a soy processing plant or fish farm in its life. Best of all, information on the deals regularly cut in its back rooms is worth a small fortune to the right buyer.)<<<<<
—Working Girl (23:53:49/02-18-57)

>>>>>(Assuming you get out alive with the paydata ...)<<<<<
—Byteman (24:02:39/02-18-57)

WESTSIDE: AFFILIATED ARTISTS INC.

by Jenny Diver

Westside, the principal rival of Studio City, includes what used to be Brentwood, Westwood Village and West Los Angeles. It straddles a tiny stretch of Interstate 405 from 20th Street to Beverly Glen Boulevard, then expands as it goes eastward to fill the area between Interstate 10 and Sunset Boulevard. Always a prosperous area that many a well-paid actor and musician called home, Westside emerged as a potential powerhouse in the trideo and simsense business soon after Amalgamated Studios began eating up production facilities at a staggering rate. The studios whose heads had declined to join Amalgamated saw the writing on the wall, left Hollywood proper, and set up shop practically next door under the name Affiliated Artists.

Affiliated Artists has held its own against Amalgamated Studios for most of the past twenty years, generally without backstabbing or other shady practices. They've been doing well enough to build and maintain a spiffy arcology on Arcology Mile as well as their sizable facilities in Westside, which has got to stick in Amalgamated's craw. This association of independent artists has hung on to most of its talent, and lured a fair number of gifted new people, by offering greater creative control to technicians, writers and performers. They've discovered a simple truth that the Hollywood crowd apparently forgot; if you give talented people their heads, they'll put out the best product and make the most money.

>>>>>(Among AA's top hires in recent years is Garret D'Amore, a 22-year-old dwarf with genius to burn. Every studio in L.A. wants Garret, but so far Affiliated Artists has managed to hang on to him by moving him around on an irregular schedule to avoid extraction attempts. Garret doesn't seem to mind his perennially unsettled life; in fact, he appears to enjoy the chaos. He likes working for AA, with whom he has a twenty-year exclusive contract, because (in his words), "they let me do what I want when I want." Fortunately for AA, what Garret wants to do is push the technical envelope until it whimpers. They've been getting amazing stuff out of him for the past four years, ever since he graduated in record time from UCLA's Film and Sim School. Unless the competition gets a lot smarter, Garret looks to be AA's cash cow for the foreseeable future.)<<<<<
—CandyApple (11:33:21/02-19-57)

>>>>>(The various bits of Amalgamated Studios are currently engaged in a "bidding war" for Garret's recruitment (forcible if necessary). Word is they're willing to pay literally any price to any shadowfolk who can get him alive. (Dead may become an option in the future, depending on how badly they want to scrag AA. At the moment, they want the talent more.))<<<<<
—FFFixer (13:23:11/02-19-57)

Maureen Skogan runs Affiliated Artists with an iron hand well-concealed in a velvet glove. She has the thankless job of

keeping a bunch of feckless artists anchored to the real world, making sure the important-but-boring details like contracts are taken care of. I had the privilege of meeting her once, and I'll never forget the experience. She's short for a human, barely topping five feet, and so fine-boned she looks like a punk kid could break her in half. Don't you believe it. We happened to meet in the same workout room at a local health club—never mind how I got in there—and I can personally confirm Maureen's strength, speed and agility. I would not want to spar with this lady in a dark alley. She has an equally forceful personality—she oozes charm, but there's a whisper of steel underneath. Those big, dark eyes don't miss a single detail, and you can almost hear her mind working in overdrive even when she seems to be just counting sit-ups.

Maureen's right-hand man, Mike Kozol, has been with AA for the last ten years. Tall, black and gracefully middle-aged, Kozol is known for producing independent, low-budget trideos that appeal to the educated. Even his enemies describe him as a perfect gentleman. Rumors abound that these two are more than professional associates, but no one knows for certain.

>>>>>(Maureen is a fixer, and damned good at her job. She tends not to like the cruder tactics beloved by Boromaker and certain AS divisions—to her way of thinking, extractions and strategic geekings lack finesse. However, she'll be more than happy to supply information that interested parties can use to make her rivals' lives extremely difficult. Anonymously, of course, and for a price.)<<<<<

—DirtyAngel (19:34:02/02-20-57)

Recently, Maureen and Kozol have made overtures to Daniel Truman of Truman Technologies. Originally located in Chicago, Truman Technologies was forced to abandon its facilities when the Containment Zone went up in late 2055. For most of the past two years, Truman has been attempting to run his fractured empire from outside Chicago, with little success. He officially relocated his head office to Los Angeles in mid-2056, and has kept a foothold in the business for the past year and a half through sheer grit and business acumen. Many of Truman's most talented people are personally loyal to him and have refused to jump ship despite the blandishments of several large studios. Affiliated Artists contented itself with watching from the sidelines to see whether or not Truman could make a go of it in L.A. Maureen Skogan appears to have decided that Truman won't last the distance but that his stable of talent is too valuable to waste. Characteristically subtle, she's opted to win him over by charm and gradually take control of his assets, rather than go the hardball route of a hostile buyout or picking off a few gifted employees at a time. Rumor has it that Truman has fallen heavily for the legendary Skogan charm, and so Affiliated Artists may well find itself in a position to strike at Amalgamated's place on the top rung of the ladder within a year or two ... if Boromaker doesn't get there first.

Headquartered in Palo Alto, Boromaker owns several simsense production facilities in the Bay Area. Almost simultaneously with the mass arrival of displaced talent from Chicago's simsense industry, Boromaker "talent scouts" began showing up at various Westside and Hollywood hangouts, chatting up newcomers right and left. According to *Variety* reports from the past two quarters, Boromaker has managed to snap up virtually the entire production staff and artist roster of Living Life Productions, a Chicago producer of action/adventure simsense that was on the verge of making it big when Chicago got hit with the bug plague. More recently, Boromaker goons have been spotted talking to midlevel execs of Brilliant Genesis, another Chicago-based production house that managed to find its feet unusually quickly on the L.A. entertainment scene. Brilliant Genesis has gone it alone for a little over a year, with surprising success; however, street jazz whispers that there may be a Boromaker-inspired office putsch on the way. If that happens, Boromaker may finally get the financial and technical resources in place to shoulder its way into the Los Angeles industry.

>>>>>(One so-far-unmentioned side effect of the Chicago exodus is severe overcrowding in Westside and Mulholland Drive, where most of the Midwesterners ended up. It's almost funny when you think about it. Here's all these stinking rich people in these walled-off enclaves, serenely confident that everything unpleasant or uncomfy lies far away from them on the other side of a pile of stone. Now all of a sudden they have to deal with hordes of immigrants on their doorstep—immigrants just as rich as they are, too rich to be swept under the rug like so much dust. And here's the kicker—because they built the fragging walls to keep the undesirables out, there's no room for all these new people. They have no place to expand. L.A.'s City Authority won't let them buy surrounding real estate because the rich folks are too cheap to pay what the Authority considers a fair price. So the only way to accommodate all the new arrivals—all of whom are rich enough and arrogant enough to insist on being accommodated—is to move over and give the newbies a little of the original residents' living space. I'm just waiting for the Chicagoans to start putting up pretty little silk tents all over some smarmy producer's prized green lawn.)<<<<<

—GBS (20:12:34/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Don't hold your breath. When the overcrowded rich people realized they couldn't buy themselves the extra room they wanted, they decided to take it. For the past six months at least, "unidentified miscreants" have been burning and bombing out whole city blocks' worth of slum and semislum around the walled enclaves. Surprise, surprise, once the remaining local residents have moved on to greener pastures, some company belonging to Amalgamated Studios or Affiliated Artists or some bigwig on Mulholland Drive's municipal council buys up the land at fire-sale prices. Next thing you know, there's a construction crew razing the burned-out tenements down to their foundations and putting up spiffy new detached houses. Gee, wonder who those are for? And golly gosh, where do you suppose the new addition to the Big Wall is going?)<<<<<

—Lurker (20:32:38/02-20-57)

UCLA

by Little Lulu

As a longtime resident of this home away from home—first as a student, then as a working girl—I'm uniquely qualified to blather on about it. (Not that actually knowing what you're talk-

ing about is a necessary qualification in everyone's mind, but we'll let that go for now.) Once upon a time, the UCLA campus was accessible to just about anyone; even if you weren't a student, faculty or staff member, you could take a stroll across the grounds anytime you wanted. But after all the upheavals of the early 21st century, when the ivory-tower eggheads around here realized just how bad things had gotten in L.A., they took what seemed like the only logical step to keep the rot away from their precious campus. They walled the place off. So now UCLA is a giant fortress spread across 170 hectares of the Santa Monica Hills. It's pretty, quiet, peaceful and almost totally isolated from the world around it. It's also pretty much owned by corporate interests.

>>>>>(Except for the wall, the place looks pretty much the same as it always did. The med school's got a spiffy new surgical clinic and the Department of Thaumaturgy's buildings look a little the worse for wear because of the magic wars, but that's about it.)<<<<<

—Student Prince (20:42:34/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Magic wars?!)<<<<<

—Outtatown (20:45:30/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Lulu covers that subject a little further on.)<<<<<

—Student Prince (20:52:13/02-20-57)

Learning still goes on at UCLA, financed by the corporations whose generous "contributions" helped pay for the wall and the tight security that keeps all the students and professors as safe as little lambs in a pen. The corps have invested heavily in UCLA's three most potentially profitable departments: the medical school, the School of Film and Sim, and the Department of Thaumaturgy. Everything else, especially on the undergrad level, has pretty much gone by the wayside.

UCLA's medical center, always a top-notch facility, remains a teaching and research hospital, though corporate money has weighted the balance increasingly toward research. The corps allow the med center to serve local communities outside the walls as well as the population inside—got to get those experimental subjects from somewhere, and a little community goodwill is always a credmaker. If they think you're a good guy, they're more likely to buy your stuff.

>>>>>(Research being done here includes cutting-edge biotech and cyberware. Novahot stuff.)<<<<<

—ResidentSlave (20:57:38/02-20-57)

Of the med school's various departments, biotech and gengineering are the best endowed. Shiawase and Yamatetsu, especially, have poured nuyen into these areas like manna from heaven. Interestingly enough, neither corp's PR machines have hinted anything about how their investments are paying off, though huge numbers of graduates in these fields end up working for one of those two corporations. Even more interesting, over the past year some of the most promising third- and fourth-year grad students in biotech have vanished from campus within hours of attending corporate recruitment meetings.

>>>>(There's a dirty bidding war going on between Shiawase and Yamatetsu. They're jockeying for position in the biosciences, and the UCLA grads are getting caught in the middle. There's all kinds of wild rumors flying around about the latest disappearance, an absolutely brilliant kid named Chandra Patel. Some say she bolted because she didn't want to work for either corp; others agree that she turned them both down, but think the corps geeked her for it. Still others insist that Chandra'd agreed to work for one of the two corps, and the other corp either poached her or geeked her. There's even a rumor that she was eaten by bugs, if you can believe anything so crazy. I figure poaching's closest to the mark. Frag, she didn't have to take a job offer—all she had to do was listen politely to one corp recruiter for the other corp to get paranoid enough to kidnap her. Anybody's guess which one of them owns her now, but they've probably got their prize scientist hidden away under lock and key. Happens all the time around here.)<<<<<

—Coed (21:12:33/02-20-57)

>>>>>(DocWagon gets a lot of its interns from UCLA's med school. Know what they do for a final exam? They drop 'em off in the roughest neighborhood they can find outside UCLA's walls and make them pick up all the trauma cases in the area. If they survive the experience, they get to work for the Wagon (which means doing the same thing practically every day, oh joy). DocWagon employees call it "initiation.")<<<<<

—Medico (21:25:56/02-20-57)

The Film and Sim School, which added simsense to its roster in the earliest days of ASIST technology, still deserves its longtime rep as one of the best film schools in the world. Sim and trideo is the big engine driving L.A.'s economy, and so the big names in the business do everything in their power to make sure that UCLA turns out armies of employees for Amalgamated Studios, Affiliated Artists, and just about anyone else with enough cred to matter. Amalgamated even sponsors its own amateur film fest every year, looking for promising candidates. It then offers the lucky winners a full scholarship to the film school, complete with a generous living allowance, on the condition that they come work for Amalgamated on graduation. Enough studio money floats around to make a megacorporate CEO drool, and a few greedy individuals have made attempts to crack into the university's endowment accounts. Bad move—all such prospective cred-jackers have, to my knowledge, ended up dead.

>>>>>(Not all, hon. And it ain't just the money we come for. As part of their never-ending efforts to make their profit-and-loss sheets look better than the other guy's, quite a few of Amalgamated's component studios regularly cut costs by farming out lower-level techie work to Bright Young Minds at Film and Sim. They pay not a fraction of a nuyen for the work because it's "such valuable experience" for the poor suckers who get roped in. Now, I'll grant you the film school has pretty



tough security—but it's nowhere near as tough as the safeguards on the studios' production facilities. So if you want to snatch a potentially valuable preview of someone's next sim or trid release, UCLA's production labs are the place to go. Just make sure you sell fast, before the info gets stale.)<<<<<

—Daredevil (21:39:34/02-20-57)

And then there's the Department of Thaumaturgy that I once called home. UCLA was the first to create a department for the study of magic, in 2025. As the first and best of its kind, the Dept. of T. naturally became a juicy target for all the latecomers to shoot at. And I'm not speaking metaphorically.

See, there's always been rivalry between Southern California's various institutions of higher learning. Before the Awakening, the schools pretty much confined their mutual competitive streak to the football fields and basketball courts. Once UCLA got into the magic game, though, and as a result started attracting streams of interested students who might otherwise have gone to USC or CalTech or somewhere, the other colleges and universities had to get into the act. So USC, CalTech, Loyola Marymount, and about twenty other places—including a few podunk community colleges—all started up Thaumaturgy Departments of their own.

If they'd stopped there, things would've been fine. Everybody can stand a little competition to keep them on their toes, colleges just as much as corps. (Not that there's much difference these days, anyway.) The real trouble started when people got tired of spouting rival theories at conferences, publishing rival dissertations, and one-upping each other's student recruitment programs. None of those things let them really nail the competition, so the magical bigwigs decided to take a more direct approach. Thus began the whole stupid mess known as the Magic Wars.

Faculty members, promising grad and undergrad students, even a magically active janitor or two at every school in Southern Cal have been regularly fragging with each other in astral space for about the past fifteen years. Most of the time they keep it to the schoolboy-prank level: the stink spell in the private office of CalTech's top professor of magical theory, the manipulation spell that slowly rotted the bindings of whole shelves full of grimoires in UCLA's hermetic library, that kind of thing. Sometimes, though, things get nasty. Six years ago, the ritual sending my class had to do as a final exam was disrupted by a huge fire elemental, whose abrupt manifestation sent a couple of my best friends to the med center's critical burn unit. We never proved anything, but all the signs pointed to a cabal of USC students as the culprits. And that wasn't an isolated incident; any number of people have gotten hurt in similar ways since. So far no one's been killed, but the feeling is it's just a matter of time before that line gets crossed.

The worst side effect of all this drek, because it's so pervasive, is the damage done to astral space. Somehow, don't ask me how, the constant juice-tossing has stretched the astral fabric so it doesn't hang right anymore (to use an analogy non-magical readers might understand). So magic around here ebbs and flows; sometimes it feels like you're pulling on a dry well, other times you tap into so much power that you almost lose control. Nothing works predictably, not the simplest spell or the dumbest watcher spirit. Sometimes it works just like the textbook says it will—other times, you don't know what may happen when you power up your foci. It surely makes life interesting, but this kind of interesting I could do without.

>>>>>(The Magic Wars aren't the worst of it—that distinction goes to corporate R&D. They've polluted so much of the land and air and water that they've managed to warp a serious number of spirits and elementals. Guess nobody figures that what you throw out in the real world makes a difference on the astral. So watch what you call up—you don't know what may come knocking.)<<<<<

—DoggyDog (22:29:37/02-20-57)

>>>>>(To say nothing of the toxic shamans around Coast Town and the Harbor Barrens ...)<<<<<

—Ecoboy (22:32:34/02-20-57)

FUN CITY

by Orangeman

Fun City covers a big chunk of Orange County, which is considered part of L.A. nowadays. It includes Anaheim, Garden Grove, Stanton and Buena Park. Tourist attractions include Virtual World Disney, Knott's Berry Farm, the Crystal Cathedral, and several wax museums. You want a full listing with addresses, drop a line to Fun City's PR desk. It's their job to answer tourist questions, not mine.

As for getting here, California Highway 91 runs by Fun City on the north, Cal Highway 57 to the east, Cal Highway 22 to the south, and Valley View Avenue on the west. There. Now all you out-of-towners have some idea where to look on the map (assuming you had the brains to buy one).

>>>>>(Thanks for the friendly welcome. I feel so at home.)<<<<

—Outtatown (10:21:49/02-22-57)

Incorporated in 2020, Fun City is the ultimate company town. Except for the piece owned by Virtual World Disney, it belongs lock, stock and barrel to Amalgamated Studios, whose directors spent most of the decade between 2010 and 2020 buying up chunks of Orange County after the county's final slide into bankruptcy. As a corporate entity, Fun City gets extraterritorial privileges. The place runs on tourist revenue; a Fun City pass, necessary for everyone who wants to spend time in this weird little dreamland, costs 5,000 CFS dollars per person per day. The full fee for the entire length of your stay must be paid in advance, and every prospective visitor must submit to a thorough security check. Sound like fun so far? Just wait—it gets worse.

>>>>>(The entrance fee covers food, lodging and all entertainment, including souvenirs for the kids. Tickets for all the above, printed with date and time of admittance, are issued at the gate at time of entry.)<<<<<

—FunGuy (11:11:29/02-22-57)

Fun City is overwhelmingly clean-cut; every detail is straight out of some old geezer's fantasy of what Middle America used to be. It's enough to make you yarf. Flags fly above wide avenues, which are all laid out in a nice, neat grid. Buildings all fit into some kind of theme, from the Old West Country Store to the mock-medieval castle of the Saga Inn. Residential areas, officially off-limits to tourists, are enclosed behind castlelike walls whose gates are emblazoned with drek like "A Man's Home Is His Castle: Castle Duck." Fun City Guides and local net terminals are ubiquitous, as are peace officers in spiffy uniforms complete with white gloves. Employees are so unfailingly cheerful and polite they set your teeth on edge.

Fun City attracts thousands of visitors daily, all of whom must be suitably entertained (or they might start bitching about the price of the entry ticket). To keep things jumping, Fun City



employs drekloads of people to produce state-of-the-art entertainment in various forms. Fun City's production labs rival Amalgamated's setup in Hollywood, and so security of all kinds is tight and deadly. Fun City is serious business, so a lot of serious biz (if you get my drift) can get done here as well. Of course, you've got to be careful, smart and lucky to pull anything off—but there's action here for those who know how to get a piece of it.

>>>>>(Production facilities, like private residences, are located in the back streets behind those castle walls. You want to try poaching anything from them, watch your fragging step. Nothing here is what it appears to be. Security-wise, they get as much mileage out of deceptive props and holograms as real people and equipment—saves them money, too. I snuck past a guard and thought I was home free—until I found out the real guard was behind me. The brightly lit guard post I'd so carefully avoided was a hologram. Another thing they do, they put the security boys in funny uniforms. You'd be surprised how tough it is to shoot at a guy dressed up as a giant mouse. Frag, it's tough even to take him seriously. Classic misdirection—the guy in the mouse or duck suit or whatever is packing weapons just as real and lethal as any loaded-for-bear

street samurai. While you're goggling at the funny suit and trying not to laugh, he's pulling the trigger. Down you go, chuckling all the way to the afterlife.)<<<<<

—NotAmused (11:30:19/02-22-57)

>>>>>(Fun City: low-wage employees packed into overcrowded tenements. Long hours with no overtime. Cops running around in amusing uniforms, with tasers in their truncheons that they're only too willing to turn on "recalcitrant" actors. Complain, and you lose your job. They treat the guard critters better.)<<<<<

—AnonyMouse (12:39:10/02-22-57)

>>>>>(I like walking around in my funny animal suit. I get to play with kids all day, and they love me to pieces. And no one's ever so much as waved a taser in my direction. It's not such a bad job, even if the pay isn't perfect.)<<<<<

—Dogbreath (13:02:34/02-20-57)

One promising site for profitable biz is the gated residential compound owned and run by MagicMind, a prominent Amalgamated division. Castle Cricket (doesn't the sheer cuteness of it all just make you sick?) contains the homes and work places of the many oh-so-valuable technicians and other employees without whom the "fun" in Fun City would grind to a crashing halt. Needless to say, the builders of this little enclave made it as impervious to unauthorized entry as possible. Castle Cricket is laid out in concentric rings, with housing on the outside. Next comes a ring of parks surrounded by wide boulevards. Studios and labs make up the inmost ring, nestled behind more walls teeming with guards and sensors. It's tough to get in, and even tougher to get out—but it can be done. (And no, I'm not going to tell you how. Anyone who can't figure out how to beat the security systems on their own should get the frag out of this biz before they get hurt or killed.)

Another interesting place is Fun City's main Admin Center, a motley collection of buildings between Stanton and Katella Streets. Admin includes the police station and a jail, but the real hot spot is the main databank for the whole town. Everything from the latest version of the Fun City Guide to complete personnel records is in here, and a lot of it is potentially useful in shady lines of work. Once again, the difficulty lies in getting in and out alive with your prize. The grounds, matrix system and astral plane are all heavily guarded; Admin's security boys pack lethal bang-bang and have no sense of humor. Assuming you get past the big guns, you then get to deal with more misdirection. First, the buildings have animal names and all personnel wear animal-shaped ID badges. (Aren't they cute, folks?) Second, the Powers-That-Be add to their sense of safety by moving their operations around the entire Admin Center at random; all the partitions inside the buildings are mobile so that they can reconfigure their offices however they need to at any time. The same department is rarely in the same place for very long, and there are no handy-dandy floor plans anywhere. (If you work there, you know where your office is this week—if you don't know, you're not an employee. If you're not an employee, you're jail meat. Period.)

>>>>>(Virtual World Disney is a fun place to spend some time, if you've got the nuyen to spare. Current attractions are Hometown, USA (as it appeared circa 1950), Final Frontier (exploring our move into space), AdventurEscape (a hands-on attraction where visitors can take the parts of favorite trideo and simsense stars), CritterCorral (rides and exhibits about Awakened critters), ToonTown (self-explanatory!), and the Quarter (jazz, blues and jambalaya in a mockup of New Orleans' French Quarter, circa the 1920's).)<<<<<

—Tourist (14:41:29/02-22-57)

>>>>>(The California branch of VWD may be a long way from its Florida HQ, but this hot little entertainment company is doing well enough to seriously worry Amalgamated Studios. It really bugs the big boys at AS that VWD has managed to hold on to its Fun City acreage despite every attempt by Amalgamated to remove it. Virtual World Disney is the only place inside Fun City that Amalgamated doesn't own and can't control.)<<<<<

—Denny (20:38:21/02-20-57)

>>>>>(Don't leave out the shops. Lots of them have illicit sidelines of interest to shadowfolk everywhere. I can personally recommend the Frontier Print Shoppe, managed by a cadaverous-looking elf named Terry Braun. Terry and his buds can do you up all kinds of forged hardcopy documents with the same equipment that lets them turn out fake "Wanted" posters for the tourist crowd.)<<<<<

—Slicer (15:18:19/02-22-57)

>>>>>(A slag named Doc Denton runs a chop shop out back of Denton's Apparel on State and Ball. He costs, but he's a pretty competent cutter. Course, some folks who went in haven't come out.)<<<<<

—AnonyMouse (15:21:20/02-22-57)

>>>>>(If some of my patients came to me a little earlier, they wouldn't end up as operating-room casualties. There's only so much medical science can do—sometimes the body just dies.)<<<<<

—Doc Denton (15:30:28/02-22-57)

REAL CITY LIFE

by Angelfish

Outside the walled enclaves of the oh-so-very rich, life in the City of Angels ranges from middling to extremely grim. Downtown's the closest to tolerable, for them as don't mind wearing the corp straitjacket. 'Course, you gotta have a cushy corp job to live in an arcology apartment with running water ten to twelve hours a day. Most Angelenos don't. Most Angelenos live in other places: the factory town that used to be East L.A., its tiny twin in Harbor, the eco-nightmare of Coast Town, or the pit of urban hell known as El Infierno. You've heard the old cliché, "the urban jungle"? Well, Los Angeles is it. Practically everyone here is either predator or prey.

No matter where you go in Angeltown, the common element is fear—fear of crime, fear of violence, fear of losing your grip on your rung of the ladder that leads up from oblivion. Even rich folks feel that last one, but it's infinitely worse for people farther down the food chain. They get to see hell firsthand. The fear underlies everything; it never stops. You may live in a rathole, but some other poor slot somewhere's always stuck in a worse one—and the thought that you may end up there is often the only thing that gets you out of bed in the morning. (Or the evening, depending on your line of work.) People cope with the constant fear in all kinds of ways, and you'll see all of them on display in Los Angeles. Some lose themselves in dreams from the beetle or the bottle. Others become the perfect corporate slaves, so desperate to keep their jobs that they can't hardly breathe without wondering if they're doing it the company-approved way. Still others become the monsters they're afraid of: the thugs, the cutters, the chippers and gangers who live on other people's pain.

And then there are the ones—brave? naive? I don't know—who look at the world around them and refuse to accept it for the unholy mess it is. They know they don't have the power to change very much, so they change what little they can. They pick up the litter in front of their apartment block and toss it in the recycle bin instead of letting it lie there and look ugly. They scrounge cans of paint from the local dump and paint the fronts of their tumbledown houses. They hang clean curtains at the windows. They try to keep a few flowers alive in the microchip-sized scrap of dead earth that passes for their front yard, even though they know the smog'll kill anything that manages to grow. They keep their clothes clean, pay their debts, and try to do some little kindness for somebody when they can. If there's any hope for the City of Angels to ever live up to its name, it lies with these brave, crazy people too damnfool stupid to know that the world is hell and nothing changes. I came from people like that, and on my better days I'm glad to count myself one of them.

'Kay, end of sermon. I've given you the snapshot; now here's the details. Welcome to my nightmare, omae.

>>>>>(Always, always, always check out any contact you meet here. If he looks clean, check him again just for grins. You can never be too careful about who you trust, especially in LA.)<<<<<

—Reality Czech (15:37:29/02-22-57)

DOWNTOWN

The Downtown District, also known as Arcology Mile, is the garden spot of Los Angeles. It includes Belvedere, Maywood, Huntingon Park, Bell, Southgate and Watts. (Yes, Watts, and ain't that a hoot for you history buffs out there?) Corporations large and small own the district, every last block of it. The sheer number of arcologies in Downtown make for an impressive skyline—the corps all seem to have hired the same people to design as close to an earthquake-proof high-rise as they could get. (Something in the corp mentality just can't deal with a low-slung HQ, I guess. I wonder why ... ?) Police patrols are frequent, well-armed, and solidly corporate—there's no such thing as civic authority here. The corps know the City Authority is incompetent, so they prefer to handle law enforcement on their own. Pedestrians who don't look sufficiently corporate will be stopped, questioned, and possibly hauled off to god-knows-where, depending on the mood of the arresting officers.

Much of this area was destroyed in the serum riots of 2023. Insurance companies wouldn't pay up; instead, their parent corps repossessed buildings, booted their inhabitants, tore everything down, and rebuilt. The onetime residents, left homeless, moved to Harbor or Coast Town if they were lucky. The unlucky ones ended up in El Infierno.

>>>>>(Check out the Bonaventure Hotel at 409 Figueroa St. for a place to meet that high-class Johnson with the lucrative job offer—or to get a little dirt at a corp conference. This place has thirty-five floors with over 1,400 rooms, a business center with all the communications gadgets your heart could possibly desire, ritz conference facilities, a ton of meeting rooms, a pricey coffee shop, and an even pricier restaurant called the Top Venture. If you hit the restaurant, wear the right clothes—and for spirits' sake, no body armor! Word to the wise—the Bonaventure's entire staff is overworked and underpaid. A decent tip can do wonders in a place like this.)<<<<<

—DirtyAngel (16:35:47/02-22-57)

>>>>>(For secure meets, no place beats the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Monument. Cross streets are Alameda, Arcadia, Spring and Macy. This is the historic center of L.A.—landmarks are all over the place, most of them restored. Olivera Street is the site of an ongoing Mexican market. Lots to see and do while you're waiting for the Johnson or whoever to show—lots of ways to play inconspicuous tourist and lots of places to get lost if necessary. The noise makes it fragging tough to get a fix with a directional mike—a definite plus.)<<<<<

—Angeleno (18:22:46/02-22-57)

>>>>>(The Affiliated Artists Arcology has its share of interesting and potentially useful spots, provided you can sleaze your way in. One fave is the Screening Room, a ninety-nine-seat theatre where Triple-A conducts audience-approval tests of new trideos. Most of the tickets are given away as prizes in the Rainbow's End and Gilded Lily casinos a few floors down. Sometimes the stars show up to watch audience reactions. There's also Yoshio's, a class-A restaurant with white-noise generators at every table. Very secure, but also very pricey. The casinos are the easiest route inside—they tend to pay more attention to the size of your cred balance than to other bona fides. All kinds of interesting folks turn up in the Rainbow and the Lily, often in a state of advanced inebriation—perfect for taking advantage of sloppy thinking and loose tongues.)<<<<<

—Lord Byron (20:33:56/02-22-57)

All the major megacorps have some kind of property here, even Saeder-Krupp and Aztechnology. Don't come looking for the Azzie or SK arcology, though, because you won't find one. Technically, those two corps aren't allowed to do business in the Free State. They're too magical, or too metahuman, or some such drek. The L.A. City Authority lets them operate inside the city limits anyway just to yank Sacramento's chain—there's not a lot of

love lost between the folks who run Los Angeles and the central government that dropped the city into their laps. So Saeder-Krupp and Aztechnology keep their Los Angeles facilities small and unobtrusive, and they pay a few droplets of tax money to the Sacramento poseur-politicians just to ensure that CFS troops don't come to town and hassle them. Everybody's happy, except for the occasional government goon who just can't stand the thought of a dragon-owned corp on California soil. However, since most of the government has written off L.A. as a den of metahuman iniquity anyway, no one much pays attention.

The heavy corp security presence makes the Downtown District pretty safe to stroll through, as long as you dress right and don't rubberneck much. Low-level ganger wars erupt every so often on the northernmost edges of Downtown, well away from significant corp holdings. That last fact is the reason they go on at all—if the gangers ever crept close enough to truly inconvenience the corp arcologies, the warfare would die down quickly and permanently. As it is, the gangers make a convenient test lab for personal weapons or cybermods that Corp A or B wants to put on the market. The corps tend to think of it as a public service—killing the vermin while simultaneously providing the customer with yet another personal-protection choice. Law and order on the cheap, with a little profit on the side; things don't get any better than this.

>>>>>(One of the nastiest gangs on the edge of Downtown is the bunch calling itself the Barbers. They're heavy into rollerblading—rolling some poor cybered-up chummer for his valuables, then killing him and taking him to a chop shop. The chop shop gets his cyberware, the gang gets the money. If the chop shop gets shut down or some rollerbladers get caught, the rest of the gang moves on to another block.)<<<<<

—LAPD (23:47:05/02-22-57)

EAST LOS ANGELES

East L.A. extends east from Downtown, roughly between Highway 60 and Interstate 5. It's a big swath of territory, most of it owned by Lockheed and its affiliates. This is the warehouse and factory district, and it looks the part. What used to be residential areas—old East Los Angeles, Montebello, Pico Rivera, Whittier, La Habra and La Miranda—has become the city's industrial core. Little houses, apartment buildings and local shops have given way to big ugly plascrete rectangles, smokestacks, and festoons of thick metal pipes with peeling paint that channel sludge and poisons into the air and water and soil. Parts of East L.A. look absolutely hellish on dark nights, what with white smoke and blue-and-orange flames silhouetted against a sky tinged dirty orange from sodium lamps.

Sixty years or more ago, East L.A. was home to mostly working-class Hispanic families. It never was a real ritz kind of place, but it was clean and respectable and even pretty in spots. When Aztlan started beating the drums for Hispanic solidarity and calling for "the lost brothers and sisters of the Aztlan people" to come home, a fair number of residents fell for that line and emigrated south. Others left because they got tired of being looked at funny by their non-Hispanic neighbors. There was a lot of fifth-column fever in East L.A. for a time, especially after the Azzies swept north and took over San Diego. Plenty of East L.A. natives got sick of having to prove their loyalties every fragging day, so they lit out for elsewhere. Lockheed Corporation, which already had facilities in the area, quietly bought up most of the land and expanded its operations. What they couldn't buy legit from locals who wanted to move, they took through a combination of fat "incentive payments" and the occasional bit of arson. By 2041, East L.A. had become a mix of factory floors, power plants and prefab tenements for Lockheed's wage slaves.

It's still a working-class area, but the people are poorer than they were a generation ago. Most of the local color is gone. Every so often you'll see a tenement that looks cleaner and sounder than its neighboring buildings, maybe with a garden in front; sometimes, on Cinco de Mayo or Puerto Rican Independence Day, people hang out the old national flags of the countries absorbed by Aztlan. But mostly the tenements and the people in them are gray and run-down and apathetic. The scary thing is, East L.A. is one of the nicer neighborhoods left in Los Angeles. Most people here have enough money to put food on the table regularly, though they're all afraid of losing their paychecks to random downsizing. The corps and the City Authority together patrol the place pretty well, especially those pockets where the most skilled workers live; no sense letting some bunch of thrill-gangers carve up the prize geese you've spent good cred to train.

>>>>>(Patrols sometimes take offenders for a ride and drop them off deep in the Barrens. Not everyone makes it out.)<<<<<

—Hispaniard (10:42:20/02-23-57)

There's not even a lot of racial tension here, compared to other parts of L.A. Residents are a mixed bag of humans and metahumans, but most of them recognize that they're on the same level. They're the people whose income depends on going to work every day, as opposed to the people who live off investments and stock portfolios. They share the same hopes, the same fears, and the same grim determination to hang on to what they have, even though it's only a ragged excuse for prosperity.

>>>>>(Plus they're all too exhausted and too fragging scared of losing ground to make trouble.)<<<<<

—Angeleno (11:45:20/02-23-57)

Of all the areas in Los Angeles, East L.A. is where you'll find the greatest number of people determined to claw their way up to the next rung on the ladder. Respectability and honorable dealing, insofar as it can be managed on a limited income and with the constant fear of job loss, are the two touchstones that keep a lot of East L.A.ers sane. They don't like gang activity or chip dealing, and many a ganger has ended up injured or dead at the hands of the neighborhood crime patrol. The City Authority loves the neighborhood vigilantes because they save the Authority money on cop patrols. Between neighborhood groups, city cops and Lockheed's razorboys, gang activity and turf wars in East L.A. stay at a tolerable level; more than Downtown, but a lot less than the real slum areas with no moneymaking enterprises to protect.

>>>>>(Puente Hills Maze in East L.A. is Orktown in all but name. The tunnels that make up the maze start in Whittier College, which the orks took over after the Night of Rage.)<<<<<

—Mazemind (14:48:21/02-23-57)

>>>>>(Los Molinos, a little hotel run by an even littler lady by the name of Rosita Hernandez, is a good cheap place to crash if you need it. Anyone unwise enough to try worming info out of Rosita gets comeuppance in the form of El Niños, Rosita's "boys" (who are anything but small).)<<<<<

—Hispaniard

(19:28:51/02-23-57)

>>>>>(If you need to know about anyone in East L.A., talk to Chico Chavez, the owner and barkeep at La Cocina on the corner of Garfield and Washington. He won't speak anything but Spanish, though he can understand plenty of other languages (among them Sperethiel). As long as you're halfway fluent in Spanish and clearly working at it, the locals'll treat you all right. La Cocina is a decent working-class bar, and nobody cares what race you are as long as you pay for your drinks and don't start trouble.)<<<<<

—Maria (20:12:24/02-23-57)

>>>>>(Lockheed's major research park is a potential gold mine of technical information, but it's tough to break into. The IC on their systems is enough to curl your hair. They do cutting-edge research on antigrav and hydrofoil tech. I know more than a few overconfident idiots who've tried to sleaze the research park's databanks and ended up in the morgue.)<<<<<

—Byteman (21:27:02/02-23-57)



HARBOR AND COAST TOWN

Harbor is the next step down from East L.A.—an industrial area stretching from Interstate 405 south to the harbors, between California Highway 107 and Interstate 710. Torrance, Carson, Lomita, Harbor City, Wilmington and San Pedro are all part of the Harbor District. Aerospace companies trying desperately to compete with Lockheed have all set up shop in Harbor; the other big industry in the area is shipping. Towering cargo cranes dominate the skyline for miles along the harbors. Inland, acres of hangars and huge warehouses stretch as far as the eye can see. Security is tight around the warehouses and such, but gangers roam the streets freely at night. The city police who are supposed to patrol Harbor's tiny residential section generally prefer to notify the corps of potential threats to their employees and let them deal with it. This leaves the city cops with more time to hang out and snarf doughnuts at the corner coffee shop. They bust purse-snatchers and hand out traffic tickets with great gusto, but potential life-threateners like go-gangs are better left to the corporate gunsels. Corp forces have bigger guns and better cyber.

The section of Harbor known as the Barrens was destroyed during the Big Quake of 2028 and never rebuilt. Just so you out-of-towners reading this will know where not to go, I'm going to tell you exactly where the Barrens are: east of 110 and south of 405, bordered by Carson, Sepulveda, Main and Avalon. The place is nothing but block upon block of plascrete and concrete rubble, sometimes piled as much as twenty feet high. Local aerospace companies dump their messes here; rusting barrels leaking noxious chemicals are a common sight. The Barrens is also home to numerous critters of uniformly unsociable temperament and bad habits.

If all that isn't enough to scare you the hell away, try the bunch of cybercrazies calling themselves the Steppin' Wulfs. They live in the Barrens and don't like anyone invading their turf. Anyone they catch on their home ground is an intruder to be killed. Fortunately for their victims, the Steppin' Wulfs are usually so hopped up on something that they can't always keep their crazed minds on the job at hand. These boys and girls are *waaay* out of control, and no one knows why. Theories abound, from enviropoisons rotting their brains to their being secretly controlled by a toxic spirit. Whatever the reason, the Steppin' Wulfs are crazed like no other thrill-gang in all of L.A. Mothers use the Wulfs like the bogeyman, as a threat to scare little kids into behaving: "You do what I say, or the Steppin' Wulfs will get you!"

>>>>>(They rip people to shreds with their bare hands. These guys like the smell and feel of blood. Some of them even drink it.)<<<<<
—Angeleno (03:10:38/02-24-57)

>>>>>(It's not a toxic spirit controlling them. The gang leader's a toxic shaman.)<<<<<
—Harbor Rat (03:40:18/02-24-57)

>>>>>(Buildrek. Not every psycho is a toxic.)<<<<<
—Reality Czech (03:44:38/02-24-57)

>>>>>(Rumor has it that certain corporations are paying the Steppin' Wulfs handsomely for access to the Barrens.)<<<<<
—Angel (07:39:29/02-24-57)

>>>>>(As long as you stay out of the Barrens, you can do biz in Harbor. The Sheraton Hotel, at 333 South Figueroa Street, makes good neutral ground for meets if you've got the cred to stay there. Among the other amenities, you can get full Matrix access from the terminal in every room. They'll even launder your shirts. They won't guarantee your privacy, but they won't spy on you themselves, either. They host a lot of security-conscious corporate conferences, and so a reputation for discretion is a gold mine for them.)<<<<<
—Salamander (10:04:57/02-24-57)

>>>>>(Buildrek they won't spy on you. The key phrase is "reputation for discretion." The rep doesn't have to be true—they've just got to be careful who they sell paydata to.)<<<<<
—Reality Czech (10:10:38/02-24-57)

>>>>>(Check out the Queen Mary, permanently moored in Long Beach Harbor. She's one of the largest passenger liners ever built. When you're done goggling at the ship, check out the shops and restaurants in the Queen Mary Seaport.)<<<<<
—CalGirl (13:15:28/02-24-57)

>>>>>(What're you, a tour guide?!)<<<<<
—Daredevil (13:19:22/02-24-57)

Then there's Coast Town, a *looong* step down the ladder from Harbor. This ecological horror-land lies between the Pacific, Interstate 405, and Hawthorne and Western streets. Anybody ever seen the old flatvids about L.A. neighborhoods like Marina Del Rey, El Segundo and Redondo Beach that show vast stretches of clean beach under endless blue skies? Gone by the wayside, chumbos. Chemical spills, sewage spills, every kind of trash you can name—it's all here in Coast Town. One three-kilometer strip from Highway 10 to Western Ave. is so drekked-up that the City Authority restricts access—and when the City Authority bothers to take action on the citizens' behalf, you know things are really bad.

>>>>>(Here's something weird. Venice Beach, just north of Marina Del Rey and the really drekky stretches of coast, is amazingly clean. So're the Santa Monica beaches, which various corps have walled off as their own private swimming preserves. Venice Beach is still a tourist hangout, where muscleboys and street performers go to hang out, be seen, and perform stunts so people will throw coins in their hats. How do they keep the drek down south from floating up to Venice and Santa Monica?)<<<<<
—Catseye (16:10:48/02-24-57)

>>>>>(Think the big desalinization plant between Venice Beach and Marina Del Rey might have something to do with it?)<<<<<
—Daredevil (16:21:30/02-24-57)

Cold-fusion plants, L.A.'s lifeline since the Central Valley government gave Los Angeles its "freedom" so we'd keep our grubby hands off "their" water, line the beaches like a pride of sea monsters designed by Escher. Huge pipes suck in gallons of seawater, muck around with it, strip the salt and other drek out of it in ways I don't even want to imagine, and then release the resultant brackish-tasting liquid into immense towers. From the towers, the officially purified water gets pumped across town to housing blocks, arcologies, hospitals, factories and everywhere else in L.A. where water is needed. In a stunning show of ignorance or indifference, quite a few manufacturing companies dump their wastes along the beaches and in the very ocean that provides the water for the cold-fusion plants. So the plants have to strip that much more drek out of everyone's drinking water. Coast Town is a disaster just waiting to turn into a catastrophe, with bad consequences for every resident of L.A.

>>>>>(Not everyone. The corps who can afford it, and a lot of the rich slags in Hollywood and those places, don't get their water from the fusion plants. They pay the central government for it, or they hire waterjackers to steal it from the rivers and lakes in the Northern Crescent. Either way, tanks full of fresh, clean water get flown in to the privileged on a regular basis. So what do they care about dirtying up the ocean even more than it already is?)<<<<<
—Daredevil (18:10:28/02-24-57)

>>>>>(The restricted area was placed off-limits after the quake of 2028 destroyed LAX. Rumor has it the quake damaged the reactors, but reports of widespread leakage have never been confirmed. The corps that were already dumping drek in the ocean started pouring it all in the restricted area, which has become perfect toxic-waste hell. This place glows during the daytime, folks. Don't anybody throw a match over the fence, no matter who dares you to. Corps with operations in Harbor and El Infierno generally dump their crap in the Barrens, which are a lot closer.)<<<<<
—eCo (18:14:10/02-24-57)

We got a preview of our own personal Armageddon in 2045, when a reactor overload in an automated research station off the L.A. coast caused a tidal wave that rocked the whole city and county. Radioactive pollution hit all along the Southern California beachline, from Ventura to Oceanside. The sickly green glow from all the drek caused local folk to call it the "Green Tide." The water's still that lovely color, and likely will be for ages to come.



>>>>>(I thought cold fusion made stuff like this impossible.)<<<<<
—Travelin' On (18:22:38/02-24-57)

>>>>>(All that powers is not cold, chum. After the breakup of the old USSR, and later when the USA became the UCAS, a lot of weapons-grade plutonium slipped through the cracks. The Russian space program just happened to sell plans for the lightweight reactors they used in their satellites right around the time their empire dissolved. Not too much after that, a lot of corps started making the weapon grade stuff usable in a jury-rigged reactor. In fact, plutonium "burns" a lot hotter than uranium. During the wind-down of the Cold War in the 1990s, a lot of this drek got used in power plants. And the nice new reactors were automated, so the corp that set the first ones up figured a few dirty emissions wouldn't hurt anything. They were wrong.)<<<<<
—Nuke (18:33:51/02-24-57)

>>>>>(There's no way this so-called Green Tide could be caused by radioactivity. First, Cherenkov radiation is blue, not green. Second, the levels of radiation necessary to create Cherenkov radiation are found in a reactor core. If the water off Los Angeles was that radioactive, we'd have seen fish die-offs all the way to the Philippines, not to mention what it would have done to L.A.'s population. Including the cockroaches.)<<<<<
—Ross Roberts (19:13:48/02-24-57)

>>>>>(The Green Tide comes from a marginally radioactive, phosphorescent fungus. After the Tide hit, a bunch of scientist skags went out in full protective gear to take a look, and they brought back samples of this stuff. Chunks of it grow in a lot of LA's abandoned beachfront. Even more interesting, Angeleno cockroaches seem to love the fungus—I've heard rumors that roaches who've eaten a lot of this green gunk are growing.)<<<<<
—Doctor Bugs (18:33:21/01-12-56)

>>>>>(Attack of the Giant Roaches??? Cut me loose ... !)<<<<<
—Skeptic (18:44:55/02-24-57)

>>>>>(So whose station blew up?)<<<<<
—Curious (18:50:32/02-24-57)

>>>>>(There was a lot of finger pointing, mostly at Pacific Foods, which runs a lot of experimental stations up and down the coast. Of course, all official records of ownership disappeared immediately after the incident.)<<<<<
—Eyes Right (18:57:42/02-24-57)

People do live here, believe it or not, mostly squatters and other down-and-out types who figure even a poisoned roof over their heads is better than nothing. More metas than humans live in Coast Town because humans are somewhat more likely to get and keep jobs that will let them live elsewhere, but there's a fair number of humans here all the same. Race-baiting propaganda aside, opportunities for humans aren't much better than for dwarfs or trolls. Poverty doesn't distinguish between metatypes. Farther away from the beaches, going toward Hawthorne, you can see signs of what normal people might call life. Little mom-and pop businesses, like grocery stores and bars and shops full of cheap clothes and shoes, pop up amid houses and three- or four-storey flats. The houses and apartment buildings are almost all grungy and run-down, but they're mostly intact. Some of them are even clean and painted bright colors. The trees are all withered and nobody has a garden, but they're trying to live like real people instead of like refuse. Amazingly, some of them are succeeding—after a fashion.

The really sad sight is the kids. Almost all of them are undersized and sickly because they can't get away from the concentrated pollutants in the air they breathe and the water they drink. A local bunch of doctors calling themselves the Hospitallers give the kids and their parents free treatment in little storefront clinics scattered throughout Coast Town's neighborhoods. The City Authority is legally obligated to run CityMed clinics in Coast Town just like it does everywhere else in L.A., but invariably some budget-minded flunky announces that the low level of tax revenue collected from Coast Town is insufficient to pay for the city's aid. So CityMed's offices remain closed, and people like the Hospitallers pick up the slack.

>>>>(What about DocWagon?)<<<<<
—Outtatown (19:10:23/02-24-57)

>>>>>(Don't make me choke. What money is DocWagon gonna make off a buncha squatters in Poisonville? You think anybody in Coast Town can afford a DocWagon contract? For-profit docs don't go anywhere they can't make cred.)<<<<<
—Local Yokel (19:18:38/02-24-57)

>>>>>(The Hospitallers also do body work, no questions asked. Most of their equipment is second-hand or boosted and their supplies are irregular, but they do the best they can with what they have.)<<<<<
—WizKid (19:39:27/02-24-57)

City efforts at law enforcement are equally lax. A smattering of city cops prowl around the neighborhoods close to Hawthorne and Western, and the City Authority mounts a decent guard on the fusion plants. Corporate security guards patrol the outskirts of waste dumps to take care of any nosy people who happen by. In the Barrens, where the bulk of the squatters live, the long arm of the law never reaches except in pursuit of the occasional miscreant who does something bad enough to make him worth chasing. This is the one area where Coast Town's eco-problems work to its advantage; the place is so drekked-up and poor that most gangs and other criminal types avoid the place. The chip dealers, the chop artists and all their kind prefer to ply their ugly trades in greener pastures.

EL INFIERNO

In English, the name of this place translates as "Hell." That about sums it up. A decade or so back, after the central government did its level best to raze El Infierno to the ground, some local wit with more education than most carved the following line



into the stone above the main gate: "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." He got it right. There's no hope in El Infierno, and that's what sets it apart.

El Infierno has a long history of poverty, violence and neglect. Back before the walls went up, this blot on the landscape included Hawthorne, Gardena and Compton—rough neighborhoods with a bad rep. Since the 1990s, when the name Compton was fragging near synonymous with the L.A. riots of those years, things have only gotten worse. The few souls struggling for decent lives amid drive-by shootings and all the other drek have gotten fewer, and the street wars have gotten bloodier. Between ongoing gang wars, pogroms thinly disguised as law enforcement, and riots touched off by resident race-baiters, it's a wonder there's anyone left alive in here at all.

Story time, kids—here's the scoop on How Things Got This Bad. Los Angeles was already becoming an urban war zone even as far back as the last decade of the 20th century, especially in the neighborhoods that would one day become El Infierno. Compton, Gardena and places like them were already full of poor and angry people getting poorer and angrier as their hopes for a better life seemed to ebb along with the century. Jobs were scarce, crime a constant, local police more of an occupying army than Officer Friendly. In this atmosphere, gangs flourished. I'm talking more than just bands of thugs out roughing people up for kicks—the gangs that really made it big in L.A. were the ones who got into organized-crime rackets like numbers running, drug dealing, and extortion. The increasingly lousy economy, plus local idiocies like the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 and the abrupt dismantling of anything remotely resembling affirmative action, were a real boon to the gangs. By cutting down opportunities for legitimate work even further among local black and Hispanic communities, they made the big gangs and their smaller allies the employer of last resort.

In the early years of the 21st century, the yakuza and Seoulpa rings began using smaller local gangs as proxies in "bidding wars" over sections of L.A. turf. The two most power-

ful outfits were the yak-connected Green Dragons and the Seoulpa-affiliated Tigers. In 2022, a spat over the narcosoft trade between the Tigers and the Dragons touched off a war that decimated both gangs. Smaller outfits who'd chafed under the ancien regime, along with newly formed metahuman-only gangs that had begun to form in the aftermath of the Awakening, sprung up all over and began jockeying for power. California's governor, more interested in playing political games with the UCAS Feds than running his own state, ignored the rising tide of violence until VITAS II hit in 2023. At the height of the plague, with people dying in the streets, rumors flashed through Central L.A. that the MLK-Drew Medical Center in Watts was storing huge quantities of anti-VITAS serum. Those who remained healthy enough to walk converged on MLK-Drew and broke the place wide open. When they found nothing, some nameless souls claimed that VITAS II was government-sponsored genocide aimed at the city's poor. This rumor, in half a dozen garbled forms, touched off citywide riots so severe that the violence began to threaten lucrative show business and other corporate operations. Pressed for action by the city's moneyed interests, Governor Treacle declared El Infierno under martial law and sent in the National Guard. When the smoke cleared, 23 soldiers, 89 policemen, and 619 civilians were dead and much of Central Los Angeles had been reduced to rubble.

>>>>>(Dress rehearsal for the invasion of 2046, right after the Lost Election. Read on.)<<<<<

—Storyteller (04:15:32/02-25-57)

Seeing their opportunity for a major land grab on the cheap, several corporations offered to buy up the area that had once been Watts at 10 percent of its pre-riot value. Rebuilding would have been prohibitively expensive, and when corp-owned insurance companies discovered convenient exclusion clauses that denied them coverage, local landowners had no choice but to sell. Within five years, Watts went from a burned-out shell to a maze of small arcologies, shopping malls, and planned corporate communities. The area's former residents were forced south and east into Compton and Gardena, turning those already rough lower-class neighborhoods into teeming cauldrons of the poor, homeless and unemployable. The city government's response to the dramatically rising crime rate was to wall off the shattered sections of Central L.A. Residents trapped behind the walls christened the place El Infierno.

After California's secession from the UCAS in 2036, Los Angeles city officials passed legislation limiting welfare benefits—food, housing and medical attention—to residents of designated housing projects in El Infierno. This enabled them to herd all the poorest of the poor into one place, safely walled away from the rest of society. Soon afterward, local police were pulled from the area and placed on "border patrol" just outside the walls. Finally, in 2038, city officials set up checkpoints on all roads leading to El Infierno and established an 11 p.m to 5 a.m. curfew.

>>>>>(Both remain in effect to this day. The checkpoints have metal detectors and chem-sniffers, plus vents and smart gun ports mounted in the pedways under the wall so the cops can fill them with gas or bullets. The coppers are all big guys with big guns and bad attitudes. No one's allowed through the checkpoints during curfew hours for any reason.)<<<<<

—LAPD (06:06:23/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Nowadays, police in the Inferno are conspicuous by their absence. When necessary, they enter in squads of twenty, plus two commanders. Rumor is they get combat pay.)<<<<<

—Firestarter (06:15:32/02-25-57)

>>>>>(The police patrols are frequently joined by Citizens for a Sane Society—a lovely bunch of people with a kick for beating up metahumans, human race traitors, and anyone else they don't happen to approve of. They claim to be "safeguarding honest citizens against the criminal element." Sometimes they go into the Inferno, though seldom in groups of less than twenty. They pack all kinds of arms and armor, especially heavy firepower.)<<<<<

—LAPD (06:45:36/02-25-57)

>>>>>(The police can't cope alone. There's more of the low-life scum than there are of them. If the only solution to the problem is the Final Solution, so be it. Amen.)<<<<<

—Jihadeen (08:25:20/02-25-57)

For the next eight years or so, the city government ignored El Infierno. So did the central government in Sacramento, except to use it as a dumping ground for criminals and other "undesirables" like poor people, metahumans and humans who didn't toe the government's increasingly racist line. The final straw in El Infierno's descent into literal hell came in 2046, right after the so-called Lost Election. Acting on rumors that an Inferno-based gang had helped wipe the databanks clean of that year's gubernatorial election results, the Sacramento government declared war on El Infierno. According to its public statements, all gangs were to be purged and the urban jungle purified of its criminal, metahuman taint. (The fact that half the gangers in El Infierno were and are human escaped its notice.) The California State Guard, Lone Star officers on loan from the UCAS, and corporate mercenary troops invaded El Infierno in force, bombing and burning and smashing everything in their path.

After several hours of fighting, the Guard units and even some of the corporate-hired mercs had had a bellyful of mowing down civilians. They started deserting, first in a trickle, then in droves. Two days after the invasion began, Sacramento officially announced a pullout. Simultaneously, they proclaimed Los Angeles a Free City.

>>>>>(The failure of their grand invasion was the final straw for Sacramento. After that they wrote L.A. off as a bad deal, especially since they hadn't been able to collect much in taxes from the sim and trid corps for years.)<<<<<

—Danny Boy (08:35:32/02-25-57)

Since 2046, the Los Angeles City Authority has ignored El Infierno as studiously as its predecessors ever did. Local gangs

have stepped in to fill the power vacuum, often providing the only excuse for law and order. Gang warfare continues, with one gang or another gaining temporary control over this or that small square of territory. In the streets and housing blocks where a given gang has undisputed control, there's a semblance of normality. Everyone knows who's in charge, and those who don't buck the local gang's authority are pretty much left alone. Plus, locals can count on the gang protecting them from others who might invade that gang's turf. In areas still under dispute, the civilians keep their heads down and ask no questions. Not that caution helps much—there's just too much lead flying around all the time. The bystander death rate is a crying shame, or would be if the City Authority actually gave a frag.

>>>>>(Ain't it scary to realize that even in Hell some neighborhoods are worse than others?)<<<<<

—Angeleno (08:41:39/02-25-57)

>>>>(If you absolutely must spend time in El Infierno, head for Pierson Place in Gardena. It's a flophouse, so no room assignments unless you ask for Nolly. If you ask nice and she likes your looks, she'll set you up in a nice, safe little basement room with a shielded jack. Plus, she has various goodies for sale.)<<<<<

—BlackJack (09:05:34/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Pierson Place is fraggin' dangerous. Scuttlebutt says Nolly is linked to local rollerbladers, so don't walk in with any fancy cybermods. Better to doss down at the Hope and Glory coffin hotel down the street—the local Dragon tong may get to know your business, but they'll leave you alone as long as the game you're running gives them no trouble.)<<<<<

—Spider (09:15:32/02-25-57)

>>>>>(The Hospitallers run free clinics here, just like in Coast Town. They move around a lot, opening up shop wherever there's a need.)<<<<<

—WizKid (10:39:27/02-25-57)

People survive in El Infierno—if you can call it surviving—on welfare grudgingly doled out by the individual corporations that sponsor local housing projects. That's right—corporations actually provide food, shelter and minimal health care free of charge to the poor slags taking up breathing space in El Infierno's beautiful cinderblock warehouses. Now before you all go out and buy ice skates because Hell's freezing over, here's the reason behind this strange corporate largesse. (You knew there had to be a kicker, didn't you?)

Corporations sponsor housing blocks for one simple reason—test marketing. The corps provide nutrisoy for the dispensers in every apartment plus various consumer products like soap, household gadgets, and so on. The residents use whatever they're given, as they tend to lack the cred with which to buy stuff of their own choice. (Cash benefits hurt the poor, you know—destroy the work ethic and make 'em lazy.) The corporations thereby get a captive test market for whatever new product they



want to push. Saves them oodles of money—instead of setting up fancy lab runs, double-blinds, and such, they just plop the new food or shampoo or whatever down in the projects and then watch the people to see whether they turn green or start choking to death. Any product proved unsafe by its "trial run" in El Infierno doesn't show up on the open market until the corp manages to work a few more bugs out.

>>>>>(Note the word "proved." Any corp can sell a massively unsafe product as long as no one can prove it unsafe beyond a shadow of a doubt. Do you know it was the new soap in the dispensers and not the new nutrisoy that caused you to break out in a rash? Can you prove it? Meanwhile, the corps write off everything they spend in the projects as "charitable contributions.")<<<<<

—Down but not Out (11:50:27/02-25-57)

>>>>>(The following corps "sponsor" housing blocks: Amalgamated Studios, Aztechnology, Farmberger Human Survey, Kalamari Foods, Saeder-Krupp and Yamatetsu. There's probably a lot more, but I haven't confirmed 'em all yet.)<<<<<

—Firestarter (16:12:20/02-25-57)

>>>>>(No Boromaker blocks? I thought those guys were trying to get into everything.)<<<<<

—DirtyAngel (16:29:51/02-25-57)

>>>>>(Kids from the projects have been disappearing lately. No bodies found and no runaways—they just vanish. Anyone else heard anything about this?)<<<<<

—Witness (20:34:47/02-25-57)

>>>>>(I heard the Chimneysweeps go-gang is getting corp pay from somewhere; only nobody knows which corp. They started sporting flashy new cycles and drek just about the time the kids began disappearing.)<<<<<

—Danny Boy (21:34:29/02-25-57)

>>>>>(The corps have set up local gangs as block guards in most housing blocks, allegedly to make the block safe for its law-abiding inhabitants through nonviolent means. Official gear includes armor, tasers and binders. Lots of guards also pack personal weapons, which they use freely when threatened. A lot of these glorified gangs practice and teach martial arts, not always with corp knowledge or approval.)<<<<<

—Sevenup (15:43:10/02-26-57)

The Eli Whitney Tower is a typical housing project. Built in 2013 and sponsored by Fuchi, the Tower is a giant plascrete rectangle, six stories high. On the first floor are a security station spottily staffed by the bottom of Fuchi's security barrel, a health clinic distinguished by peeling paint and scant supplies, and a commissary chock-full of the latest corp consumer junk. Floors 2 through 5 contain two-room apartments, each room six meters by three meters, with shared sanitary facilities. Several of these units share a "kitchen" that amounts to a couple of nutrisoy dispensers and a few tables. There used to be chairs, but they weren't bolted down and so they've long since disappeared. The top floor is nothing but coffin spaces. Each resident has a "resident pass" that opens the door to their apartment or coffin slot, plus doors to shared kitchens or bathrooms. Of course all the locks were long ago disabled and no attempt has ever been made to fix them. Most of the light bulbs are missing in the corridors. Elevators are permanently locked on the basement level because no one can be bothered to fix the cables or the electrics or whatever broke this week. Every flat surface is crawling with graffiti. Names tagged upside down—a death threat—and names with RIP over them are especially common. As the crowning insult, the Tower and projects like it have no water for twenty hours out of every twenty-four. The four hours of water they do get come at random; sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes in the dead of night. El Infierno's housing blocks are on the bottom of the ladder as far as water goes; every other thirsty area in Los Angeles gets its water needs taken care of first, in descending order according to the financial clout they wield with the City Authority.

>>>>>(That means rich enclaves first, then Downtown, then East L.A. and Harbor, then the poor slots in Coast Town and the Inferno.)<<<<<

—Lizard (16:34:55/02-26-57)

>>>>>(Gangs in some of the housing blocks reclaim and recycle the water, giving residents another hour or two a day. Many of these gangs, like the Reclamation Crew around Whitney, jack water and power from Downtown and East L.A. for the folks in their own block. Needless to say, they're the most popular people in El Infierno.)<<<<<

—Blood Prince (17:29:37/02-26-57)

>>>>>(So how come there's so many people in L.A. if there's no water?)<<<<<

—Curious George (20:33:41/02-26-57)

>>>>(L.A. grew when it had ready access to water from the Central Valley hundreds of miles away. Since Secession, the city's major sources of water have dried up—the Valley hogs all its water for itself, and NAN controls the flow of the Colorado River. All we've got are the cold-fusion reactors, and they don't produce nearly enough to go around.)<<<<<

—Jade (20:39:31/02-26-57)

>>>>>(Citizens are supposed to let the water they use re-enter the system so the plants can recycle and treat it, but lots of people don't bother. Dual pipe systems with "gray water" for sinks, showers and washing machines going through a filter and back into an individual building's water system are a common sight. That's why you'll see enviro-friendly soap in all the stores—most folks don't give a frag about the environment, but the "green" soap's easier on the filters.)<<<<<

—Jack (22:34:51/02-26-57)

MOJAVE DESERT



>>>>>(The following screed comes to you courtesy of Road Runner, a friend of a friend of a friend who knows the desert like her own backyard.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:35:42/02-01-57)

If you're a typical shadowrunner—somebody who eats, sleeps and breathes the sprawl—you'd best not come to the Mojave Desert without a fragging good reason. And if you do come here, read up on the place first. Aside from the few habitable towns scattered within it, the Mojave is an alien environment for people like you. It's a place of extremes, where relying on anything or anyone except yourself can kill you. At one end of the spectrum lies the corporate resort of Palm Springs, a monument to the power of corp money and technology. Here, richer-than-God execs and their friends cavort in air-conditioned splendor, insulated from the realities of everyday life by the best entertainment, food and assorted luxuries money can buy. Outside the fortified walls of Palm Springs lies the open desert, a harsh and unforgiving place. There aren't too many spots in it fit for (meta)humans to live, other than the military town of Barstow and a few scattered corporate military bases. There sure as drek isn't anyplace like the sprawl you're likely used to. No glass towers, no Stuffer Shacks, no climate-controlled shopping arcologies. The desert is its own world—a world of strange magical creatures, fierce nomadic bands, solitary shamans and powerful magical sites, where only the strong and cunning survive.

>>>>>("Where only the strong and cunning survive?" Laying it on a little thick, aren't we?)<<<<<

—D. Bunka (22:31:17/03-004-57)

>>>>>(Not really, D-boy. The Mojave is a pretty forbidding place. Just look at the climate alone. The desert boasts the highest recorded temperatures on the North American continent, 56.7° C—and that's in the shade. You really can fry eggs on the rocks—and boil your brains if you're not careful. Hell, look at the old place names here—Death Valley, Furnace Creek, Devil's Golf

Course. If you're going to head into the Mojave without a guide (something I strongly advise against), you'd better make sure you bring plenty of water, you'd better make sure your wheels are in good working order, and you'd better stick to the paved roads. Cuz if you get stranded out here you could very well end up dead.)<<<<<

—Desert Rat (22:40:05/03-04-57)

TRAVELING IN THE MOJAVE

The Mojave covers a vast stretch of southeastern California. It's bordered by the Inyo Forest on the north, Aztlan on the south, the Ute Nation on the east, and the Sierra Nevada mountains on the west. The California Rangers keep up with fixing potholes pretty well, but no one's resurfaced the roads in decades, so if you're going to drive around out here, get yourself a hovercraft or something with four-wheel drive. You'll regret if later if you don't—probably right around the time the buzzards are closing in.

Here's a quick-and-dirty road map for all you enterprising tourists. Major routes through the Mojave are CTTR 15 between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, CTTR 14/395 between Los Angeles and Reno, and CTTR 40 between Barstow and Phoenix. You'll pretty much have the roads to yourself, except for the occasional Ranger patrol. Should you run into a Ranger, do what the man says and pay any tickets he gives you; the Rangers don't bother hassling the law-abiding, and scofflaws who drive like idiots deserve to pay for the damage they cause to the roads. The highways are California's lifeline, and the Rangers are our only means of ensuring that the roads stay fit to travel on.

>>>>(Plus if you don't pay the required tolls or speeding fines or whatever, the Ranger'll put a missile up your tail pipe.)<<<<<

—Jammer (22:55:34/03-04-57)

Air travelers have a few options, provided you can swing the necessary datawork. Palm Springs has a small airport, and landing strips are also located at Barstow and the Mojave's corp-owned military bases. Be sure to get clearance before landing at any of these airstrips, unless you're looking for death by fireball. There's not much law in these parts, and the locals tend to shoot first and ask questions later.

>>>>>(No train routes?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (23:30:46/03-04-57)

>>>>>(Can you see some railroad company paying to lay down klicks of track across the burning sands of the Mojave? I can't.)<<<<<

—WindSprint (23:45:04/03-04-57)

POPULATED AREAS

First things first; let's talk about where the people are. Most of the folks reading this board are interested in making a little cred, I'll wager, and you can't do much of that without civilization. Those of you drawn to the desert for its magic may not care much about anything else, but you need to know where to find water and food and shelter. That, too, means civilization, or the closest thing to it.

PALM SPRINGS

The resort of Palm Springs oozes corporate luxury and decadence. Nobody leaves you alone; the assumption is that if you're in Palm Springs, you're far too important to be left without your own personal flotilla of fawning servants. From the minute you land at the airport and get whisked away by your own private limo and driver, someone is always on hand to pamper you and cater to your whims.

>>>>>(So forget privacy, chumbos. If you're in Palm Springs for biz, work out some way of discussing your plans in nice, harmless language that won't set off anyone's alarm bells.)<<<<<

—Mr. Majestyk (24:35:24/03-04-57)

>>>>>(The VIP treatment isn't just to impress visiting corp skags. It's also for protection. At least three of every five people who fall all over themselves to do your bidding during your stay are corp informers getting paid a fat fee to keep an eye on you.)<<<<<

—Corp Watcher (24:50:33/03-04-57)

>>>>>(Not all that fat a fee. A hefty bribe can work wonders, provided you're careful about sounding out potential stoolies.)<<<<<

—Walker (01:11:35/03-05-57)

As for the surroundings, the place literally has to be seen to be believed. Palm Springs is proof positive that wealth doesn't buy good taste—you'll find more expensive kitsch per square meter in this corp haven than anywhere else on Earth, except possibly Las Vegas. That's no accident, either; the corporate wheeler-dealers who made Palm Springs what it is today consciously modeled it on their fave casino Wonderland. Just to give you one example, the four-star Las Palmas Hotel has an open-air courtyard full of tiny fountains. Each little round fountain is filled with brightly colored sand, from which the lips of small chrome pipes can just be seen protruding. When the fountains are playing—which is all the time—jets of water shoot out of the pipes and leap gaily from one fountain to the other, with barely a drop spilling on the blue and pink and canary-yellow sand. What you see is a gazillion ropes of water, flying through the air like live things and sparkling like diamonds in the sunlight. Think about it—all that water, made to perform tricks like a dancing bear or something, just to amuse some rich corporate toadies who want to hang out in the desert without hanging out in the desert. It's a pretty spectacle, but the amount of cred spent and water wasted is enough to make you sick if you think about it for too long.

>>>>>(They use even more water to stage a fake volcanic eruption outside the Miramar Hotel. The Miramar stole this idea from someplace in Vegas, I don't remember where. Just after dark falls every night, the giant plascrete "volcanic island" in front of the hotel starts to rumble and shake. After a few seconds, they turn on red floodlights to make it look like lava's starting to boil. Then water

starts to bubble over the edges of the "volcano" and tumble down the sides (which are carved in little stair steps for a more artistic effect). The floodlights color the water red, of course, keeping up the whole "boiling lava" illusion. (Not real well, to my mind, but then you can't have everything.) Finally, after about five or six solid minutes of water flow and recorded rumblings, a geyser shoots out of the top of the "volcano" and spatters the innermost edge of the watching crowd. I don't even want to think about the liters of water they use on this baby, just to entertain passers-by for six minutes. When I first saw it, I didn't know whether to admire the sheer effort it must have taken to rig it up or be appalled at the waste.)<<<<<

—Irish Rose (01:18:35/03-05-57)

And then there's the shopping. Omae, Palm Springs is a compulsive shopper's idea of Heaven. The streets are lined with boutiques hawking the latest fashions from Tokyo and Paris, Italian leather shoes that cost enough to feed a family of four for a couple of weeks, wiz electronic gadgets that do more things than the most avid techno-weenie could ever dream up, gourmet food in packaging so fancy it might as well be solid gold ... you name it, some shop in Palm Springs has it on the shelf or can get it for you in less than a day. If you have any cred left after a hard day's consuming, you can relax in a four-star restaurant or fern-filled patisserie, where impeccably dressed waiters will bring you anything your little heart desires. Or stop in any of the impeccably furnished bistros for a cup of real coffee, and eyeball the Ares board member chatting up the latest simsense star. You're in the Land of the Beautiful People—relax, enjoy, and don't think about the cost. (Money is *such* a retro concept ... *so* tiresome, you know?)

>>>>>(Keeping your very own simsense star in Palm Springs has become the latest thing for the fashionable corp exec. Some neighborhoods have been completely taken over by "the girls." You can spot them shopping during the week under the watchful eyes of their driver/bodyguards, just waiting for their weekend visitors.)<<<<<

—Inquiring Mind (01:28:34/03-05-57)

If you're running out of money and you feel lucky or if you just want to splash some more of your copious cred around, check out the abundant casinos. All done up in the latest retro-moderne style, the gambling dens of Palm Springs are designed to catch the eye with glitter and flash. If you look around for long enough, you'll see the desperation underneath. Look—over there is the corp CEO who spends all his time at the blackjack table because he doesn't feel happy anywhere else. And over *there*? That's the overpaid "private secretary" with the gorgeous bod who's playing five slot machines at once in the vain hope of winning enough to buy her freedom from her lousy job. The casinos are full of sad cases like that, all pretending they're having a great time in this corporate Shangri-la.

>>>>>(Right. "Money can't buy happiness." Tell that to my sibs in the barrio in L.A. Enough money to buy our own food instead of relying on free nutrisoy that tastes like drek would sure buy them lots of happiness.)<<<<<

—Dante (03:22:13/03-05-57)

>>>>>(Money can cure a lot of problems if you've got enough of it. But it can't make you happy with your life, or a decent person. You watch these corp skags long enough, you start to see that in their own way they're no better off than us in the Barrens. It's just a different kind of pain.)<<<<<

—Eliot (04:01:44/03-05-57)

From the casinos, most of the well-plastered clientele moves on to what Palm Springs PR brochures euphemistically describe as "adult-entertainment complexes." These are the brothels, BTL dens and sex shows where the corp boys and girls can let their hair down, so to speak. Like every other establishment in town, these places are well patrolled, so the customers don't have to worry about getting their heads smashed or their pockets picked. The yaks and mafia boys oversee the day-to-day operations.

>>>>>(Yaks and mafia boys? I thought Palm Springs was supposed to be safe.)<<<<<

—Tyro (05:52:33/03-05-57)

>>>>>(These aren't just any old yaks and mobsters. Some very highly placed oyabuns and bosses personally oversee the action here, as a personal favor to their corporate pals. In fact, Palm Springs is one of the few places where you'll see crime bosses and corp execs hanging out together openly. You have to remember, Palm Springs is a very special place. The corps that run the town are vey careful about who gets in. No runners, no reporters, no one who might spoil Joe Exec's little weekend getaway. And there's an unspoken agreement between the corps that no one will try to snatch anyone else's executives or pull any other funny business. The crime bosses operate under the same kind of rules. Everyone's very careful not to disturb the peace.)<<<<<

—Kolchak (06:39:20/03-05-57)

Palm Springs also has less expensive amusements. Almost all of the major corporations maintain their own compounds for their executives and guests, and these places have all the amenities—Olympic-sized swimming pools, multiple Jacuzzis, workout rooms with *everything*, and so on. During the day, visitors can play a few holes at one of Palm Spring's climate-controlled championship golf courses, or visit one of the giant trideo multiplexes and catch the latest hot release.

>>>>>(Climate-controlled golf courses?)<<<<<

—Duffer (10:39:14/03-05-57)

>>>>>(That's right. Rain or shine, hot or cold, it don't matter. These places are covered with huge transparent ferroplastic domes. And they have real grass inside! But the best part are the caddies—perky, athletic young women with simsense-star looks, always eager to serve.)<<<<<

—Putter (10:47:40/03-05-57)

>>>>>(Male chauvinist pig.)<<<<<
—Riot Grrrl (11:05:12/03-05-57)

>>>>>(About half the caddies are perky, athletic young men. It ain't only guys who go golfing, and then there are always the folks who swing the other way. You never know what may appeal to the customer ...)<<<<<
—Slim (11:25:36/03-05-57)

If you're feeling adventurous, test your hunting skills at one of the safari parks just outside Palm Springs proper. These private estates are still inside the walls of the enclave, but they're far enough away from the shops and casinos to give the illusion of wilderness. Safari-park customers can amuse themselves gunning for rhinoceroses, mountain gorillas, elephants, buffalo—or other animals that no longer survive in the wild.

>>>>>(If you're willing to pay a little extra, you can go after two-legged prey—that's right, humans or metahumans. You want to hunt elf, troll, ork or human? No problem. Just let the park operator know a few days ahead of time. He'll procure you some "prey," then let the poor slot loose in the park. Every park has a fence and armed guards around its perimeter, so the prey can't get out.)<<<<<
—Hatari (11:23:45/03-05-57)

>>>>>(So how do I go about crashing this party?)<<<<<
—Mongo (15:59:02/03-05-57)

>>>>>(The best way to get into Palm Springs is to get yourself invited. That way your host can pick up your tab, and you won't have to worry about the security. All entry points to the town are closely guarded, and the streets are patrolled by some of the most well-trained corporate security personnel in the business. You may not be able to spot them, but believe me, they're there.)<<<<<
—Scenester (16:23:07/03-06-57)

>>>>>(If you don't have powerful corporate friends or the bankroll you'll need to pass as someone who belongs, you can always try to get hired at one of the local businesses that cater to the corporate crowd. Many of the restaurants, clubs and such are wholly or partly corp-owned, however, and all of them screen prospective employees pretty closely.)<<<<<
—Corporate Dropout (16:48:41/03-06-57)

>>>>>(So get good datawork. It'll cost, but that kind of investment pays for itself.)<<<<<
—Pragmatist (16:54:22/03-05-57)

Palm Springs is also known for its body shops—that's "reconstructive-surgery clinics," according to the brochures. Lots of corp skags love these places; there's just something they find comforting about the thought that their money can buy them a whole new face and body. Don't like your eye color? Change it. Want to look more like novahot simsense star Winona Flying Horse? Drop a few thousand nuyen, stroll into a chop shop and come out with a new nose, fuller lips, and cheekbones sharp enough to cut bread. Or you can look like the ever-so-sexy Murray Hopper, simsense dream man—just buy yourself a stronger chin and a restored hairline. For a few more thousand nuyen, a customer can have breasts or buttocks resculpted, or get some of those unwanted pounds sucked away. No more tiresome diets or exercise programs—just chop chop and you're all set. For readers of this board, of course, the body shops serve a different purpose ... if you've got the cred, that is.

>>>>>(A few of the more expensive clinics can change your retinal pattern and genetically alter your fingerprints.)<<<<<
—Hawkeye (17:03:21/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Now whoever said that cosmetic surgery had no practical application?)<<<<<
—Django (17:26:19/03-06-57)

>>>>>(I've also heard that a certain Palm Springs chop shop is a real favorite with older corporate execs. Apparently, this place offers a cyber enhancement that provides a solution to, ah, certain "bedroom difficulties.")<<<<<
—Technogeek (17:39:52/03-06-57)

BARSTOW AND THE MILITARY BASES

Barstow is the largest corporate military base in the Mojave. In fact, most people consider Barstow a town in its own right, even though nearly 90 percent of its 3,000 residents live on the military base. The town lies just off CTTR 15, the Trans-Mojave Highway connecting L.A. and Las Vegas. Near the base, just inside Barstow's "city limits," is the California Rangers' regional HQ. The Ranger depot is easy to recognize; just look for the big, ramshackle building with all the banged-up vehicles parked outside.

>>>>>(Don't be fooled by the battered look of the wheels, either. Anything parked in the Rangers' compound has plenty of oomph left in it, even if it looks like it's held together with spit, baling wire and hot-melt glue.)<<<<<
—Jammer (17: 50:32/03-06-57)

Barstow is as different from Palm Springs as night from day. It's almost as corporate—not surprising, considering who owns it—but the residents of Barstow are there to work rather than play. You won't see lots of money here, or fashionable clothes and flashy cars. You will see a lot of busy people going about their business, many of them in corporate security uniforms. More different corporate colors go walking across Barstow's grounds and trotting up the barracks steps than you'll see anywhere else in the world, except maybe downtown Denver. Everyone from Ares Macrotech to Mitsuhama has a sizable security contingent here, ostensibly to guard against Aztlaner and Ute incursions into California territory. (The roster of corp soldiers doesn't include Aztechnology—surprise, surprise.) In fact, Barstow and the other corporate-owned military bases provide conveniently isolated locations for weapons-testing facilities and genetic-engineering labs.



>>>>>(Sounds like an enterprising team of shadowrunners could pick up some real wiz gear at these bases.)<<<<<
—Big Bad Bob (18:11:13/03-06-57)

>>>>>(You'd have to be really enterprising to pull it off, Big Bad. Remember, these facilities are in the middle of a desert. There's virtually no way to sneak up on them—the military boys'll spot you before you get within five miles. And like just about everyone else out here, they'll shoot first and save the questions for later. And they don't take kindly to people flying over their facilities, either. Just last month some moron decided to buzz the Fuchi base at Blythe. They blew his Avenger to bits.)<<<<<
—Madeline ((18:23:44/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Well who said anything about sneaking up on them? Personally, I've always harbored a secret wish to pursue a career in a corporate military organization.)<<<<<
—Big Bad Bob (18:30:29/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Good luck with the background check.)<<<<<
—Killroy (18:42:11/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Could be worth the trouble. Think about it. If you're going to such lengths to keep people from snooping around your base, it means you've probably got some big secrets—like whatever it was that Ares detonated at its Mescal Spring facility last fall. People could feel the tremors as far north as San Francisco, and it rattled the Azzies enough that they scrambled three squadrons of fighters along their northern border. I know for a fact that a lot of very powerful people were demanding an explanation of what happened, but Ares still won't say anything about it.)<<<<<
—Watchman (18:58:49/03-06-57)

Barstow is a cross between a spit-and-polish military installation and a company town, complete with a tiny Main Street. Main Street runs all of three blocks, lined with such small-town staples as a pie-and-coffee diner, a small general store, a pharmacy and a medical clinic. Despite this effort at the cozy small-town look, Barstow fails to come across as a homey kind of a place; somehow, the businesslike grimness of the rest of the base makes Main Street look like a pasteboard-and plywood facade on a backlot where they're filming a Western. The scary thing is that Barstow is the most normal-looking of the lot; at least someone there made a token stab at creating a livable atmosphere. The remaining corp-owned bases are worse.

All the bases, Barstow included, are heavily secured and patrolled to protect their secrets from prying eyes and their personnel from some of the more dangerous critters out in the desert. Guard towers and electrified fences surround most of them, and Barstow lies behind a thick plascrete wall. Even though everyone on the corporate bases has a legal right to be there, these places still look and feel somewhat like prisons. They're cold and sterile; no houses, no parks or other usable public spaces, just weapons ranges and research labs and long, skinny blockhouses where the troops live and sleep.

>>>>>(Even family living quarters for married personnel are nothing but barracks with a few more partitions inside, so they can make believe they've got real bedrooms. Living in one of those for a year put a real strain on my marriage, I can tell you. Of course, the whole corporate-military atmosphere didn't help, either.)<<<<<
—X-Guard (19:10:22/03-06-57)

As of this writing, the other corporate military bases I know of are located at Lone Pine, the old town of Mojave, Mescal Spring, Needles and Blythe. All of these lie along the major roadways that pass through the area, which enables the corps that operate the facilities to monitor traffic passing into and out of the Mojave. Bear in mind that other corp installations may exist, though they won't be very big or very permanent. The local environment can't support too many built-to-last military bases, so corporations that need extra facilities for some weapons test or other tend to build prefab sites for temporary use.

>>>>>(These temp sites are a lot easier to crash than the real military bases. Trick is finding out who's putting something up where, and whether the stuff they'll be testing at the site is worth the risk of sleazing in. The corps keep their plans well shielded from public view, so getting the information takes some digging. (But then, if we couldn't dig up the drek, we wouldn't be in this biz. Right?))<<<<<
—Eslipper (19:21:33/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Anybody know anything about rogue military units at abandoned UCAS bases out here? I keep hearing rumors about UCAS soldiers who bucked their Prez's orders to pull out in 2036–37. They supposedly didn't agree with the Secession, so they voted against it with their feet.)<<<<<
—Curious George (19:34:42/03-06-57)

>>>>>(You're thinking of the units in Big Sur.)<<<<<
—Tin Lizzie (19:38:22/03-06-57)

>>>>(No, there are rogue soldiers in the Mojave too. I've run across one band of these guys who call themselves the Minutemen—you know, after the original colonists who fought the Revolutionary War. They used to be stationed at the China Lake Naval Weapons Center and the Fort Irwin Military Reservation, and they stayed there when the rest of the UCAS troops pulled out. A few years later, a combined military force from Ares and several Japanese corporations pushed the Minutemen out of Fort Irwin and into the northwest half of China Lake. They've held on to that territory since about 2041 or 2042, mostly because the corps are satisfied with Fort Irwin and the piece of the old Naval Weapons Center that they managed to take. For the past fifteen years or so, the Minutemen have been holed up at China Lake, venturing out every so often to make nuisance raids against the corp forces (which they regard as an illegal army of occuaption on American soil) and to nail the occasional big, nasty magical beastie that comes wandering out of the deep desert. They're supposed to be



pretty tough fighters, and their equipment is pretty decent even if most of it is twenty years old.)<<<<<

—Madeleine (19:45:33/03-06-57)

>>>>>(They have real trouble getting spare parts, though. Mostly they've survived by stealing newer and better gear in their anti-corp raids. No one's sure how many Minutemen there are—I've heard rumors of everything from a few platoons to a fragging regiment. I figure the more accurate estimates are on the smaller end.)<<<<<

—Buzzard (19:56:21/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Mercenaries looking for a place to go to ground awhile sometimes join the Minutemen or other rogue groups for a few months. There's a bunch of "independent" marines operating out of Twenty-Nine Palms Marine Corps base, not far from the Joshua Tree National Monument—merc friends of mine have spent time there. They call themselves the Desert Rats, and they spend a fair amount of time "discouraging" people from harming the Joshua trees. If some talismonger hires you to get bits of the trees for him, think twice—the Desert Rats are likely to make you regret you ever took on that job.)<<<<<

—Sidewinder (20:04:55/03-06-57)

THE DESERT

Lots of people claim that no one really lives out in the wild desert, simply because people can't survive the harsh environment. Take it from me—anyone who says that is wrong. It's true that once you get away from Palm Springs and the military bases, you can travel for quite a ways without seeing another living thing. But that doesn't mean there are no living things out there. And it doesn't mean they can't see you. Think about the implications of that before you come trekking out here—the Mojave Desert is not for the faint-hearted. If you must travel through the Mojave, the safest thing to do is just assume you're being watched all the time and expect to be surprised. Because the only time you're going to see any of the desert's natives—(meta)human or otherwise—is when they want you to.

The natives you're most likely to see are the Anasazi, a motley collection of small, nomadic bands who range throughout the Mojave. They claim to be descendants of the historical tribe of the same name, though no one really believes it. On the other hand, no one has a better explanation of who they are, and they're not the kind of people you want to argue with. Sometimes—rarely, though—an Anasazi band will trade with people at a military base,

but generally these folks keep to the desert. No one knows for sure where they get their food and clothing, their weapons and ammunition, or their vehicles. One fanciful story has it that they create all their gear magically out of thin air, but I'm sure we all know how much credence to give *that* one. Everyone I know, however, agrees that the Anasazi are not folks to be messed with. Their ragtag caravans may not look like much, but they pack enough physical and magical punch to rob military supply convoys (which they've done on more than one occasion, much to the corps' chagrin).

>>>>>(And they pack enough punch to control the few remaining freshwater springs in the Mojave. From what I understand, the Anasazi view themselves as caretakers of the Mojave. To them, that apparently involves keeping outsiders from abusing the desert and its resources—the most important being water. No matter how thirsty you are, don't take water from any spring until you've gotten permission to do so from whichever Anasazi band controls it. If you do take water without permission and they catch up with you, you'll be lucky to get off with paying a large fine. They may demand nuyen, food, weapons, ammunition, your vehicle or all of the above. Or they may decide to kill you. Anasazi bands also collect "tribute" from outsiders passing through the desert—anything of value you're carrying that happens to catch someone's eye. Do not resist paying. You may think you can defeat a band of Anasazi, but a few warriors in each band always seem to be hiding just out of sight. Trust me on this one. I had a few friends who found this out the hard way.)<<<<<

—Lawrence (20:15:41/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Caretakers of the desert? What a bunch of bulldrek. These so-called Anasazi are nothing but a bunch of bandits.)<<<<<

—Maj. Minor (20:20:34/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Who are the Anasazi, anyway? The historical ones, I mean.)<<<<<

—Curious George (20:30:44/03-06-57)

>>>>>(The historical Anasazi were a Native American tribe that used to live throughout the Southwest. As I remember it, the last of them died out some years ago.)<<<<<

—Histobuff (20:36:33/03-06-57)

>>>>>(If you do have a run-in with a band of Anasazi, you may be able to get a rival band to help you. There are about fifteen different Anasazi bands in the Mojave, and they distrust one another as much as they do outsiders—maybe even more. Of course, ingratiating yourself with one band may make you enemies in other bands, so think long and hard before you get involved in Anasazi politics.)<<<<<

—Comanchero (20:41:11/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Come on, enough with this mysterious-savage bulldrek. These folks aren't all that different from any sprawl gang. They collect tribute from outsiders passing through their turf, like any other gang. The only difference is their turf happens to be the entire Mojave Desert. And their alleged hostility to outsiders does not keep them from dealing with the t-bird smugglers who operate along the Mojave's border with the Ute Nation. In fact, those smugglers are the Anasazi's mysterious source of weapons and supplies.)<<<<<

—D. Bunker (20:48:33/03-06-57)

Other than the scattered Anasazi bands, the occasional military supply convoy, and the rare t-bird smuggler, the only other humans you're likely to encounter in the Mojave are the solitary shamans who live in the area. Generally, these folks like the Mojave's mountain ranges and mystical locations, but they can pop up anywhere. Most of them follow the Coyote, Eagle, Raven, Snake or Phoenix totems. And thankfully, they don't normally go out looking for trouble. Most of them like to be left alone and only take the time to seriously mess with people who mess with them first. Most of them, anyway.

>>>>>(Not all, chum. I found that out the hard way. One night I was passing by not far from Ubehebe Peak, about ten klicks or so away—and never mind why, it was biz—when I happened to run across this old guy jandering up the road. Now, the road we were on was a dinky little two-lane track in rotten repair; I'd guess the California Rangers don't get too near Ubehebe if they can help it. And the guy looked really old and really tired and he was moving real slow. So I did what I thought was the neighborly thing—I slowed down and offered him a lift. The guy glares at me, and his dark brown eyes turn this weird gold color. Then he tries to shove his walking stick through my open window. I hadn't opened it very far—I'm not that stupid—so all he could manage to do was brush my head with it. I floored it and took off. Next thing I know, I start feeling sick as a hell hound that can't belch. I pull over, stumble out of my truck, and toss up the contents of my stomach. Several times. I also noticed I was burning up—and for those of you who know something about desert nights, you know it was fragging cold outside. I barely made it back inside the truck before passing out. I woke up about dawn, feeling washed-out but otherwise OK. Lucky for me I wasn't too far from the little town of Owenyo. When I got there, I told a few locals my story and asked about the old guy. They told me I'd run across a Scorpion shaman—which was a new one on me, I can tell you.)<<<<<

—Alejandro (21:02:34/03-06-57)

ANIMALS AND PLANTS

(Meta)human inhabitants of the Mojave can be dangerous enough, but native plants and animals can be downright deadly. More important for you outsiders to know, the Mojave's animal life is a lot more abundant than its (meta)human population, so you're far more likely to run into some nasty wildlife. So far, the Mojave's forbidding conditions have prevented any zoologist from classifying all of the species here, but I can give you a quick rundown on the paranormal species I know of that are unique to the Mojave.

There's the borax burro, a silly-looking animal that should be taken far more seriously than most people think. The reason? This critter's spit can eat right through your armored clothing, and it

doesn't stop when it hits meat. The burro spit just keeps on dissolving until it hits bone. And they'll bite you if they get frightened or angry or confused—which happens a lot, as they're not the swiftest things on four legs. The only clue you'll get that you're dealing with a paracritter rather than a mundane wild burro is size; the borax burro stands about a meter and a half at the shoulder, whereas the normal wild burro is only about a meter tall. So look carefully.

>>>>>(A vicious donkey. Now I've heard everything.)<<<<<
—Skeptic (22:01:44/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Don't laugh, chummer. These things have nasty tempers and they can move pretty damn fast when they want to. They're a lot more sure-footed and graceful than they look, so don't be fooled. And that corrosive slobber is for real—I have a bad scar that runs all the way from my right ankle up to my hip to prove it.)<<<<<
—Basher (23:50:12/03-06-57)

>>>>>(Hey Basher, didn't you ever hear of a carrot and a stick? You're such a jackass! Ha, ha, ha!)<<<<<
—Joker (23:59:22/03-06-57)

The nova scorpion is another beastie to beware of—not that regular scorpions are any picnic, but nova scorpions are worse. They're easily identifiable by size—these puppies are a meter or so long from pincers to stinger. Unfortunately, they're also a pretty gold color that blends right into the desert sands. They're most active at night, preferring to snooze in a shady spot by day (like any sensible desert creature). Most often they won't attack unless provoked, but unprovoked attacks have been known to happen. If you get stung by one, expect nasty nerve damage. If you don't have much body mass, expect death—this critter's venom is lethal stuff.

>>>>>(At least you don't have to worry about one of these things crawling into your boot at night.)<<<<<
—Gordon (09:23:15/03-07-57)

>>>>>(No, but you might want to check your car trunk in the morning!)<<<<<
—Akuma-boy (10:31:22/03-07-57)

Slime mold is also dangerous, though only when wet. This ... stuff, critter, whatever ... is incredibly weird looking—kind of like a frothy, gray and white fried egg. Hydrated slime mold—the dangerous kind—turns into a pale, glistening jelly about a meter in diameter.

>>>>>(Ewwwwww ...)<<<<<
—Outtatown (10:50:22/03-07-57)

You'll find this gunk most often in relatively dark, moist places like caves or under overhanging rocks. The hydrated mold drips corrosive goo and binds itself to whoever it falls on. This isn't





manna from heaven, OK? If it falls on you, get it off any way you can or it'll eat through anything lighter than mil-spec heavy body armor. The dry mold is harmless, except maybe to your aesthetic sensibilities.

Finally, there's the road racer. This critter isn't so much dangerous as annoying—it likes to steal things to use as nest-building materials. It's also attracted to shiny objects—so don't bring your silver-plated pistol out here, or you may lose it to a big cousin of the roadrunner. Like the roadrunners it apparently sprang from, the road racer can put out impressive speed, though it can't fly worth a damn except for short distances.

>>>>>(They make good eating, too ... if you can sneak up on one and pop it.)<<<<<

—Diamond Jim (11:20:32/03-07-57)

Aside from these unique paracritters, the Mojave is also home to a variety of paranormal desert species found in other parts of the world as well: the aardwolf, chimera, deathrattle, gila demon, greater armadillo, gyre, juggernaut, lesser thunderbird, rock lizard, saber-tooth cat, siren, stormcrow and tachypus.

Mutant Animals

In addition to the paracritters, you'll also find mutated specimens of mundane desert species. Don't be thinking that the muties are harmless because they're not necessarily magical; lots of them can be just as dangerous as any para-beast. No one knows for sure what causes these mutations, but we can make some good guesses. Can you say "tainted or toxic springs"? How about "illegal toxic dump sites"—all of which are scattered throughout the desert? Betcha can! Reported mutant specimens include mountain lions, coyotes, bats, hawks, tarantulas, trout, tortoises, lizards and snakes. Mutant animals are usually larger and more aggressive than their normal counterparts. A lot of them also have mange, albinism, bizarre bony deposits and the like. And now for the really scary part—some mutant critters may exhibit the kind of powers normally exclusive to Awakened species.

>>>>>(Did I read that right? These mutant critters may possess any paranormal power?)<<<<<

—Marty S. (11:14:27/03-07-57)

>>>>>(You got it. If you come across a mutant critter, you can't be sure what kind of powers it has. And to top it off, the mutant critters don't always look all that different from their mundane cousins.)<<<<<

—Marlin P. (11:23:10/03-07-57)

>>>>>(I don't know that it's all bad. I mean, where else but the Mojave can a fisherman bag a twenty-five-pound trout?)<<<<<

—Winkelman (11:51:09/03-07-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, and where else can a 100-pound hawk with heat-sensing eyes bag a man?)<<<<<

—Marlin P. (12:04:15/03-07-57)

>>>>>(Nowhere else. That's why wealthy hunters—wealthy hunters with death wishes, that is—have been known to pay up to one million nuyen for a chance to go after some of the Mojave's big game. Not only are the potential trophies truly one of a kind, but there's a real element of risk involved, considering the size and powers of some of the critters out there—not to mention the Anasazi bands, who view outside hunters as poachers. A hunter can easily become prey in the Mojave. If you're really interested, visit the Mojave Outfitters store in Palm Springs. Ask for Joe Bob—he knows a few guys who'll take you into the desert.)<<<<<

—Bwana (12:13:09/03-07-57)

Magical Plants

Several species of magical plants grow in the Mojave, which the Anasazi bands use to temporarily give themselves abilities similar to the powers of Awakened beings. No formal studies have yet been made of these plants, and few outsiders even know they exist. (So readers, do us local folk a favor and don't spout off about this stuff to anyone who might be able and/or willing to exploit it in a major way. I'm including this information as a public service to my fellow shadowfolk, and I don't take kindly to having my good deeds abused.)

Rather than blather about the juju plants in my own words, I've uploaded a brief excerpt from the personal notes of a friend of mine who spent some time in the Mojave last year: Dr. Alejandro Smith, who once served on the faculty of the old University of Berkeley. Alejandro is one of the few outsiders who has lived among the Anasazi, and he learned about the plants and their uses from his Anasazi hosts.

The Anasazi call these plants their "spiritual helpers" and believe that the desert bestows them on the Anasazi to help the bands fulfill their obligations as caretakers and protectors of the Mojave. Each Anasazi band contains a *brujo*, or medicine man, who collects and prepares the plants and tightly controls their use among the members of the band. The Anasazi view the use of these plants as part of their birthright and fiercely protect the secrets of their locations and preparations. In fact, any band member who reveals this information to outsiders may be put to death. For this reason, I was never permitted to accompany the brujo and his assistants when they collected magical plants or to be present during their actual preparation.

The preparation known as **animal tongue** is a pasty mixture prepared primarily from the pulp of the manzana cactus. When ingested, the preparation provides the user with the abilities similar to the animal control power observed in Awakened beings. The Anasazi warriors typically use animal tongue for protection against animal attacks and to reconnoiter large areas through the eyes of desert birds. The brujo and his assistants also used the preparation to induce mystical visions.

The **little smoke** mixture is a blend of mosses and green leafy substances that I was unable to identify. When smoked, the mixture provides the user with abilities similar to the concealment and confusion powers associated with Awakened beings. Once, I observed the brujo and several band members use the preparation. Minutes later, they concealed the band from a passing military convoy.

Small amounts of **spirit strength**, prepared from small black mushrooms the brujo gathered, were often distributed to the band's warriors before any expected combat and before hunting expeditions. Apparently, this pasty mixture boosts the user's abilities, similar to the Awakened powers of enhanced physical attributes, enhanced movement, enhanced reactions, and enhanced senses.

I was unable to determine the ingredients of the preparation known as **witch's moss.** When ingested, this green, porridge-like mixture provides the user with an ability similar to the paralyzing touch power of Awakened beings.

Immortal flower, which is prepared from the petals of a small Mojave flower of the same name, provides a user with an ability similar to the regeneration power of Awakened beings. Like many of the items in the Anasazi pharmocopoeia, immortal flower is typically ingested prior to combat situations.

Rock lizard blood is a bluish-green paste made from the mashed pulp of the desert's weeping tree. When ingested, the mixture provides the user with abilities similar to the Awakened powers of immunity to pathogens and immunity to poisons. The brujo of an Anasazi band typically distributes small amounts of the substance to all band members whenever the band arrives at a new freshwater spring.

>>>>>(Man oh man, I think my running career is about to really take off. I'm gonna grab me a bushel basket and take a little trip out to the desert.)<<<<<

—Basher (20:11:57/03-07-57)

>>>>>(I'd hold on there if I were you, Basher. It's not quite as simple as going out and picking your own. First of all, these plants are rare. You're not going to find them just growing along the desert highways. Second, these plants contain some powerful stuff, and you could seriously frag yourself over if you go running out and start chewing on a cactus. The preparation is very important. That's why the Anasazi brujo never allowed Smith to watch when he cooked these goodies up. Hell, the stuff is dangerous even for a brujo. Think about it. These mixtures aren't prepared in a corporate laboratory somewhere. They're made from wild plants. And you can never be sure how much of an active ingredient a given plant is going to contain. For the same reason, these mixtures go

"stale" after a period of time and lose their effectiveness. Third, the effects of these mixtures are temporary—they're not going to transform you into a superman. And they have a downside as well. Once the effects of a mixture end, the user experiences a crash. Any or all of your normal abilities may be reduced while your body recovers from what you've just put it through. And if you use a mixture often enough, you may suffer permanent damage. So give it a little thought before you traipse off into the Mojave for a little mushroom picking.)<<<<<

—Castaneda (20:19:37/03-07-57)

>>>>>(I've heard that Saeder-Krupp and a few of the other biomedical biggies are offering big nuyen for samples of these substances. Now I understand why. Just imagine if you could synthesize the active ingredients in these plants.)<<<<<

—Prospector (23:51:09/03-07-57)

>>>>>(That's just the kind of corporate greed the Anasazi are committed to protecting the desert from.)<<<<<

—Green Girl (01:45:13/03-08-57)

MAGICAL HOT SPOTS

Weird magic abounds in the Mojave, and it seems to be a big draw for shadowfolk and others of the magical persuasion. (I'm not sure why anyone wants to deal with the bizarre and frighteningly powerful magical drek that goes down in this desert, but it's not my place to tell people their business. You want to risk your neck with the strange magic out here, be my guest.) The Big Four magical locations in the Mojave are the Ubehebe Crater, Saratoga Springs, the Lost Mine and the Joshua Tree National Monument. All of these sites exhibit high concentrations of mana, and free spirits tend to pop up around them like weeds in fertile soil. Don't even ask about background count; depending on where you are, it may be damned near imperceptible or shooting off the fragging scale, or anywhere in between. Shamans and mages used to spirits or elementals native to more forgiving landscapes may find the spirits of the Mojave distant, cold, possibly even a tad hostile. In fact, they aren't any more or less dangerous than spirits or elementals elsewhere. They simply come across as harsh and alien because they're shaped by a harsh and alien environment.

>>>>>(I'll back you up on that one. Recently I summoned an earth elemental out near Saratoga Springs. It appeared as a shifting mass of sand and gravel, and it was considerably more terse than most elementals. During the entire time we conversed, it never spoke other than to answer questions, and it never attempted to threaten, cajole or barter with me. Nevertheless, I could sense an unforgiving, almost hostile nature in the spirit. I have no doubt that had the spirit become uncontrolled the consequences for me would have been less than pleasant.

My experience should serve as a warning to all novice magicians out there. The spirits of the Mojave are as harsh as the desert itself—do not trifle with them.)<<<<<

—Barstow Mage (04:46:27:03-08-57)

UBEHEBE CRATER

Ubehebe Crater, part of an extinct volcano, rises in northwestern Death Valley like a desolate moonscape. No plants grow on this parched site, nothing that might provide shelter from the sun or wind. You go out on the crater unprotected, you'll collapse from dehydration within a few hours. In less than a day, you'll be dead. At night, the termperature in Ubehebe drops to zero or below; you can freeze to death real quick. Are all you sprawl kids paying attention? Ubehebe—hell, the whole Mojave—isn't the Barrens. It has dangers you've never had to cope with and can't begin to understand. So if you come here, for frag's sake do some decent research first and ask local people about desert survival. Otherwise you won't live long enough to get whatever wiz magical experience you came looking for.

>>>>>(You can't even dig yourself into the sand for protection against the cold, because the ground in the crater is all fused rock.)<<<<<

—Tracker (18:03:32/02-20/57)

Things do manage to live on and around Ubehebe, despite its harsh terrain—paracritters like borax burros, deathrattles, gyres, nova scorpions, rock lizards and stormcrows. People, however, don't fare too well. As for the other denizens of the crater, you'll find quite an assortment of spirits and elementals, as well as weirder magical beings I can't even begin to describe. I once ran across patches of magical energy that seemed to be aware of me in some way, though there was no consciousness in them sophisticated enough for me to sense. But they followed me when I walked near them, and I had this overpowering, neck-hairs-standing-up feeling that the magical puddles were watching me. Maybe they're protospirits or something—I don't know. I just know they gave me the creeps. I've also seen spirits and elementals bopping around in groups, and I have no idea who summoned them. Friends of mine who've gone walking through the crater tell me they've suddenly stepped into what felt like a lightning bolt—a jolt of electromagnetic energy so intense that it hurt. They said it was like stepping on a low-voltage wire; no permanent damage, but one helluva nasty shock. One chum of mine escorted a small party across the top of Ubehebe, and a cyberboy among them got hit by one of these lightning jolts. It shorted out all his headware. And these things are just the magical manifestations of which I personally am aware—which means there's likely a lot more strange drek out there just waiting for some poor city slicker to fall afoul of it.

>>>>>The atmosphere at Ubehebe is positively spooky. There's lots of spirits, from earth elementals and mountain spirits to ghosts and spirits of things that live in the rocks. I get chilled walking through Ubehebe on a hot day.)<<<<<

—Scotty (03:23:14/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Spooky? The place is fragging dangerous! Especially with all the shapeshifters that seem to be running around the place all the time. That's right, those mountain lions and coyotes could be much more dangerous than they look.)<<<<<

—BlackStone (04:29:55/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Those spirits this chica's talking about, that pop up in groups? Nobody summons them. They manifest spontaneously. The background count at Ubehebe is so fragging high, stuff just happens on its own.)<<<<<

—Magic Man (04:50:22/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Forget summoning spirits out there—they'll slip out of your control in nothing flat and then you're toast. I lost a real good chummer that way last spring—he got flayed to death by a desert spirit that manifested as a sandstorm and engulfed him as soon as it showed up. When it dissipated back into the astral, all that was left of my chummer was a corpse bleeding from a thousand million cuts. We're still not sure if he died from blood loss or suffocation from all the sand clogging his nostrils and throat.)<<<<<

—MacLir (06:10:34/03-11-57)

>>>>>(What're you talking about, high background count? I've been out to Ubehebe, and nothing's happened. I mean, nothing. I tried slinging an itty-bitty fireball spell to light a pile of kindling, and I couldn't even raise a spark. All I got was warm fingertips and a few wisps of smoke. You ask me, something about the background count was dampening my mojo.)<<<<<

—Pyro (06:37:44/03-11-57)

>>>>>(I go out there all the time to commune with the desert spirits. I've never noticed anything unusual about the background count. It's a little on the high side, but not much. I've never had any trouble slinging juice out there, either.)<<<<<

—Sister Wind (08:01:33/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Maybe the crater likes you.)<<<<<

—Crystal Kid (08:09:23/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Weirder things do happen in this world.)<<<<<

—Magic Man (08:14:55/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Shamans tend to visit Ubehebe more often than mages, especially two types—sprawl wannabes who hope they'll be chosen by a wilderness totem, and initiation candidates. While the crater is relatively safe during daylight hours (not even snakes stir in the heat), surviving a night in Ubehebe is a different matter. Lots of the sprawl kids and even some of the initiates who try it end up dead.)<<<<<

—Desert Rat (20:27:03/03-11-57)

>>>>>(To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever managed to construct a permanent lodge on Ubehebe either. Rockslides, windstorms, flash floods and freak accidents seem to collapse any structure within a few weeks of its going up.)<<<<<

—Southlander (23:09:47/03-11-57)

>>>>>(Okay, if this Heebiejeebie Crater is such a bad-ass place, then how come that old dude lives up there? How come the ghosts and goblins don't eat him up?)<<<<<

—Tyro (01:34:22/03-12-57)



>>>>>(The Old Man is one of those "ghosts and goblins," you moron. He's a free spirit. According to local legends, he's been there for about a hundred years now. Some folks say he used to be a miner who went out looking for a lost claim and lost his mind. But the old Indians who used to live around Ubehebe say the Old Man was there for a long, long time before any whites came to the area. Lotsa folks have seen him. I don't know anyone who's actually met the spirit, though, so no one knows what he's really about.)<<<<<

—Desert Rat (02:20:13/03-12-57)

>>>>>(He's not the only one out there, either. Some days, Ubehebe looks like a fragging free spirits' convention.)<<<<<

—Scotty (02:29:46/03-12-57)

SARATOGA SPRINGS

Saratoga Springs lies near the southwestern edge of Death Valley. As one of the few reliable springs in the area, Saratoga attracts waterbirds and other wildlife. An idyllic oasis it's not, though. The plants growing around the water's edge are larger and greener than desert plants should be, and a lot of them look abnormal—not enough to shout at you right off, but enough for you to notice after you've looked at them awhile. They're also said to rustle furiously at odd times, as if a storm wind was stirring them up ... except there's no wind. Not a breath. Rumor has it that some of the plants are even carnivorous; I've heard stories of travelers who went to sleep by the spring and were never seen again. Whether "man-eating plants" got them or not, no one can say ... but those of us who live in the Mojave learn not to dismiss any story out of hand, no matter how wild.

And then there's Saratoga's best-known resident, the uncontrolled lake spirit that lives in the spring's waters. Lots of people claim that the spirit has something to do with the bizarre vegetation: either its energy somehow makes things grow faster and bigger than normal, or it somehow created a bunch of mutant plants to protect its habitat from interlopers. As you might guess, people who believe the man-eating plant stories are the biggest proponents of the latter theory.

>>>>>(It's true that the Saratoga lake spirit is very possessive about that spring. The thing doesn't seem to mind wildlife drinking at the watering hole, but it can be downright nasty to humans and metahumans. More than a few folks have stooped down to drink some of the clear, cool water only to be dragged in and never seen again.)<<<<<

—Forty-Niner (03:21:46/03-12-57)

>>>>>(It ain't the spirit that gets 'em. It's the plants, I'm tellin' ya. Some of 'em grow as high as yer head, with big flat leaves that glom onto ya and dissolve yer bod until there ain't nothin' left.)<<<<<

—Hogwood (03:36:34/03-12-57)

>>>>>(You're chipped out, Hog. Chipped out all the way to hell.)<<<<<

—Gizmo (03:45:57/03-12-57)

>>>>>(The lake spirit usually manifests at dawn and dusk. You can drink in relative safety at other times of the day.)<<<<<

—Comanchero (04:09:51/03-12-57)

THE LOST MINE

Hidden deep within the canyons and badlands of Death Valley is the legendary Lost Mine, rumored to contain nuggets of orichalcum as big as a child's fist. With a prize like that for the taking, it's no wonder that lots of people go prospecting for the place, despite the lack of strong evidence that it ever existed. Enough weird things have happened to enough mine seekers, however, to keep the story alive. Personally, I reserve judgement; like I said before, no story about the Mojave is too bizarre to be true.

No one who's ever gone looking for the Lost Mine has come back reporting that they've found it; in fact, not many people who've gone looking for it have come back at all. Those who have report universal failure, most often because they got hopelessly lost or were prevented from going on by some freak accident. This kind of drek has happened to everybody, from the greenest greenhorn to the savviest desert rat. According to local legend, several mountain spirits guard the mine and use their powers to conceal its entrance—which would certainly explain why experienced desert trackers have no better luck than sprawl babies in searching for it. Other spirits supposedly cause accidents to befall any searchers who come within a kilometer of the mine.

Right now, the two favorite candidates for the site of the Lost Mine are Wild Rose Canyon and the lands around Jubilee Pass. Both places are drenched in magic. Folks who've assensed them say that the rocky landscapes light up the astral sky like beacons, and a lot of people who've wandered around nearby claim to have seen all manner of spirits and ghosts and weird lights and such. Some even claim that the ghosts of long-dead forty-niners, Mojave Indians and other people from different periods of California's history have appeared and warned them to turn back. None of this necessarily proves that Wild Rose or Jubilee Pass is the site of the Lost Mine, or even that the mine exists, but it certainly suggests that something strange is going on.

>>>>>(I'm one of the few lucky survivors of a Lost Mine expedition. We were traveling through Wild Rose, been there about two days. The second night, we camped in a shallow cave with each of us taking turns keeping watch. In the morning, our burros and most of our gear were gone. All three of us swore we hadn't fallen asleep on the job—I know I didn't, and I know my chummers well enough to believe they didn't either. None of us heard a thing, not even so much as the stamp of a hoof. If the burros had run away, we'd have heard something. Well, without our animals and gear, we couldn't get any further. Drek, we were lucky we had enough useful stuff with us in the cave to make it back to civilization. So we headed back the way we'd come as soon as it was safe to travel.

After about a day's backtracking, we ran across the only trace we ever found of our burros—a line of hoofprints pressed into the rock of the flats we happened to be crossing. Now, this was solid rock; no way did our burros mass enough to make hoof prints in it. But our guide recognized the marks of their shoes. Our magic man took one look at the prints, got a queasy look on his face, and told us to get moving. To this day, he won't say what he picked up that made him react like that—all we can get out of him is, "It was bad. I don't want to talk about it." You ask me, there's something out there that doesn't want anyone finding that lost mine.)<<<<<

—Huston (06:32:44/03-12-57)

>>>>>(This is a bunch of buildrek. The Lost Mine is a myth. I'll grant you that the Awakened world contains lots of weird things, but the Lost Mine is not one of them.)<<<<<

—Kahn (04:29:18/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Do I detect some sour grapes?)<<<<<
—Barstow Mage (05:23:49/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Shut up.)<<<<<
—Kahn (06:02:44/03-13-57)

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL MONUMENT

The Joshua Tree National Monument is best known for, you guessed it, its forest of Joshua trees. For those who don't know, Joshua trees are big yucca plants with long, thin leaves and white flowers that you can smell a country mile away. I can't say what the trees were like before the Awakening, but since magic came back to the world the wood of the Joshua tree has been prized as talisman material.

The trees in the Mojave are especially in demand because of the Mojave's reputation as a wellspring of magical power. About five years ago, a large group of overeager talismongers chainsawed nearly half of the trees for their wood, leading more than one local Anasazi band to appoint itself guardian of the forest. The Anasazi regard the trees as sacred and shoot intruders on sight. They get enthusiastic help from a band of rogue marines who go by the name Desert Rats, and who see it as their duty to protect "United States territory" from harm by intruding Aztlaners, Utes, Pueblos or "former US citizens who have sworn allegiance to the illegal UCAS." (That last is a direct quote, told to me by a friend of mine who spent a little down time with them at the Joshua Tree National Monument.) The Desert Rats apparently enjoy shooting Azzies more than anyone else, but they won't have any trouble plugging you whether you look like an Aztlaner or not.

>>>>>(Rumor has it that the Azzies would like to grab the area so that they can take advantage of the heavy concentration of spirits residing there. They seem to regard Aztlaners killed by the Desert Rats and the Anasazi as "acceptable collateral damage.")<<<<<
—BlackStone (20:05:12/03-13-57)

>>>>(There's more spirits in that Joshua-Tree forest than you can shake a stick at, omae. Lots of them live in the fragging trees; that's how come the trees are so abnormally big. And they're so healthy, it's kind of weird—like they're sucking all the life out of the soil and air and water.)<<<<<
—Mr. Green (20:05:12/03-13-57)

>>>>>(All plants suck up nutrients and other life-giving things from soil and air and water. Big deal.)<<<<<
—Kahn (20:25:13/03-13-57)

>>>>>(That's not what I meant. There's a ... I don't know ... a feel to the place like the trees are sucking it dry. Now that I think of it, there isn't much wildlife in that forest, and that's weird, too. I wonder ... ?)<<<<<
—Mr. Green (20:33:12/03-13-57)

>>>>(The spirits manifest in (meta)human form whenever they want to, like dryads or something. They can be any race they want, too: dwarfs, elves, trolls, whatever. You want to tell the difference between a (meta)human and a tree spirit, look at their eyes. The spirits' eyes are a real deep green, the same color as the leaves of the Joshua trees.)<<<<<
—Magic Man (20:48:10/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Is that why the trees move? Because of the spirits?)<<<<<
—Dancer (20:55:22/03-13-57)

>>>>>(What?!)<<<<<
—Skeptic (21:05:12/03-13-57)

>>>>>(They move. If you watch carefully, you can even see them do it. It's real slow, and the soil ripples around them like they're wading through water. They don't leave a trail of disturbed earth behind them, though—it smoothes out, just like water closing over a ship's wake. The ripple effect is only visible for a couple of centimeters around the tree.)<<<<<
—Dancer (21:15:42/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Bulldrek.)<<<<<
—Skeptic (21:19:12/03-13-57)

>>>>>(No, it isn't. I couldn't believe it either the first time I saw it—it was one of those things where you doze off in a little clearing and when you wake up you'd swear the trees are closer. So you tell yourself it's just your imagination, right? Only it kept happening to me. So I tested it—I marked the ground by one tree and kept an eye on it. After a while I fell asleep again, even though I hadn't felt tired when I first sat down to watch. Could've been boredom, could've been some magical whammy from the trees. I don't know. Whatever, when I woke up the tree had moved a good half meter from my mark. I was scared to death it was some kind of weird Anasazi magic thing, that the Anasazi knew where I was and were just playing around until they got bored and decided to kill me. So I hightailed it out of there, not even bothering to collect the wood I'd come after. For a long time, I thought that was why they'd let me out alive. Now I wonder if maybe the Anasazi never spotted me—it was just the tree spirits trying to freak me out. Or maybe they were trying to be friendly.)<<<<<
—Streetwise (21:38:11/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Next you'll be telling us they talk.)<<<<<
—Kahn (21:44:02/03-13-57)

>>>>>(Now there's an interesting thought ...)<<<<<
—Dancer (21:50:03/03-13-57)

THE PLAYERS



>>>>>(We've talked about quite a few interesting and/or important folks in the preceding postings, so I took it on myself to compile a listing of "the players," as they call it down sim-flick way. Most of this stuff is public knowledge. I leave it to you experts to figure out how it all fits and to fill in the juicy details. I skipped right to the point on many of them—I mean, we all know where the Big A is headquartered and who owns SK, right? For all you anal-retentives out there, the names are in alphabetical order. Company divisions are located in the same place as the parent company unless otherwise noted.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (08:00:59/02-01-57)

AFFILIATED ARTISTS INC.

President/CEO: Maureen Skogan
Home Office Location: Westside

Business Profile:

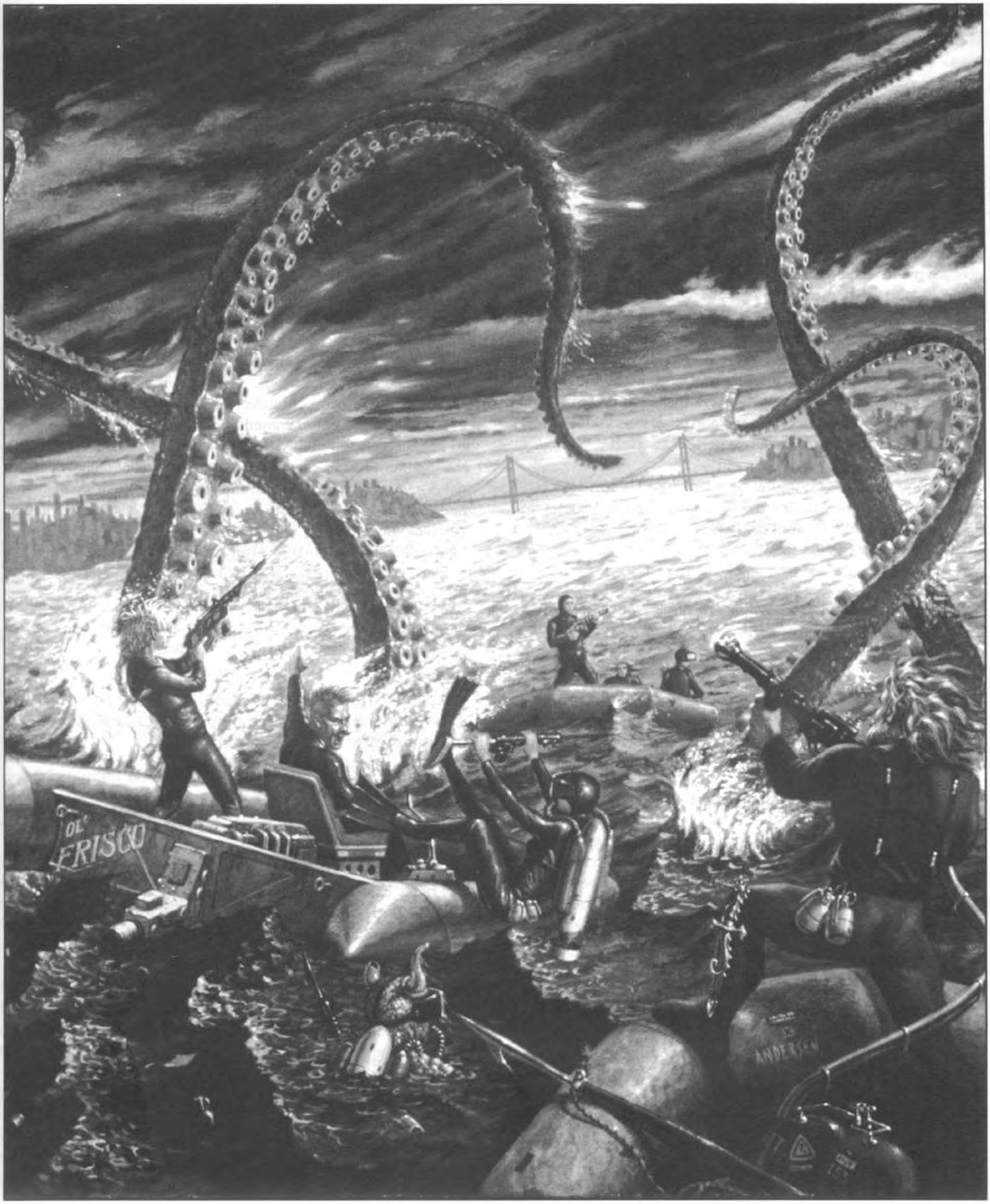
The number two studio in Los Angeles, Affliated Artists is a simsense and trideo company. Unlike its rival Amalgamated Studios, which has spread its claws into theme parks, broadcast channels and live music and sports events, Affilitated Artists confines its operations to the sim and trid markets. Strictly a production and distribution company, AA draws its strength from its sizable stable of independent artists and creators, who are willing to give everything they have for the freedom to fulfill their artistic dreams. This intense creative energy gives Affiliated Artists the scope and edge to keep eating away at Amalagamated's huge market share.

Principal Divisons:

Affiliated Artists has no distinct divisions.

>>>>>(Check out Jenny Diver's write-up on AA in the Los Angeles post. It'll give you the full picture of the film wars and rumors.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (08:10:34/02-01-57)


DL
FRISCO
ANDERSON

AMALGAMATED STUDIOS

President/CEO: Unknown (assumed to be Cy Taylor)
Home Office Location: Studio City

Business Profile:

One of the Big Three of California's entertainment companies, Amalgamated has defined its product as "entertainment," not "simsense" or "video/trideo." This makes it the most diversified of the Big Three. Not only does AS have a finger in every pie, it invented or improved most of them. Fun City is Amalgamated's best-known asset: an entire city devoted to hotels, restaurants, amusement parks and tourist attractions. Many of its other products are manufactured under division names, obscuring their real origin.

Amalgamated provides its own extremely tight security. Many of its security personnel are ex-runners looking for the good life (a regular paystick does wonders for the cred account, don't you know). Amalgamated security includes a large number of skilled deckers. As masters of illusion, the Powers-That-Be at Amalgamated are wise to all the ways to fool cameras and other sensors; that's why they tend to rely heavily on front-line personnel.

>>>>>(I only listed this company here because I like things complete. I'm funny that way. See the write-up in the Los Angeles file for specifics on who runs what and who owns who.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (08:14:33/02-01-57)

Principal Divisions:

>>>>>(Not listed in the L.A. section. If it ain't here and it ain't there, it's too small to worry about.)<<<<

—Captain Chaos (08:18:45/02-01-57)

Division Name: Fun City
Division Head: Jackson Rice
Chief Products/Services: Administration of Fun City, including promotion and designs.

Division Name: LivingWord Productions
Division Head: Buna Chima
Chief Products/Services: Production of simsense and live feeds for the religious markets.

Division Name: Concert Sims
Division Head: Pasquale Mendoza
Chief Products/Services: Recordings of live concerts, Urban Brawls, and similar live events.

>>>>>(Amalgamated isn't quite as monolithic as it may seem; many of these divisions are continually trying to one-up or backstab each other. Concert Sims is small, but it's their cash cow. AS has deals with Los Angeles Urban Brawl teams, as well as most of the others that allow it to film in complete safety. And here's another wiz way that Concert Sims makes cred—it is standard AS procedure to include live concert rights in all contracts. You never know who might actually be able to sing these days.)<<<<<

—StudioTech (8:15:10/02-06-57)

ANGELIC ENTERTAINMENT (SAEDER-KRUPP CORPORATION)

President: Heinrich Gruenwald
Headquarters: Los Angeles

>>>>>(Gruenwald is in charge as of this upload. Given Lofwyr's tendency to frown on failure (!), Gruenwald may be sleeping with the fishes by the time you read this.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (08:25:56/02-01-57)

Business Profile:

It is against California law for Saeder-Krupp to operate in the Free State, so SK followed the lead of Pyramid Operations and set up its own shell company. (So much for legal barriers, neh?) This company really is a shell. Angelic Entertainment invests in everything from shopping 'plexes to university chairs and research. Most investments are hidden behind all kinds of guises and games: holding companies, extraterritorial exemptions from reporting, and so on. Angelic has major investments in nearly every part of the entertainment world, from combat biker teams to sim theaters to hotels.

Saeder-Krupp's security boys are essentially military personnel in civilian clothing. Mages, and to a lesser extent shamans, are integrated into SK's security forces. Sites may also be guarded by parabiological critters and watcher spirits. Matrix security is lighter, but little information of any value can be found in Angelic's system. Lowfyr's predilection for micromanagement lessens the need for storage of sensitive data.

Principal Divisions:

None.

>>>>>(It's tough to figure out exactly what Lofwyr is doing in the CFS. Half the time, it seems as if the whole CFS thing is just a big pain in his tail. Why does he bother?)<<<<<

—Tin Lizzie (10:21:34/02-06-57)

>>>>>(I still remember the first time someone asked me to make a research run on a facility outside of Bakersfield. I laughed my hoop off when I saw "Angelic Entertainment" written on the gate sign in big letters. Oh boy, I thought, let's steal some simflicks and combat bikes. Big fragging deal, right? Well, omaes, I'm the only one left alive and I'm sure that fraggin' dragon is still after me.)<<<<<

—Paranoia (11:01:34/02-06-57)

AQUA ARCANA

Company Head: Jebediah Jones
Headquarters: Monterey

Business Profile:

Aqua Arcana is as much a magical organization as a business, specializing in water magics and relationships with Awakened sea creatures. Its major goal is to keep everything along the coast in balance. Company personnel do a great business keeping sea monsters from eating coastal traders, negotiating trade pacts with the merrow, and fighting fires along the coast and in the harbors.

Anyone who wants access to Aqua Arcana's magical records or is looking to get into their initiate society must perform what AA calls "magic responsibility." This means that the mage applying for funds, research aid or initiate orientation must work on AA's boats and coastal holdings, or do something for some similarly worthy cause. AA's membership guidelines are extremely strict, and no one is exempt from them. Because AA is essentially a business with magical trappings, members pay no dues as such. The corporate partners are liable if the business has problems, but so far it's had none.

>>>>>(Even Jeb Jones, the founder, once worked eighty hours on a tugboat trying to wipe a toxic spirit from a cove south of San Francisco, just for the privilege of using his own organization's library and to get funds to recruit a Leviathan shaman he'd heard about.)<<<<<

—BayWatcher(18:35:02/02-07-57)

ARES CFS (ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY)

President/CEO: Kyle Morton
Headquarters: Cupertino

Business Profile:

Ares CFS is the California headquarters of Ares Macrotechnology. Many of Ares's concerns in the Free State are home grown companies that Ares bought out a while back, almost all in Silicon Valley. President Kyle Morton—personally appointed to that position by Grand Pooh-Bah Damien Knight—used to head up Silicon Valley/Apple Computer products, and still dabbles in that business more than any other. His way of dealing with the garage deckers and programmers is the envy of every other big corp. The rest of Ares CFS's divisions are fairly autonomous, though they report directly to Morton. Ares Arms–California is largely a legal fiction, meant to take advantage of California business laws by operating as a native company instead of an outsider. It is primarily a sales office for the megacorp's main arms works in Seattle.

>>>>>(Scuttlebutt about Morton says he was once one of those garage deckers. But no one's proved it.)<<<<<

—Corp Watcher (18:54:03/02-07-57)

Principal Divisions:
Division Name: Silicon Valley /Apple Computer Products
Division Head: David Werks
Chief Products/Services: Creation and production of personal data assistants (PDAs).

Division Name: Ares Arms–California
Division Head: Dolph Hensen
Chief Products/Services: Military and police equipment ranging from small arms and ammunition to top-line Ares vehicles.

Division Name: Knight-Errant of California
Division Head: Armin Guzman
Location: Sacramento
Chief Products/Services: Providing multifaceted private and corporate security, both physical and electronic.

Division Name: Leviathan Technical
Location: Scotts Valley
Division Head: Elton Manning
Chief Products/Services: Various items for surveillance, counter-surveillance and general security. Also communications devices such as telephones, cell phones, pocket secretaries, personal computers, cyberdecks and simsense players.

>>>>>(Every decker in California is familiar with Leviathan's dataline scanners and maglocks.)<<<<<

—Buzz (19:14:03/02-07-57)

>>>>>(I heard LT is going to spin off a new division soon. Its working title is "IntraPersonal Communications," and I believe it'll specialize in cyberware, skillwires and headware.)<<<<<<

—BizMan (19:34:03/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Let me get this straight. Mr. Knight—I mean, Ares—owns a gun company, a computer company, a security firm, a firm that makes security toys, and now a firm that makes cyberware. Somebody please explain to me why he doesn't control the entire CFS.)<<<<<

—PoliSci (19:48:06/02-07-57)

>>>>>(What I want to know is how come the Japanese corps aren't all over him like white on rice. He's practically on their front lawn.)<<<<<

—Fighting Irish (20:25:03/02-07-57)

>>>>>(I've been watching Damien Knight for some years now, and each and every day I am amazed at what he pulled off. He walked right up to the other megas and took the Holy Grail of computer tech out from under their noses. I wish I'd been a fly on the wall the day Fuchi's executive goobers discovered that Ares had beaten them to the punch.)<<<<<

—Squire (20:54:11/02-07-57)

>>>>>(Ares does not sit still. Here's its latest acquisition:

Division Name: Osprey Technical Publications
Location: Los Gatos
Division Head : Lisa Carleson (former owner, president and CEO)
Chief Products/Services: Produces hardware and software manuals for companies too small to have their own technical writers.

My guess is, Ares bought this company to offer all those burned-out designers in garages a check for doing some no-brain computer books or basic tutorials. Keeps the plebes in check and makes it a bit harder for Fuchi or MCT to grab 'em after they've been used up on Project X or Y. I've heard a few faint rumblings of loyalty towards Ares cropping up even among the most independent of the independents. Bad news for our Japanese cousins.)<<<<<

—DeWinter (21:52:03/02-07-57)

BOROMAKER

President/CEO: Vernon Black
Home Office Location: Palo Alto

Business Profile:

Boromaker is on the bottom rung of the L.A. sim scene. In order to push themselves up the ladder, they've been buying up talent from some of the formerly Chicago-based sim and trid companies that bugged out (pun intended) when the Big Bug Blast hit. All this shopping has stretched Boromaker's financial resources pretty thin, but the company hopes to make a major splash in action-adventure simsense with their recent acquisition of hot newcomer Living Life Productions.

>>>>>(See the L.A. section for more information.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (09:22:31/02-01-57)

Principal Divisions:
None.

>>>>>(I hear the money behind these acquisitions is coming from Mitushama's new L.A. people. I wouldn't be surprised to see the yakuza muscling in on the Mafia's territory in big sims.)<<<<<<
—Script Doc (02:33:13/02-08-57)

>>>>>(If that's true, MCT must be getting ready to play ball with the big boys down in L.A. They better learn early that the sim biz ain't like regular corp politics—this stuff is for real. This is Los Angeles.)<<<<<
—LAAngel (03:11:21/02-08-57)

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE AND WATER SOCIETY (CAWS)

Leader: Ben Alvarez
Headquarters: Someplace in the Central Valley

Business Profile:

Sacramento considers CAWS the toxic version of the Small Farmer's Union. More activist and antigovernment than the SFU, CAWS does a lot that seems more intended to harm the government or the megacorporations than to help the small farmer. CAWS recruits all kinds, but most of its members are farmers forced out of business by megacorporate agribusiness. Ben Alvarez is practically a mythic hero in the Central Valley; lots of people, both in CAWS and outside it, see him as a cross between Robin Hood and Zorro. Needless to say, he is wanted by the CFS government.

>>>>>(We will prevail!)<<<<<
—Rebel With a CAWS (04:02:45/02-08-57)

CALIFORNIA FREE STATE GOVERNMENT

Governor: Anthony Whitman
Social Policy Director: Forrest Moginie
Economic Coordinator: Bradley Lynfield
Director of Education and Morals: Lester Brown
Director of National Defense: Lee Shadix
State Water Board: Whitman, Lynfield, Dolph Hensen (of Ares Arms–California), Carlo Managama (of Kalamari) and Katherine Han (of Lockheed)

>>>>>(Hey, I didn't vote for any of these skags.)<<<<<
—Packrat (05:33:24/02-08-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, right. Like you vote.)<<<<<
—Eponine (05:37:43/02-08-57)

>>>>>(I have seventeen SIN numbers, I gotta do something with them.)<<<<<
—Packrat (05:42:32/02-08-57)

>>>>>(HA! HA! HA!)<<<<<
—Eponine (05:46:11/02-08-57)

CALIFORNIA RANGERS

Head Honcho: Lee Shadix, Director of National Defense
Headquarters: Sacramento

The California Rangers are a bizarre reworking of the old California Highway Patrol and State Police. Almost all of them are riggers, and on paper they're supposed to act as law enforcement throughout the Free State (except for free cities like Los Angeles). They do that, plus quite a bit more. They use the various fines they collect to improve the roads and repair stranded motorists' vehicles; when necessary they also act as sheriffs, gathering posses to chase criminals. Technically, the California Rangers have jurisdiction in any area in which no metropolitan police force operates, as well as on all state roadways and any other state-owned property. In real life, these riggers won't stop a criminal unless he or she is using a California State highway as an escape route. Up until recently, the Rangers also operated all border customs stations in cooperation with various military organizations, but they've recently been relieved of that duty so that they can roam more freely around the state looking for miscreants. (That's the story, anyway.)

>>>>>(The California Rangers' main purpose is to clamp down on smugglers and waterjackers throughout the state. The problem—and the reason that the gummint has been "specifying" most of their duties to the point of anal-retentiveness—is that Whitman and his fellow strongmen don't trust them. They think the Rangers are nuts, and in some cases they're right. These guys all live in the wilderness and dead areas, patrolling roads for days at a time. The weird thing is, they all like it.)<<<<<
—Panzer Man (03:21:18/02-13-57)

>>>>>(The government is trying to phase them out, but the people love them. Most are happy to pay fines for speeding and such (when they get caught ...) because the money actually gets put to good use.)<<<<<
—Ranger Rick (06:21:31/02-13-57)



>>>>>(The California Rangers aren't quite as perfect as you make them out, RR. Sure, some take their jobs seriously, wearing uniforms and such—others are just plain nuts. How do you think Crazy Louie got his name?)<<<<<

—Lud (07:21:56/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Crazy Louie, down Barstow way?! Crazy ain't the word—he's fraggin' insane. He drives an old Studebaker, has it painted BLACK, in the desert! He has an external sound system in which he plays everything from bizarre sound effects to jazz to classical to some weird drek called boogie-woogie. If you hear him playing a song called "I Fought the Law," pull over.)<<<<<

—Monkey (07:35:56/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Don't forget the drones. The Rangers have 'em and they use 'em. Ares, MMC and Lockheed love to send these guys experimental drones, because they know the Rangers'll give 'em a road test no engineer could conceive of.)<<<<<

—SkyNet (10:32:45/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Because the riggers spend most of their time on the roads, regional HQs tend to be oases where they gather to refuel and repair their vehicles and swap tales. Here's a list of HQs at last count:

North Central Region: Red Bluff
Northern Coast Region: Ukiah
Northern Boarder Region: Susanville
Central Region: Sacramento
SF/Oakland Region: Berkeley
Central Boarder Region: Yosemite
Southern Coast Region: San Luis Obispo
South Central Region: Bakersfield
Southern Boarder Region: Needles
L.A. Region: Barstow
Plus any and all unclaimed military bases ...)<<<<<

—Ranger Rick (11:01:34/02-13-57)

CHEVRON

President/CEO: Dillon O'Dwyer
Home Office Location: Danville

Business Profile:

Chevron started out as an oil company back in the late 19th century and has pretty much stayed true to its roots, with major market shares in fossil fuels and geothermal energy. Certain aspects of Standard Oil of California's business were carried out under the Chevron name until California gained independence, at which point Standard Oil of California placed all its operations under the Chevron umbrella. By the beginning of the 21st century, Chevron had begun experimenting with alternative energy sources, and it has continued to invest in this line of research. The company also has extensive holdings in corporate agriculture, where it runs methanol farms as well as produce farms. Chevron prides itself on its unusual arcology designs—the Danville Arcology, its corporate HQ, is a sight to behold.

Dillon O'Dwyer has become a pretty big player in CFS politics recently, trading on his friendships with the governor and several top execs of the international megacorps. O'Dwyer has used his favorite-son status to invite investment from other companies in Chevron's experimental research and new business ventures. The company's growing data division is involved with several smaller corporations, taking care of their data processing and other connections to the net.

Chevron has its own (extremely competent) security, and CFS military units patrol many of its more sensitive sites.

Principal Divisions:
Division Name: Chevron Data Systems
Division Head: Jeran Suliman
Chief Products/Services: Internal data processing and outside data processing for other corporations.

Division Name: Power and Development
Division Head: Henry Gerard
Chief Products/Services: Finding and developing new sources of fuel and power.

>>>>>(Know why O'Dwyer's still looking for investors? Because they're the only reason Chevron has survived this long. I have never seen a company start up and close down business faster. Without those suckers—'scuse me, "investors," O'Dwyer would have been laughed out of town.)<<<<<

—Marcus (11:08:45/02-13-57)

>>>>>(The Danville HQ is impressive. It blends into the surrounding area so well that you can be looking straight at it and not really grasp how big it is. Chevron's labs and installations took that whole "blending" concept and ran with it. They're so unobtrusive, they're nearly invisible to the naked eye. Site security, needless to say, is extremely tough.)<<<<<

—Architeck (11:14:22/02-13-57)

>>>>>(The big rumor is that lots of the other megas use Chevron installations as cover for their own labs. That way, they get two sets of security plus military force when they need it.)<<<<<

—Corp Watcher (11:19:25/02-13-57)

>>>>>(Hey, Cap, you won't find this one in the traditional datastores, but it's a must for anyone wanting to run in California ...

THE FIXX

Leader/Owner/Contact extraordinaire: Dexter Hemingway
Headquarters: The old LAX airport

>>>>>(Biz Profile:

Dexter is the man and The Fixx is the place. In the old days they would call Dexter a backer. He has money, influence and friends everywhere. You never see Dexter's name on any payroll or credit list, yet there he is shaking the hand of a big sim star, corp exec or even a mob boss. And that ain't all—he can work the same magic on the shadowy side of the tracks. Just to give you an example, he's got agreements with the Steppin' Wulfs and various other gangs in and out of El Infierno. This guy may be the ultimate fixer in the CFS.

Dexter lives in the Fixx, which is a fantastic place. Dexter took all the old hangars out at LAX and connected them to each other. In the really really big one, he's put up an entire castle—a real one, imported from France or someplace like that. I'm just your average skag from the sprawl, and I nearly drooled over my synthleather when I saw it. The Fixx has everything you need under one roof. Contacts hang there like leaves on a tree—weapons dealers, talismongers, deckers, riggers and more mercs than you ever, ever, ever saw. I didn't need to use 'em personally, but Dexter also has an entire medical staff on hand that can get all the cyber- and bioware any runner could ever want.

Stop in and tell 'em Boxer sent you, and you'll get first-class treatment!)<<<<<

—Boxer (09:00:24/02-14-57)

>>>>>(I hate to tell you, Boxer, but your word ain't worth squat at the Fixx. Hemingway has the the old LAX better protected than Saeder-Krupp's HQ. The only road to the old airport is guarded by drones, remote sensors and at least two gates (which they move around at random) guarded by the most cybered-up orks you'll ever see. These guys chew glass for fun. The road's marked out by painted yellow stripes and a series of reflective markers. If you miss a marker and go off-track, you're likely to end up in a crater the size of a small moon filled with the foulest water you've ever seen or smelled. So make sure you get an invitation to the Fixx—don't just show up and expect the red-carpet treatment.)<<<<<

—Pablo (09:11:34/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Old LAX isn't just craters and water. There are toxics out there, and mean-tempered elementals, too.)<<<<<

—Flyboy (09:35:46/02-14-57)

>>>>>(The Fixx is gorgeous—and I'm not just talking about the castle. This place has private rooms, meeting rooms, swimming pools,

surgery recovery rooms, gambling dens ... everything, omae. The newest rumor says Hemingway is building himself a second castle in Palm Springs, so he'll have a place to go hang with the power boys.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (10:02:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Hemingway's as honest as a fixer ever gets, as long as you don't harm any of the relationships he already has. Whatever you do, DO NOT go running to the Fixx with the heat on your rear. He'll hold you up if the drek hits the fan and you need someplace to lay low, but don't bring the heat to his house. You do that and he'll sell you to the Man in a minute.)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (10:37:21/02-14-57)

>>>>>(How far do his contacts go? Up to Sacramento?)<<<<<

—Outtatown (10:55:25/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Have you seen the picture of Governor Whitman that they run whenever the Guv needs to show he's a friend of the simflick industry? It's pretty famous. The guv waving and the man in a tux, smiling and giving the thumbs up—sound familiar? That guy is Dexter Hemingway. Now that's power!)<<<<<

—Local Yokel (11:03:45/02-14-57)

FUCHI CFS (FUCHI INDUSTRIAL ELECTRONICS)

President: Siko Katara
Headquarters: San Francisco

Business Profile:

Fuchi CFS provides research and development for the home company. No manufacturing or other facilities are located in California. Fuchi products are exported to California by affiliates in Japan and other cities around the world. This company's single division, Pacific Rim Computer Consultants, has an office in Sacramento.

Fuchi CFS belongs to the Villiers faction, and both Siko Katara and Tashaki Nogoma were appointed by Richard Villiers. Site security is extremely tight, with highly trained physical-security personnel and top-of-the-line IC and deckers. Mages and shamans (not too many of the latter) are integrated into physical security forces.

Principal Divisions:
Division Name: Pacific Rim Computer Consultants
Division Head: Tashaki Nogoma
Chief Products/Services: PRCC is a research and development think tank.

>>>>>(Of all the megas, Fuchi seems to have taken Ares's Silicon Valley takeover the hardest. I think they hoped to waltz in and become electronic gods. Fuchi really hasn't done much of anything since Ares stole its thunder.)<<<<<

—Deckmeister (11:23:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Fuchi may have some of the best engineers around, but its R&D efforts don't match up. So it comes to the Valley and buys up Ares's leftovers. Never, ever put any designs on a computer hooked into the Matrix—next thing you know, it'll be on the market under a Fuchi patent.)<<<<<

— Big Red (11:28:41/02-14-57)

>>>>>(As stated earlier somewhere in this post, put your money on Nogoma and Fuchi to take over government security real soon.)<<<<<

—Sac Watcher (11:34:24/02-14-57)

GOLDEN ACORN SOCIETY

Owner/Leader: Yee Chan
Location: Oroville

Profile:

Headquartered in the Buddhist Temple in Oroville, the Golden Acorn Society is a martial arts school and initiatory group. The Acorn Society has few restrictions on membership—you don't have to be Awakened, and all races are welcome. Many of Yee Chan's students teach the sons and daughters of corp suits in Sacramento and San Francisco.

>>>>>(You don't get much out of the advanced courses if you aren't an adept of some sort.)<<<<<

—Dancer (11:52:18/02-14-57)

>>>>>(I'd pay big nuyen to see some of those racist politicos in Sacramento having their children taught by a big, ugly ork.)<<<<<

—Gasser (12:34:51/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Hey, watch that kinda talk.)<<<<<

—Bay Ork (13:11:48/02-14-57)

>>>>>(So does anybody know what Yee's purpose is, and what the Acorn Society's goals are?)<<<<<

—Dancer (13:24:33/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, what's the deal? Do they run the shadows? Work for a corp? Are they spies? Anyone?)<<<<<

—City of Angels (13:42:47/02-14-57)

>>>>>(The Golden Acorn Society is a front for the Golden Dragon gang, headed by none other than Yee Chan himself.)<<<<<

—ESP (14:49:20/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Uh ... anybody else? Something a little more believable?)<<<<<

—City Of Angels (14:57:14/02-14-57)

GREEN EARTH SOCIETY

President/CEO: Patty Maltetta
Home Office Location: Merced (getting ready to relocate to Redding)

Business Profile:

This group manages tracts of natural terrain, forest preserves, natural wild lands and the like. The Land Management department makes decisions about land use, including grazing and mining permits, roads and other infrastructures, and permanent buildings. The Trust department manages assets that the Green Earth Society holds in trust, ensuring that existing restrictions on land use are honored and also managing non-land assets, including conservation of other parts of estates not directly connected with property.

>>>>>(The Green Earth Society is notorious for selling out to everybody from large-scale talismongers to loggers to real estate developers.)<<<<<

—EarthFirster (15:26:17/02-14-57)

>>>>>(We are a bit more realistic than terrorists like you. That's all.)<<<<<

—GES (15:35:23/02-14-57)

>>>>>(I'll never understand the GES. They will fight to the death over an endangered species' nesting ground and then turn a blind eye to corp toxic dumping. It's no wonder people either hate or love Patty Maltetta depending on the time of day.)<<<<<

—Wombat (15:46:33/02-14-57)

HUMANIS CALIFORNIA

President: Gunnar Wilson
Headquarters: Sacramento

Profile:

A humans-only social club **(22 Mp deleted by sysop)**

>>>>>(Sorry—I just can't bring myself to promote these guys. They're players on the Free State scene, all right, but I'm not writing about them. Interested people can get the whole story from the Northern Crescent and Central Valley sections of this post. Note that they deny any connection to the Native Californians, an especially nasty band of thugs. Make of that what you will.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (09:43:21/02-01-57)

>>>>>(Well, I ain't shy ... .

NATIVE CALIFORNIANS

President: Lester Brown
Location: All over the fraggin' state

Profile:

If you meet one of these guys and you're a metahuman, kill him before he kills you. Nuff said.)<<<<<

—Defender (16:26:17/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Don't spread rumors, Defender. Lester's a bigot and all, but I don't think you can put him on the trigger end of a gun.)<<<<<

—Realist (17:15:23/02-14-57)

>>>>>(I don't understand. My dad is a member of the HP, but he doesn't go out looking for trouble. As far as I can tell, HP's just a bunch of old guys who play cards and drink beer together.)<<<<<

—Innocent from Iowa (17:30:43/02-14-57)

>>>>>(That's the problem with HP. I'd guess most of its members do what Iowa's dad does—drink beers with their peers. But it's the minority—the Native Californians, the Human Nation skags I've heard scattered rumors about, and every other humans-first paramilitary group—that concerns me. These are the haters and killers.)<<<<<

—Mother Jones (17:54:24/02-14-57)

KALAMARI, INC.

President/CEO: Carlo Managama
Home Office Location: Monterey

Business Profile:

Kalamari started as a seafood diner in Eureka and took off when ads featuring the very photogenic Captain Steven Blackeagle hit the screens all over the USA (to which California still belonged at the time). Blackeagle still fishes, does occasional promotions, and rakes in the salary of a division head, though he supposedly leaves the actual running of his division to his staff. With the end of the merrow wars that caused Kalamari Foods so much recent trouble, Carlo Managama claims that his corp is once again on the verge of going multinational.

Kalamari hires rent-a-cop agencies to protect its food franchises. Its sales headquarters is protected by Knight-Errant and some very nasty IC. The Kalamari Foods research stations are mostly on former oil platforms and newly built platforms off the California coast; they have their own security service, which hires a lot of metahumans.

Principal Divisions:

Division Name: Kalamari Foods
Division Head: Hiro Nishimoto
Chief Products/Services: Development and harvesting of new sea-based food sources.

Division Name: Squid Shacks
Division Head: Captain Steven Blackeagle
Chief Products/Services: This division administers the chain of Squid Shack seafood stuffer franchises and runs the dozen or so that the corporation owns outright.

>>>>>(What, no thanks to Aqua Arcana for coming in and saving Kalamari's hoop from a full-scale war with the merrow? You're welcome.)<<<<<

—AquaArcanan (18:15:23/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Yeah, we read all about it over in the Big Sur post. Now shut up.)<<<<<

—Grumpy (18:34:46/01-14-57)

LOCKHEED CORPORATION

President: Carmen Polaski
Home Office Location: Los Angeles

Business Profile:

One of the biggest, most famous defense contractors in the old USA, Lockheed lost much of its prestige and power when the UCAS left the CFS behind and the money for its whopping contracts ran out. Larger and more powerful corps, many with Sacramento's ear, duplicated Lockheed's products and made signficant inroads into its market in the early years of independence. To survive, Lockheed simultaneously expanded and specialized its operations. Nowadays, it owns a fair chunk of Los Angeles—not a bad recovery.

One of President Polaski's first decisions was to purchase the name and remaining assets of Northrup, a long-standing Lockheed rival. MCT had earlier gotten its claws on the best of Northrup's assets, leaving it a shell of its former self. Lockheed took on many of the Northrup employees disenfranchised by the MCT buyout and set them up as a separate division devoted to R&D, a move that has paid off handsomely. Security for both of Lockheed's divisions is provided by Knight-Errant and Ares Arms (which should give conspiracy enthusiasts food for thought).

Principal Divisions:
Division Name: Northrup
Division Head: Vincent Jones
Chief Products/Services: Northrup acts as the research and development wing of Lockheed. Current projects are redesigns of the Wasp and Yellowjacket that Northrup lost to MCT.

Division Name: Lockheed Manufacturing
Division Head: Iyogi Toyoda
Chief Products/Services: The manufacturing wing manufactures rotorcraft, hovercraft and drones.

>>>>>(No comments at all on Lockheed? I'm disappointed.)<<<<<

—Skeptic (19:01:34/02-14-57)



>>>>>(Security forces? Those guys look like marines, act like marines, and are equipped like marines. And you can find them anywhere in the Valley, not just on Mitsuhama territory.)<<<<<

—Muldoon (19:26:39/02-14-57)

MCT CALIFORNIA (MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES)

President: Yoko Nakano
Headquarters: San Francisco

Business Profile:

MCT California's operations are centered around San Francisco (no surprise). Mitsuhama Motors' main plant is in San Bruno, in the area under Japanese control. MCT's agribusiness is based in the Sacramento Delta area.

MCT handles its own security—its forces are well trained and equipped, and extremely unsubtle. Expect heavy weaponry, complete sensor coverage, parabiological critters, and mages or shamans. The Matrix is no cakewalk either—IC is heavy and almost always black.

Principal Divisions:
Division Name: Mitsuhama Motors of California
Division Head: Pik "James" Sako
Division Location: San Bruno
Chief Products/Services: MMC produces autonomously guided light ground vehicles.

>>>>(Translation—smart cars, bikes, vans, security vehicles and drones. Anything that doesn't fly.)<<<<<

—Muldoon (19:54:32/02-14-57)

>>>>>(One of the few Japanese corps that beat Ares to the punch. Mitsuhama bought (read: hostile takeover) the company that became MMC from Northrup, leaving Northrup a company in name only.)<<<<<

—TheMan (20:05:46/02-14-57)

Division Name: Integrated Agricultural Applications
Division Head: Lance Ihara
Division Location: Stockton
Chief Products/Services: Applied research into bioengineered crops and agricultural chemicals to enhance crop production, beef up resistance to disease and pests, and improve nutritional value.

>>>>>(Some strange things go on in MCT's Valley labs. Apparently they're doing magical and paraspecies bioengineering research as well as the agricultural stuff.)<<<<<
—Freddie (20:29:31/02-14-57)

>>>>>(There's been a ton of MCT activity down in L.A. lately. It looks like they want a piece of the sim biz. They've been courting the ex-Bug City companies, looking to get a foothold in the enclaves of the rich and famous. I think they've opened a division in L.A. called MCT-Entertainment.)<<<<<
—Corp Watcher (20:50:32/02-14-57)

PACIFIC FOODS

President/CEO: Ben Alvarez
Home Office Location: North Richmond

Business Profile:

Pacific Foods is a merger of two long-established California corporations—Safeway and Longs Drugs—that combined in the wake of California's independence. During the confusion that followed the UCAS pullout from California, CEO Ben Alvarez saw many other stores throughout the state go under and giant shopping malls become derelict. Anxious to help Pacific Foods avoid the same fate, Alvarez started to think beyond a chain of food stores. Instead, he decided to create the ultimate one stop-shopping place. He started buying up semi-derelict malls and filling them up with groceries, household incidentals, and just about anything else a customer might want from a convenience store. Since the early 2040s, Pacific Food outlets (or PFs, as the locals call them) have become even more ubiquitous than Stuffer Shacks across California. Unlike Stuffer Shacks, which tend to turn up in large urban areas, PFs exist in the suburbs and the countryside as well as in the sprawls.

Pacific Foods has gone so far beyond selling food that it now calls itself plain old PF in advertisements. Customers can find most of the items and services at a PF outlet that they might expect in an entire mall in Seattle; however, PFs do not sell munitions, armor clothing, weapons, or cyberware. Pacific Foods also has a sizable arcology north of San Francisco.

>>>>>(The odd thing about these stores is the high level of security. Real live guys, with real live guns. I've seen cyberboys and girls, and mages too.)<<<<<<
—Local Yokel (22:32:11/02-14-57)

>>>>>(Big Ben will tell you that a dead customer never comes back to spend his nuyen. Keep 'em alive and they keep comin' back.)<<<<<
—Shyster (22:45:56/02-14-57)

PYRAMID OPERATIONS (AZTECHNOLOGY)

President: Juan Atzcapotzalco
Headquarters: Los Angeles

Business Profile:

Like Saeder-Krupp, Aztechnology is banned from operating in the CFS ... on paper. In practice the law is pretty lax—in Los Angeles, the corp has essentially ignored it. Aztechnology's only concession to its alleged pariah status is a name change that fools no one—it calls its California subsidiary Pyramid Operations. Pyramid has property in Los Angeles and even an office in Sacramento, from which it does its fragging damnedest to influence government decisions. Other interests include agribusiness and research.

Pyramid Operations facilities are heavily protected by corporate guards. Matrix security is likewise extensive; the extent of onsite magical security is currently unknown.

Principal Divisions:
None known.

>>>>>(So all those Pyramid Operations warehouse/research facilities littering the Mojave Desert are what ... office supplies?)<<<<<
—Gonzo (08:36:15/02-15-57)

Chief Product/Services: Pyramid Operations provides support services for its various business concerns.

>>>>>(A remarkably uninformative description. But then, that's Aztechnology for you. Keep it secret, no matter what.)<<<<<
—Corp Watcher (10:23:41/02-15-57)

>>>>>(They ain't secret about their operations, chummer. Check out the California Rice Farmer's Association in Chico-Oroville, the agribusinesses around Salinas, Home Helpers Corp, the Hispanic Entertainment Network ... all of them trace their parentage back to Pyramid Operations and then home down to Tenochtitlán.)<<<<<
—Spayd (12:03:38/02-15-57)

>>>>>(About the only thing Aztechnology doesn't do in California is manufacture. All those "Made in CFS" items it sells are actually made in Aztlan, under significantly fewer regulations, by sweatshop labor. Pyramid Operations is supposed to be "corporate headquarters and support services," but it's actually an import-export business.)<<<<<
—Sarah (12:31:26/02-15-57)

>>>>>(For a company that provides "support service for its business concerns," it's got amazing state-of-the-art security—remote-controlled guns, magical assets and weird things in the Matrix. Pretty intimidating for a "support" company.)<<<<<
—Bubba (18:28:52/02-15-57)

RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS CALIFORNIA

President: Yoshio Shizumi
Headquarters: San Francisco

Business Profile:

Renraku specializes in computer storage and services. Renraku operates certain city databases, such as San Francisco's Public Information Exchange Resource (PIER) and the FactFiles database. FactFiles is a compilation of data and abstracts on every conceivable subject. Recently, Renraku has been experimenting with a new venture that provides a full range of data storage, processing, encryption/decryption and system design and setup services to markets on the San Francisco Peninsula and in Sacramento. Efforts to establish other offices have so far met with little success.

Security at Renraku sites varies considerably. In general, security in California is fairly light, because all Renraku sites are in areas considered safe. Matrix security, however, is quite tight and relies much more on IC than on deckers.

Principal Divisions:

No specific divisions. All operations are controlled by the headquarters in San Francisco.

>>>>>(FactFiles is dull—gigapulse upon gigapulse of raw data. But if it's data you need, FF is the first place to look.)<<<<<
—NetJockey (04:47:26/02-16-57)

>>>>>(Remember Renraku's Los Angeles DataHeaven venture? Seems they got it up and running, and hardly anybody bought access. (Lots of people accessed it without buying, though ...) Renraku lost a lot of nuyen, along with the appetite for data ventures in California.)<<<<<
—Big Red (14:23:51/02-16-57)

>>>>>("Little success." Natch. Who in their right mind wants to give the Japanese access to their data?)<<<<<
—Patriot (16:03:52/02-16-57)

SAVE OUR SEAS

President: Angela Devon
Location: Monterey

Profile:

SOS is dedicated to preserving and restoring all of California's waterways. Its usual tactics include surveillance, education, facilitating resource recovery, and cleanup days. Any company seen polluting the seas is contacted and offered help in finding more efficient ways to do business. First contact usually includes before and after operational summaries of similar companies that SOS has worked with, showing the benefits to be gained by eco-conscious operations. SOS will assist companies in finding ways to reduce their waste and match them with people who use their byproducts as inputs. On the tough-tactics side of the ledger, SOS claims responsibility for sabotaging Hetch Hetchy dam and is suspected of pouring wax into an oil pipeline in Southern California.

Membership in SOS is open to anyone; rates range from 10 to 200 CFS bucks.

>>>>>(Not quite as spectacular as firing the wells, but didn't do any damage to the environment—just to the corps' pocketbooks. Stupid fraggers ran around for a week trying to figure out what was going on. We just about laughed ourselves sick.)<<<<<
—AAdams (18:48:24/02-15-57)

>>>>>(The corps actually respect these guys. Angela can play hardball with Lofwyr and come out looking good.)<<<<<
—Chaz (18:58:21/02-15-57)

>>>>>(There's been talk that SOS is funded by Sierra Inc. I doubt it, but there may be a connection between SOS and Aqua Arcana. No proof at all on either count yet. I guess I'll just have to keep digging.)<<<<<
—Axel (19:12:14/02-15-57)

SHAMANS OF SHASTA

Head of Organization: Hestaby the Great Dragon (according to the buzz, anyway)
Location: The Shamans have turned the old Shasta Ski Resort on Mount Shasta into a medicine lodge.

Profile:

Seemingly a closed organization, the Shamans of Shasta number approximately 50 to 100 active members living in the area around Mount Shasta. Rumors abound of other "Shasta shamans" throughout the rest of the CFS, as well as in rural areas of Tir Tairngire, Ute, Pueblo and even the UCAS. At last count this organization had no hermetic magicians in it, and no mage has come forward to announce his or her membership. The Shamans of Shasta seem to be exclusively rural shamans.

People can become associate members of this group, though these memberships are mainly a token gesture (and a way to make money). An associate membership does not grant access to the Shasta Lodge, but only to areas near and around Mount Shasta such as nature trails, talisman shops along the base of the mountain, and gypsy camps. The goals of these shamans remain as mysterious as those of their alleged sponsor, the great dragon Hestaby. All anyone knows for sure is that the Shamans of Shasta are staunchly loyal to the dragon. The Shamans have refused to take sides in the border dispute between the Free State and the Tir, but recently worked in tandem with Hestaby to repel the Tir incursion toward Shasta Dam.

>>>>>(The party line about these guys being "shamans only" is fine and probably correct as far as it goes, but there are mercs, riggers, deckers and (I'm sure) hermetics in the organization. It's just that they never do anything in the public eye.)<<<<<
—Skeptic (19:35:22/02-15-57)

SIERRA INC.

President: Payne Rotsey
Headquarters: Sacramento

Profile:

According to everything anyone's been able to find, Sierra Incorporated is precisely the mainstream environmental organization it claims to be. In fact, many activists insist that Sierra Inc. is a corporate front meant to draw members and energy from more radical groups. Its main areas of concern are preventing more environmental degradation and ensuring that people have access to wilderness areas. Because Sierra Inc. wishes to enjoy the moral high ground, it eschews the often harsh tactics of its opponents when advancing its agenda. Approved tactics include legislation, lawsuits, demonstrations, boycotts letter-writing campaigns. Close examination of Sierra's record over the years shows a mixed record of successes and hollow victories. Membership is open to all; dues are fifty nuyen a year.

>>>>>(SI is a front. It's government run and corp paid for!)<<<<<
—GreenMan (05:27:43/02-16-57)

>>>>>(They're wimps, but not completely corrupt. I think if they moved the HQ out of the capital into, say, Yosemite or Sequoia, they might gain some respect.)<<<<<
—Landlubber (06:02:33/02-16-57)

>>>>>(Don't let the sugar coating con you. They front both Save our Seas and TerraFirst! You just need to dig deep, real real real deep.)<<<<<
—Snoop (06:23:44/02-16-57)

>>>>.(I think you dug too deep and blew your mind. SI and TerraFirst! What color is the sky in your world again?)<<<<<
—Skeptic (07:33:21/02-16-57)

SHIAWASE CORPORATION–CALIFORNIA FREE STATE

President, Shiawase Agrotech: Mariko Kiyonobu
President, Shiawase Biotech: Etsu Powike
Headquarters: San Francisco

Business Profile:

Shiawase California is actually two companies—Shiawase Agrotech and Shiawase Biotech—that share a corporate headquarters. Both presidents report back to Japan independently of each other. Shiawase Agrotech is active in the ongoing cleanup of San Francisco Bay and the Delta as well as in the Big Sur region. Shiawase Biotech has invested in various California health-care facilities. Shiawase has the lowest profile of all the megacorps in the Free State, even though its research facilities spread from the Northern Crescent to the Mojave Desert.

>>>>>(Lowest profile, huh? This sounds interesting.)<<<<<
—Corp Watcher (01:21:24/02-17-57)

>>>>>(You can't toss a dead Lone Star cop without hitting a Shiawase research facility. They spread like a cancer. I bet Etsu or Mariko can't even remember all the stuff they have going on.)<<<<<
—Daredevil (01:36:44/02-17-57)

>>>>>(And research, and research and research ... Shiawase is another corp that's into experimenting on the people of California. Clean up the Bay, see what effect pollution has had on wildlife, then dump the slag somewhere else and see what effect the stuff has on humans. Chemical-biological weapons research with minimal investment. They act like they're our friends, but they're using the whole Free State as a giant human laboratory.)<<<<<
—Lynx (03:34:12/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Whoa—calm down, Lynx! Geez! Is this all just occurring to you now? We're all lab rats to the big boys. We've been fighting the good fight against this menace for years. Wake up and smell the soykaf.)<<<<<
—Reality Czech (03:41:21/02-17-57)

>>>>>(With all those research facilities, I've heard Shiawase needs outside security. Some of the corp installations in wilder places have started hiring gangs and ex-runners. I hear a place outside Palm Springs even has pinkies on the payroll. More often, look for Knight-Errant, and even Ares Arms in addition to Shiawase's own corp security.)<<<<<
—CalGirl (04:01:22/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Can anyone say free nuyen?!)<<<<<
—Silver Sammy (04:55:25/02-17-57)

SMALL FARMER'S UNION

President: Kelly Grace
Location: Sacramento

Profile:

Surprise, surprise—SFU is one of the good guys. (Betcha didn't think there were any of those left.) This aggressive organization has successfully lobbied Sacramento to get rights and political clout for the small farmers of the Central Valley. By choosing to work with the CFS government and big business, Kelly Grace has engineered a string of positive and influential decisions regarding corporate takeovers, fair trade, and price structures. Well respected and well liked, the SFU is even popular with Governor Whitman.

>>>>>(Can't say Whitty's endorsement shows me much ...)<<<<<
—BayOrk (05:36:21/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Honestly, these are good people. Even if Whitman does like them.)<<<<<
—ChicoMan (05:57:34/02-17-57)

TERRAFIRST!

Leader: Unknown
Location: Unknown

Profile:

TerraFirst! is sometimes called "Terror First" for the aggressive and often illegal tactics it uses to "stop all the harm being done to our Mother Earth." (That last is a direct quote from a TerraFirst! leaflet.) Its avowed goal is "to return Terra's respiration to what it was in the Middle Ages." (Another direct quote.) TerraFirsters who've gotten caught are almost exclusively the disenfranchised: metahumans and underclass humans who are tired of environmental discrimination and have not benefited from Sierra Inc.'s milder actions. To TerraFirst!, "action" generally means war. Favorite tactics include raids on polluting plants, corporate headquarters, logging camps, and the like. They also indulge in occasional kidnapping, blackmail, data theft and publication, and sabotage just to keep things unpredictable. In general, TerraFirst! is about half environmental activists and half thugs. Occasionally they go on big raids for which they hire outside help.

>>>>>(Why work for them? TF sounds like a bunch of short-time losers.)<<<<<

—HardHat (06:49:01/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Access to resources and contacts, and the opportunity to call on these guys when necessary. They've got no compunction about being a distraction, if you're hitting someone they don't like.)<<<<<

—GreenMan (08:34:28/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Supposedly they run guerrilla camps and an underground railroad, and have a whole group of street docs on tap. Plus just enough well-educated techies and engineers to pull off their more high-tech exploits.)<<<<<

—CHiP(08:48:41/02-17-57)

>>>>>(Hmmm—maybe they are backed by Sierra Inc.)<<<<<

—CalGirl (10:01:24/02-17-57)

UNITED TALISMONGERS ASSOCIATION

President: Tamara Nimbus
Home Office Location: Arcata

Business Profile:

The United Talismonger Association is a business, a lobbying organization, and in some cases a professional club. The UTA manufactures, distributes, sells and researches talismans and mundane items such as incense, totem jewelry, crystals, pyramids, tarot cards and literature. They've been active in searching the overgrown forests of the Northern Crescent for fetish materials and other items for enchanting, and they're also one of the prime movers behind legislative efforts to protect what they call "magical growth areas." Tamara and assorted friends are spending amazing amounts of time and nuyen lobbying the government to declare areas of the Northern Crescent "magical and nat-



ural preserves." Tamara occasionally hints that this idea has Hestaby's backing; she claims to be one of the few people to have had a personal meeting with the great dragon.

Any mage, shaman, or enchanter adept can join the UTA. Joining up gets you a discount on fetishes and other magic items at their various headquarters and stores, of which there are more than fifty in the CFS alone.

>>>>>(The UTA was just awarded a big fat contract from Sacramento to look into the magical phenomena in the Mojave Desert. It looks as if they'll be hiring soon.)<<<<<

—FFFixer (10:32:21/02-17-57)

>>>>>(These guys (especially Tamara—she's one major mage) aren't as innocent as they seem. They want full magical rights in the CFS and play kissy-kissy with Whitman to get it. They will hire runners to steal fetish material on Monday, and on Tuesday claim that they're the only ones capable of protecting California's wilderness from thieves. Nothing is scarier than mages who want power.)<<<<<

—Citizen K (11:56:32/02-17-57)

>>>>>(I hear Nimbus is looking for some people to go deep undercover with the Anasazi in order to learn the secret of their plant magic.)<<<<<

—Whisperer (12:32:46/02-17-57)

VIRTUAL WORLD DISNEY (VWD) CALIFORNIA

President: Val Byerson
Home Office Location: Fun City

Business Profile:

VWD uses its California headquarters to run its portion of the Fun City theme park and to keep tabs on its rivals. VWD has a minor studio in Fun City, through which it buys scripts and handles development, distribution and marketing. It used to run its retail chain division out of Fun City, but recently relocated those operations to the corporate headquarters in Buena Vista, Florida. For its Fun City site, VWD employs Knight-Errant Security. The company president, Val Byerson, is a shrewd and intense man who appears to be a beacon of honesty in a cutthroat business (there's another one for all you fans of Good People with Deep Dark Secrets).

Principal Divisions:

Other than the theme park, Val Byerson handles everything personally. Barbara Dresselhaus, who runs the theme park, was recently named vice president.

>>>>>(I've been there. It's fun! Just don't bring your gun. It took me eight hours to explain that I forgot I had it on me.)<<<<<

—Kid Billy (15:36:33/02-17-57)

YAMATETSU CALIFORNIA (YAMATETSU CORPORATION)

President: George Sakai
Headquarters: San Francisco and Oakland

>>>>>(Oakland! Hey, Cap—hitting the sim chips, are you?)<<<<<

—Tusker (16:22:14/02-17-57)

>>>>>(That's what the corporate report said, and it's backed by Sacramento. I don't believe it either—but it does make life interesting.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (16:30:35/02-17-57)

Business Profile:

Yamatetsu has been positioning itself as the metahuman-friendly megacorp, hiring quite a few to run their Oakland-based warehouses and shipping concerns. According to published reports (and some unpublished ones), Yamatetsu is heavily into (meta)human engineering and services. This is the corp that coined—and immediately trademarked—the term MetaErgonomic. MetaErgonomic engineering, for Yamatetsu, means everything from the size and shape of a chair to the size and shape of a pistol grip. Any product that requires modification for metahumans to use comfortably may be reengineered by Yamatetsu, though they emphasize high-tech items.

On-site physical security is low-key and generally structured to minimize collateral damage and loss of life. However, guards are heavily armed and respond quickly. Mages and shamans are integrated into the physical forces, though Yamatetsu employs fewer of them than other megacorps. They also use parabiologicals. Matrix security is tight, favoring architecture and deckers over black IC.

>>>>>(Great. High-profit items. We need the boring, mundane stuff more. How many metahumans do these do-gooders employ, anyway?)<<<<<

—Grishnak (11:34:52/02-18-57)

>>>>>(We employ fewer metahumans than we wish to, for the simple reason that few metahumans meet our qualifications. Yamatetsu is currently looking into investing in the Oakland school system. If you doubt our intentions, please consider that we are based in "Orkland" as well as San Francisco.)<<<<<

—Shorty (11:58:29/02-18-57)

>>>>>(If Shorty is actually Harvey Blackbeard (and I believe he is), then our good friend Harv is in charge of the Oakland Warehouse and Shipping department. Are you a VP yet, Harv? Of course not—a VP would get to live in the arcology in San Fran, and they sure as hell don't want any dwarfs in their clean little arcology. Do they, Harv? Sell this drek to someone who cares!)<<<<<

—MacLir (12:24:02/02-18-57)

GAME INFORMATION



The California Free State is a unique place, full of contradictions and extremes. The huge sprawls of Los Angeles and San Francisco are vastly different from each other, despite their similar size and population density; magic works one way in the Mojave Desert and another way in the lands near Mount Shasta; gypsy tribes made up of all the (meta)human races live in harmony with each other, while all across the Free State Humanis policlubbers and Native Californian thugs hunt down metahumans like rats. And all the while, the megacorporations fiddle like Nero as California edges closer to the brink of burning. Amid such rampant chaos, opportunities for shadowrunners abound—if the runners in question are savvy enough to cope with California's unique problems and hazards.

SHADOWRUNNING IN CALIFORNIA

Shadowrunners in California will find opportunities and challenges unique to the Free State, from specific types of shadowruns to pervasive elements of California society with which every runner must eventually deal. Background factors and types of biz that player characters are most likely to run into are described in the following paragraphs.

PREJUDICE

While FASA does not wish to introduce or promote prejudice at any level, we understand that it is a part of the world in which we live. Because Shadowrun is based on the real world as well as the cyberpunk future, it makes sense that (meta)human prejudice exists in the Shadowrun universe. However, prejudice is a difficult element to introduce into a game. No one wants to be told that his or her character cannot do certain things because he is from the "wrong" group and so should sit the game out. To introduce the element of prejudice without letting it ruin your game, keep it a roleplaying issue. Also, keep in mind that prejudice comes in many forms; no one type of character is going to be the only brunt of bigotry in the game environment. For every anti-ork human out there, there is an anti-human ork. In the **California Free State** sourcebook, we have illustrated prejudice against all the races *by* all the races. This

allows gamemasters and players to decide if prejudice in their game is a simple "us against them" issue, or something with subtler shades of gray.

Another important thing to keep in mind is that, while prejudice can show itself in harsh and even violent ways, there are always people who fight against it. They may be civil rights activists, runners of underground railroads, or ordinary people who simply refuse to believe that mistrust and hatred are the way to solve society's problems. Not everyone is a hero—nor do they need to be—but creating a situation in which a player character must find someone to help him in a hostile place makes for interesting roleplaying.

Finally, prejudice should never become so extreme that players feel their characters have no hope of accomplishing anything (or surviving). Though realistic in some cases, such a harsh environment makes for poor game play. Some players interested in exploring mature themes may appreciate such an opportunity for roleplaying, but others may find it frustratingly limiting. The gamemaster must balance the bad and the good so that dealing with prejudice makes the game more interesting for the players without causing insurmountable difficulties.

Humanis Policlub

The Humanis Policlub is a perfect example of a way to make prejudice in California as extreme as the gamemaster wants it. Humanis can be nothing more than a "good ol' boys club"; members may actively dislike those of a different metatype or color, or who use magic, but they never act on the prejudices that they talk about so freely with their friends. Alternatively, the gamemaster may decide that Humanis members actively and physically assert their beliefs. These people are the violent ones who beat up metahumans for fun. The Native Californians are a specific example of this kind of bigot, but they are not the only ones. Nor is this kind of virulent bigotry unique to California. Both types of bigots may exist within any chapter of the Humanis Policlub, allowing the gamemaster to make prejudice more or less of a factor as he or she sees fit.

Racial Go-Gangs

Humans are not the only prejudiced race in the Shadowrun universe. Like many other places, the California Free State has a pro-"your favorite race here" group for every pro-human organization. As with Humanis and its fellows, these can run the gamut from passive resistance to outright violence. On the violent end are the racial go-gangs, the metahuman response to the violence of the pro-human Native Californians. The metahuman go-gangs are just as violent and vicious as those they oppose. Also, remember that different metahuman races don't necessarily like each other; just because dwarfs and trolls are both metahumans doesn't mean they see each other as allies or friends. Metahuman go-gangs can despise other metahuman races just as much as the Native Californians despise metahumans.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

California has one of the most chaotic political landscapes in North America, and different people may be running the show from one region of the Free State to another. California's central government is very weak, and so many towns throughout the state have had to develop strong local leadership in order to survive. This state of affairs is not always good (for local people or for shadowrunners). Much of California has become like the Old West, where the richest man, the fastest gun, or just the meanest thug rules the town. In many cases, residents of those towns are too frightened to fight against whoever lords it over them. These towns may also take on certain racial attitudes promoted by their boss or bosses; sometimes, people even found a town based on a shared belief. The possibilities are almost limitless; the gamemaster can decide on a town-to-town basis exactly who is in charge and why.

GYPSY BANDS

In the disputed Northern Crescent, low-level warfare reigns on many levels—between governments, between corps, and between races. Tolerance, serenity and peacefulness seem to be the norm only among the gypsy bands who call the Northern Crescent home. The gypsies are a varied lot; a given band may include everyone from veterans of the California War tired of the killing, to ex-shadowrunners looking to retire (or hide) in peace, to displaced people from the sprawls, to homeless victims of the various conflicts throughout the Free State. The gypsies are more than willing to accept new people into their family or tribe, though each new member must prove his or her trustworthiness before they are taught "gypsy ways." Gypsy ways include such valuable information as who to contact in each town across the Crescent to get food, water and other supplies.

The gypsies are made up of all races and types of people. Most are just regular Joes, but gypsy bands may also include magicians, mercs, riggers and deckers. A gypsy magician is more likely to be shamanic than hermetic, but mages do exist among them. Gypsy deckers operate under a couple of handicaps—they usually use older equipment and must have some type of satellite uplink (see p. 88, **Virtual Realities 2.0**). Some gypsies are cybered, but they have all gotten their implants somewhere else; the gypsy bands do not have the resources or facilities to install cyberware.

Gypsy tribes are constantly on the move. Most tribes follow the same route year after year; others move from place to place seemingly at random. They usually travel in vehicles brought by people who want to join the tribe, or traded for in local towns; the latter tend to be older vehicles. The gypsies rarely use currency; they prefer to barter with people, and many communities eagerly await the trading opportunities that the gypsies bring.

Other communities dislike and distrust the gypsies—another reason why the tribes stay on the move. By their very existence, the gypsy bands prove that the (meta)human races can get along just fine, and certain people in all races deeply resent seeing that example set. When confronted with a situation that might turn ugly, the gypsies tend to move on rather than fight in order to protect those who cannot fight for themselves. They use many subtle, non-confrontational ways to get back at those who do them harm, among them ritual magic, theft of personal items, and con games.


65
LIMIT
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THE ANASAZI

The Anasazi are both a throwback to the nomadic tribes of the American Southwest and a post-apocalyptic warrior society. These tribes are spiritual, secretive and deadly. The typical Anasazi considers him or herself a warrior, and many Anasazi tribes battle each other to prove themselves the stronger. However, all the tribes will band together at a moment's notice to drive out anyone or anything they consider a threat.

Though the Anasazi war against each other, they consider it their most sacred duty to preserve the Mojave against "despoilers" from outside it. They consider wholesale talismongering a heinous crime; they take no exception to a single individual gathering fetish and foci materials for him or herself, but will prevent large-scale "harvesting" of the desert's treasures by any means necessary.

The Anasazi are much more suspicious of outsiders than the gypsy bands of the Northern Crescent, and so it is rare—but not impossible—for an outsider to join the tribe. An outsider must spend years earning the tribe's trust before they will welcome him or her among them.

Few Anasazi are cybered, as they lack the resources and facilities to implant cyberware. Anasazi warriors tend to be shamans, shamanic adepts (p. 110, **Awakenings**), physical adept followers of the Warrior Way (pp. 51–52, **Awakenings**), or mundanes without cyberware. A few Anasazi are cybered warriors and riggers; still fewer are deckers. Anasazi shamans usually follow the Eagle, Coyote, Horse, Griffin, Iguana, Moon, Phoenix, Raven, Scorpion, Snake, Sun, or Wolf totems. The Anasazi call Sun shamans Followers of Vengeance, and Moon shamans Followers of Forgiveness. (For a description of the Scorpion shaman, see **Magic in the Mojave**, p. 143 of this section.)

Like the gypsies, the Anasazi make most of their living through barter. As the Anasazi tend to avoid (meta)human habitation, much of this trade is conducted by initiates going on their ordeals (see pp. 39–41, **Grimoire II**). The Anasazi are also known for creating magical concoctions from the plants and herbs of the desert, which they call their "spiritual helpers." These concoctions are the Anasazi's most precious secret, and it is virtually impossible for a player character to learn how to make them. Game information for these magical plants is listed on p. 143 of this section.

WATER WARS

Water smuggling is big shadow biz in the California Free State, and is the type of run most likely to be outside the experience of player characters from elsewhere. Virtually any vehicle, from a cycle to a VTOL to a truck, can be adapted to take water. The typical water tank costs five CFS dollars per liter; water tanks can be made in any size and adapted to fit any existing vehicle.

The market price for water depends on the client. As a rule of thumb, assume that the average buyer will pay 5 CFS dollars per liter of water. In Los Angeles, this price doubles; in the Mojave Desert, it triples.

CORPORATE RESEARCH FACILITIES

In a place like California, where the central government is weak and easily bought off, the megacorporations can literally do whatever they want. In the Free State, what they want is unfettered research and experimentation. California is littered with corporate research and development labs, some run by international megacorps and others by smaller California-based companies. The typical shadowrun is a run on a corporation, but pulling this kind of biz in California brings on an amazing number of hazards. Anywhere in the Free State, runners hitting a corporate facility may be hundreds of miles away from safety and pay day—with the corp on their tails, mutant creatures hounding their every step, and Native Californians or other racist gangs ready to hunt them down for yuks. The gamemaster can create entire campaigns around getting into and fleeing from a corporate site. With no contacts, no easy nuyen and nothing but miles of hostility to cope with, the player characters may find the run on the R&D facility the easiest part of the whole adventure.

MAGIC IN CALIFORNIA

Like many places in the Shadowrun universe, California has its share of homegrown magical societies (see **The Players**, p.122). It also abounds in natural materials, so much so that the average talismonger sees it as one-stop shopping for fetishes. Where the Free State differs from other places is in the way magic works in certain locations: Los Angeles, the region around Mount Shasta, and the Mojave Desert.

LOS ANGELES

The magical war between the top universities in the Los Angeles area (see **UCLA**, p. 92 of **Los Angeles**) have gone dangerously beyond stupid pranks and initiation rites. The amount of magic being thrown around and astral travel being done has so polluted local astral space that magic in the Los Angeles area is utterly unpredictable; any mage or shaman attempting to cast a spell, conjure a spirit, or go astral must take immense care because he does not know what unpleasant surprise he may get. This astral phenomena goes by many names: mana brambles, mana waves, and astral tides are a few of the printable ones.

This phenomenon may affect player characters in four major ways. It may cause a change in a spell's force, a change in its drain level, a change in the force of a spirit, or the bizarre condition known as astral disassociation.

Spell Casting

The gamemaster can choose whatever effect he or she wants from the table below, or determine it randomly by rolling 1D6 twice. The first die roll result determines whether the spell's Force or Drain level is increased or decreased. The second die roll result determines the extent (if any) to which the spell's Force or Drain level is changed. All tests for the affected spell are made using the Force of the spell as dictated by the two die rolls, with a minimum Force of 1.

Keep in mind that the Force of the spell will also affect Drain. If a spell's Drain level is listed as Deadly and must be staged up, add 1 to the target number for the Drain Resistance Test, regardless of the Force of the spell. Staging down Drain proceeds as normal.

SPELL EFFECT TABLE

First 1D6 Roll	Effect
1–2	Force Decrease
3–4	Force Increase
5–6	Drain Change

Second 1D6 Roll

Force Decrease

Die Roll	Effect
1 or 6	Force remains unchanged
2	Force is reduced by 1
3	Force is reduced by 2
4	Force is reduced by 3
5	Force of the spell is halved

Force Increase*

Die Roll	Effect
1 or 6	Force remains unchanged
2	Force is increased by 1
3	Force is increased by 2
4	Force is increased by 3
5	Force is doubled

Drain Changes

Die Roll	Effect
1 or 6	Drain remains the same
2 or 3	Drain is staged up by 1 level
4 or 5	Drain is staged down by 1 level

*All standard penalties for casting a spell greater than the caster's Magic Rating apply (see p. 128, **SRII**).

Night Dragon, a newcomer to Los Angeles, finds himself in a nasty fire fight (surprise!) with some Steppin' Wulfs go-gangers. He decides to toss a Force 6 hellblast spell, just to shown those Steppin' Wulfs he means business. The gamemaster decides that the mana bramble is in full force. Opting for a random outcome, the gamemaster rolls 1D6 and gets a 5. That means the Drain changes, and so Night Dragon's Drain Resistance Test is affected. The gamemaster decides to roll for the Drain change instead of choosing from among the listed alternatives. He rolls a 2 and so the Drain is staged up 1 level. Hellblast has a listed Drain level of [(F/2) + 6]D, or 9D; staged up 1 level, that means Night Dragon's player must make his Drain Resistance Test against a Drain level of 10D. Night Dragon better kill those Wulfs with this one, or he may lose this battle.

The mana bramble affects all spells cast in the physical or astral plane. It does not affect the use of fetishes or foci, because they were created with Karma Points and the phenomenon has no effect on Karma. Metamagic also remains unaffected, as do the abilities of physical adepts. The gamemaster determines how often the mana bramble changes; it can change every time a spell is cast or it can remain constant for days at a time.

Ritual magic is just as unpredictable as spellcasting, in the same ways described above. The gamemaster may also decide that the mana bramble affects the target number for the ritual link, making it easier or harder to accomplish. This game mechanic represents the strange nature of astral space around Los Angeles and the resulting difficulty of trying to send something through it.

Spirit Summoning

Conjuring in the Los Angeles area is a risky proposition because the spirit that responds may not be of the Force the summoner requested; instead, the spirit may be of a Force greater or less than attempted. The conjurer suffers Drain based on the Force of the spirit actually summoned, not the spirit that the character intended to summon. The gamemaster can increase or decrease the summoned spirit's Force according to the table above. A spirit of a Force higher than the summoner requested will remain to do the service or services required of it, but will act as insubordinate and resentful as the gamemaster can creatively make them.

Astral Disassociation

Astral disassociation is a phenomenon that seems to exist only in the Los Angeles area. A character in astral space suffering from astral disassociation feels like a person tossed into the deep end of a swimming pool, floundering toward solid ground and gasping for air. In a sense, the character is "drowning" in astral space. He or she begins to feel as if the astral plane cannot fully support him, that at any moment his lifeline back to his meat body will dissolve into nothing.

This phenomenon is purely psychological, and so it is also purely roleplaying. The gamemaster should use astral disassociation to cause nightmares, or make a mage or shaman character second-guess what he or she witnessed in astral space. Just to make things even more fun for the player characters, have astral space seem perfectly normal on the character's next visit; keep him guessing about what he may or may not encounter every time he astrally projects. The gamemaster can also change the speed of Essence loss (see p. 146, **SRII**) from the standard rate of 1 point per hour to 1 point per half hour. This will make magically active characters even more paranoid about the risks of astral projection.

MAGIC IN THE MOJAVE

The Mojave Desert is so alive with magic that characters can almost see, taste and feel it. It is also one of the harshest environments in the world. This combination of harsh conditions and skyrocketing magic levels makes the Mojave one of the most dangerous places in California, especially at such magic-drenched locations as Ubehebe Crater, the Joshua Tree National Monument, Saratoga Springs, and the Lost Mine (see **The Mojave Desert**, pp. 118–121).



Spirits

The Mojave Desert is among the largest sources of spirits in the Awakened world. Though this may seem at first like a mage's or shaman's dream come true, in fact it is the opposite. The spirits of the Mojave are much more independent, and often much more hostile. They look with contempt upon those who conjure them to perform duties, and they let the mage or shaman know it. The gamemaster should make any spirit summoned in the Mojave act as if its summoner has robbed it of its freedom; the spirit will fight the mage or shaman, perform its services with intense reluctance, and take every opportunity to break free of the magician's control.

Spirits also have a tendency to manifest at will in the Mojave, without being summoned. Usually, a spirit manifests spontaneously to protect its domain, though every spirit may have a different motive than every other. All standard rules for manifested spirits apply; for suggested motivations, see p. 76, **Grimoire II**.

Background Count

The background count in the Mojave Desert is aspected (see p. 104, **Awakenings**) to work against conjuring, and so all Conjuring Tests in the Mojave Desert area must be made against a target number equal to the Force of the spirit desired plus 2. The desert as a whole has a Power Site Rating (see pp. 103-104, **Awakenings**) that fluctuates between 1 and 3. The power site rating and background count allow the gamemaster to manipulate the numbers as needed to fit his or her campaign.

Talismongering in the Mojave

The magical richness of the Mojave has made it a magnet for various magic users: talismongers, enchanter adepts, and just about anyone else with any magical interest wants materials for making foci and fetishes from this area. The Joshua trees are a prime target, as they confer several benefits on the enchanter. Using anything from a Joshua tree—roots, leaves, bark or wood—reduces the base time for refining and artificing by 1/2 (round up; see pp. 20–25, **Grimoire II**). Parts of a Joshua tree can also be used as exotic material, per the Optional Exotic Materials rules on p. 25, **Grimoire II**; the tree material can replace the standard 10 units of herbs or can be used to make 1 unit of herbal radical. As noted above, the base time for making the herbal radical is reduced by 1/2. Finally, chunks of wood can be used as telesma

(see p. 25, **Grimoire II**). Joshua tree wood counts as a virgin telesma for purposes of enchanting.

In addition to Joshua trees, talismongers use (and will pay well for) other items from the Mojave, from rocks to cacti to borax burros. These items and others can reduce the base time for refining and artificing by 1/3 to 1/4 (round up) at the gamemaster's discretion.

Scorpion Shaman (Anasazi Totem)

Scorpion is the dancer of death. He fears nothing, because he can kill anyone and anything. His poison is his strength and his strength brings death. The Scorpion shaman has absolute power to do what he wants, and knows it.

Scorpion shamans are solitary by nature. They even prefer to fight alone rather than call on spirits for help or guidance. Though they align themselves with Anasazi bands, Scorpion shamans live outside even these small groups as much as they can.

Scorpion shamans do not like other Scorpion shamans. If two Scorpion shamans meet each other, they will challenge each other to a Dance of Death—single, hand-to-hand combat with melee weapons, no spells or guns—to determine which shaman is stronger. In many cases, the shamans coat their blades with nova scorpion venom. Despite its name, the Dance of Death ends when one shaman is clearly defeated; literal death is not necessary. Scorpion shamans also perform the Dance of Death with a member of the opposite sex as a prelude to mating. Scorpion shamans rarely stay with their mates, and soon resume their solitary lives.

Favored Environment: Deserts, especially the Mojave.

Advantages: +2 to combat spells and illusion spells. Scorpion shamans can milk a nova scorpion for its venom. Nova scorpion venom does only 5(L) damage to a Scorpion shaman.

Disadvantages: +2 to all target numbers during the day, -1 die to all Conjuring Tests. The Scorpion shaman will become severely depressed when away from the hot, dry environment of the desert. Increase all target numbers by 1 for every day the shaman spends out of that environment. Desertlike conditions can be recreated in other parts of the world for the shaman; in such cases, increase all target numbers by 1 for every 12 hours that the shaman spends away from this protected environment.

Spiritual Helpers

As stated in the **Mojave Desert** section (p. 117), Anasazi tribes have a medicine man known as a *brujo* (feminine, *bruja*). Rather than shamans or mages, these individuals are storytellers and spiritual leaders of these nomadic bands. The brujo also knows the secrets of making "spiritual helpers," the magical balms and liquids that bestow certain powers on their users.

The ancient Anasazi used these potions for hundreds of years before cyberware existed, and the potions work as well in the Awakened world as they always have. Cybered and magically active individuals can use these potions, and the disadvantages listed below remain the same no matter what the user's lifestyle. However, because Anasazi spiritual helpers get much of their power from the user's Essence, heavily cybered individuals will not get the same boost from them as un-cybered people.

The mixtures and their powers in game terms are described below. The duration of the powers conferred by all spiritual helpers is the Essence of the character using them + 1D6 hours, up to a maximum of 12 hours, rounded down.

Animal Tongue: This mixture grants animal control powers when ingested (see p. 216, **SRII**).

Disadvantages: When animal tongue wears off, the character must make a Willpower Test against the Essence of any animal he or she meets. If the test fails, the character is filled with terror, as if the animal was using the fear power against him (see p. 218, **SRII**). The character reacts this way regardless of whether the animal is mundane or paranormal, and remains exaggeratedly fearful of any animal he or she encounters for the same amount of time that the mixture's beneficial effect lasted. For purposes of this rule, spirits do not count as animals.

Little Smoke: When smoked, this mixture grants concealment and confusion powers (see p. 217, **SRII**).

Disadvantages: Perception and Willpower are reduced to 1 when the mixture wears off, for as long as the mixture's effect lasted.

Spirit Strength: When ingested, spirit strength grants enhanced physical Attributes, enhanced movement, enhanced reactions and enhanced senses (see p. 217, **SRII**, and p. 131, **Paranormal Animals of Europe**).

Disadvantages: The character's natural Body, Quickness, and Strength Attributes are all reduced to 1 and the character's natural Reaction becomes 1 + 1D6. These disadvantages last as long as the mixture's original effect lasted.

Witch's Moss: This mixture grants paralyzing touch when ingested (see p. 219, **SRII**).

Disadvantages: The character's arms act as if affected by the cripple limb spell (p. 136, **Awakenings**) and remain useless for as long as the mixture's effect lasted.

Immortal Flower: When ingested, this mixture grants regeneration (see p. 219, **SRII**).

Disadvantages: The gamemaster keeps track of all damage taken while the character is under the influence of this power. For every Deadly wound taken, or if the character's cumulative wounds equal a Deadly wound, that character must remove one box from his or her physical overflow. If the character's physical overflow is reduced to zero, the character permanently loses 1 point of Essence. If and when the character's Essence is reduced to zero, he or she dies.

Rock Lizard Blood: This mixture grants immunity to pathogens and immunity to poisons when ingested (see p. 218, **SRII**).

Disadvantages: All damage taken while under this power's influence is staged up 1 level, for the same amount of time that the mixture's effect lasted.

THE NORTHERN CRESCENT

Unlike Los Angeles and the Mojave Desert, the Northern Crescent has no inherent magical phenomena associated with it. However, the presence of the great dragon Hestaby has given rise to a few magical oddities in the region around Mount Shasta.

Mount Shasta

Hestaby's presence on Mount Shasta has given the area immediately surrounding it a power site rating that ranges from 1 to 3. Because the power site rating is aspected, the gamemaster must increase it by +1 whenever any nature magic is used near Mount Shasta, such as casting nature-based spells and summoning nature spirits (see pp. 103-104, **Awakenings**).

Talismongering in the Northern Crescent

As with the Mojave Desert, talismongers see the vast forests of the Northern Crescent as a giant shopping mall for fetish and foci materials. Herbs, minerals and metals from the Crescent are greatly prized for talismongering. Items from these northern forests can reduce the base time for refining, artificing and enchanting by 1/4 to 1/3 (round up) at the gamemaster's discretion (see pp. 20–26, **Grimoire II**). Wood and bark from new-growth redwoods make excellent telesma; treat these as hand-made telesma for purposes of enchanting.

THE SACRAMENTO MATRIX

The matrix system used by the central government of the California Free State may just be the world's scariest system to break into—not by choice or design, but strictly because of overwhelming government shortsightedness coupled with graft and fear. The people in charge of the government have no idea what a monster they've created. Those who created it, patrol it, and monitor it know better. The Sacramento Matrix is described on p. 51 of the **Central Valley** section.

In game terms, the gamemaster can create any type of setup he or she wants. The only limit is the gamemaster's imagination. The Sacramento Matrix is a hodgepodge of partially constructed nodes and half-finished security. Booby traps, still-active IC, and dead ends are the norm. The system has become such a disaster that the first thing each new security firm does when it takes the system over is to create new nodes, new IC and new traps. As the security firms see it, they have no reason to waste valuable resources and decker power trying to clean up the mess, because most of them don't stay in charge long enough to finish whatever they start.

To simulate this Rube Goldberg system, the gamemaster has two options. First, he or she can create utterly illogical PLTGs. The gamemaster should ignore the "conventional wisdom" of matrix creation in favor of rampant strangeness: black IC protecting empty nodes, trap doors that lead nowhere, Red nodes stuffed full of useless information protected by white IC, and so on (the weirder, the better!). Alternatively, the gamemaster can use the Node Creation Tables on pp. 159–160 of **Virtual Realities 2.0** to create random nodes and encounters.

Regardless of how the gamemaster sets up the Sacramento Matrix, paydata should be difficult to come by. When figuring paydata for any download from this system, divide the paydata points in half and round down (see pp. 66–67, **VR 2.0**). This means, of course, that data stealing player characters may end up with nothing. (Them's the breaks ...)

CRITTERS

The California Free State contains many of the paranormal animals listed in various sourcebooks, including **Shadowrun, Second Edition**. The Mojave Desert, the Pacific Coast, and the Mount Shasta area are also home to several unique critters. Finally, the high radiation and toxic levels in many areas of the Free State have created some truly loathsome and dangerous mutations. Several examples of California's unique paranormal wildlife, plus rules for creating toxic and mutant creatures, appear below.

With regard to weaknesses, gamemasters and players take note of the following change. The categories of allergic reaction listed on p. 46 of **SRII**—Nuisance, Mild, Moderate, and Severe—are the correct ones. Those on p. 220 are incorrect.

BORAX BURRO

Equus asinus magnus

Identification: The borax burro stands about a meter and a half high at the shoulders. It has a bristly, erect mane on its neck, a scanty tail with a bushy tassel, long ears, and varied coloring and markings. The borax burro is frequently confused with the smaller, mundane wild burro (*Equus asinus*) by those not familiar with the two species.

Habitat: Hot, dry deserts. Native to the Mojave.

Magic Capability: Parabiological.

Habits: The borax burro is shy by nature, but can be vicious if cornered or attacked. It roams alone or in small herds of two to six individuals. The typical borax burro has one or two foals, born in the spring. It prefers mountain slopes, and has been most often seen in the Mojave and Colorado deserts. Sightings in the desert lands of northern Africa have been recently confirmed.

Commentary: The borax burro got its name because it was initially assumed to be a descendant of the burros used in the borax mine works in Death Valley. Debate continues to rage among parazoologists over whether the borax burro is an Awakened wild burro or a toxic variant on that creature. Bolstering the argument for the toxic theory is the borax burro's corrosive saliva, which can eat through armor jackets, metal, canvas and flesh. Many people have tried to bottle this saliva, but failed because it also eats through glass and ceramic. The burro itself is immune to the saliva's effects, for reasons that remain unknown. Once the burro dies, its saliva becomes harmless. As yet, researchers have not discovered the gland (if any) that produces the substance. Unlike several other paranormal animals with corrosive saliva, the borax burro does not spit; the saliva can only be transmitted by bite.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Attacks
4/2	3 x 4	4	—	2/4	6	6	3	6M Physical (Bite)

Powers: Corrosive Saliva, Enhanced Movement



NOVA SCORPION

Scorpionida novalis

Identification: Approximately 1 meter long, the nova scorpion has a gold-colored body and large pincers. Its tail ends in a large stinger. Several species of scorpions inhabit the same area as the nova scorpion, but they are all much smaller and paler with smaller stingers.

Habitat: Deserts worldwide; large numbers of them live in the Mojave.

Magic Capability: Parabiological.

Habits: Nocturnal. During the day, nova scorpions may hide in any convenient dark spot, such as a vehicle storage compartment. A nova scorpion may also dig a lair in the sand and inhabit it for weeks or months at a time. Though nova scorpions are solitary, many individuals may share living space in the same area. The nova scorpion hunts by feeling the movement of its prey through vibrations in the ground. It can sense human footfalls, the motion of vehicles, and even the movements of small rodents and other mammals. The nova scorpion births its young live, several at a time; young scorpions are frequently found attached to their mother.

Commentary: The nova scorpion is clearly an Awakened creature. More than ten times larger than any known mundane scorpion, these creatures are so poisonous that local residents of the Mojave have christened them "death scorpions." Nova scorpion venom is potent enough to kill a (meta)human outright, unless an anti toxin is administered within an hour of the sting. Scorpion shamans (see p. 143 of this section) can magically heal victims of a nova scorpion's sting.

Many isolated research facilities in or near desert areas use nova scorpions as guard animals. The scorpions lack enough intelligence to be trained, but they are sufficiently active and territorial to make effective guardians when set loose at night. Nova scorpion venom has recently begun to filter into the open market; the strongest dose available seems to be the brand known as Mojave Death, which causes an intense physical reaction known as "the shakes." Mojave Death does 5(S) Physical damage. Many variants of it exist for sale, all weaker than the so-called pure version. Each dose costs 1,000 nuyen. DocWagon and most major hospitals carry antidotes to all forms of nova scorpion venom; any facility where scorpions are used as guard critters likely has a supply of antitoxin available.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
1	3 x 4	1	—	1/3	2	6	4

Attacks: 4(M)Physical (Stinger), Venom

Powers: Concealment (Self Only), Venom*

*The venom's damage code is Essence (D) Physical. A bitten character who receives the antitoxin and survives still takes full damage from the poison, but otherwise heals normally. The antitoxin costs 150 nuyen per dose.

ROAD RACER

Geococcyx californianus paisanus

Identification: The road racer stands about three-fourths of a meter high at the shoulder. The upper part of its body sports dark and light stripes, with a lighter belly and a red topknot. Its beak is long and thin. The road racer is the Awakened cousin of the mundane roadrunner, a smaller and less colorful bird.

Habitat: High desert. Native to the Mojave.

Magic Capability: Parabiological.

Habits: Diurnal. The road racer's major food sources are lizards, small mammals, insects and plants. The road racer is so much a creature of habit that local people have claimed to set their watches by its rounds. Young road racers hatch from large eggs, which the mother racer lays over a period of weeks in the spring. The road racer's territory includes Southern California, western Pueblo, southwestern Ute, and northwestern Aztlan.

Commentary: The road racer, like the roadrunner, can fly only for short distances. It also has a reputation as a pack rat because it will pick up anything it can carry in its mouth. The road racer is particularly attracted to shiny objects (like ammo belts). Intelligent and a creature of habit, it runs along the same routes at the same time every day. Desert dwellers assert that the road racer brings good luck to its friends.

The road racer has been used with some success as a messenger between given locations, but this practice is not widespread. The road racer will only run its route at the same time every day, regardless of the needs of a corporation or research facility.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
3	4 x 5	2	—	3/4	5	6	4

Attacks: 5(L) Physical (Claw or Beak)

Powers: Concealment (Self Only), Enhanced Movement (Running Only)

SLIME MOLD

Myxomycota novalis

Identification: The slime mold can cover an area of 100 meters, although mold of this size is very rare and exists only if it has enough food. It usually covers no more than a 5 meter area. In its dry state, the slime mold looks like a frothy white and gray fried egg, a few centimeters in diameter. When hydrated, it is a pale glistening jellylike mass, up to a meter in diameter.

Habitat: Deserts. Native to the Mojave; so far, it has not been reported anywhere else in the world.

Magic Capability: Parabiological.

Habits: Nonsentient. Slime mold is most often found in caves, under overhanging rocks, and in other relatively dark and moist places. It dries out in the summer and rehydrates during the winter rains. It reproduces by division.

Commentary: Slime mold is harmless when dry. Its binding power works only on sand and rock. Several corporate research facilities in or near the Mojave use slime mold to protect doorways and other entry points, relying on its corrosive secretions to disable or even kill intruders.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
4	3 x 3	3	—	1/3	3	6	2

Attacks: As powers

Powers: Binding, Corrosive Secretions, Immunity to Normal Weapons

Weaknesses: Extreme heat, flame, and lack of water. Fire does normal damage. Extreme heat and/or lack of moisture will cause the mold to dry up, but will not kill it.

SEA LEECH

Not Classified

Identification: This huge leech reaches an average size of ten meters long and three meters wide. The number of "mouths" through which it sucks its victims' blood ranges from one large mouth to as many as ten. Each mouth is made up of strong muscles with which it drains blood and is filed with teeth sharp enough to rip the flesh of a troll with ease. Very few sea leeches resemble each other, and the scientific community has not yet been able to determine all the forms these creatures can take. Of those observed so far, some have tentacles, some have fins, and others look frighteningly like metahumans complete with arms and legs.

Habitat: Freshwater oceans; additional habitats remain unconfirmed.

Magic Capability: Parabiological.

Habits: Researchers have not yet determined the sea leech's feeding time, breeding season, territorial domain, full range, or typical number of young. So far, it is known to be active in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Commentary: The existence of these foul creatures defies even the strangeness common to the Awakened world. Various people presume these large leeches to be anything from genetic experiments gone terribly wrong to toxic spirits trapped in the physical world. Their actual origin, however, remains a mystery.

The destruction they cause is unfortunately all too well known. A sea leech can suck the blood out of a victim in less than five minutes. Most sea leeches wait until a victim falls overboard or is swimming in the bay to attack; no attack from land or from the deck of a boat has yet been reported, though an occasional sea leech with tentacles may lash its victim as he or she tries to get out of the water.

Once a sea leech has made a successful attack, the victim takes 1 box of Stun damage per round from blood loss, in addition to physical damage from the critter's teeth. The rate of blood loss remains the same regardless of how many suckers the sea leech has. To save a character from a sea leech, it is best to make the leech release the victim of its own accord; trying to pull the victim away may only aggravate the damage done by the teeth around the suction hole. Traditional methods of dealing with leeches—salt and fire—work against sea leeches (though you'll need an awful lot of salt ...). After the leech releases the victim, heavy bleeding continues at the rate of 1 box of Stun damage per round until the wound is healed with a successful Biotech (10) Test or a heal or treat spell. If a leech dies while sucking on a victim, it remains attached after death. The victim continues to take blood-

loss damage as above until the leech is removed and the wound closed.

If a character attempts to pull a victim from the leech, the character makes an opposed Strength Test against the sea leech's Strength. If the test is successful, the victim is freed but takes 2 boxes of Stun damage for blood loss and must also make a Damage Resistance Test against the leech's Strength Attribute. Armor does not apply to this test.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
(5 - 7)	(5 - 7) x 2	(3 - 8)	—	(1 - 4)	(1 - 4)	6	(2 - 8)

Attacks: 8(S) Physical (Suction/mouth)

Powers: Engulf (Water), Enhanced Attribute (Strength), Enhanced Movement (Swimming)

Weaknesses: Fire and salt. Sea leeches have a Moderate allergy to salt; fire-based attacks do double the normal damage against a sea leech.

Notes: In order to keep the sea leech mysterious, the gamemaster can use the number ranges given above as guidelines to customize the creature. A leech can have up to ten mouths, though the number does not change the damage done by a mouth attack. Of the three known types of sea leech, the first looks like a supersized leech with no appendages; the second looks like a standard leech with tentacles; and the third looks vaguely metahuman in appearance, with four appendages shaped somewhat like arms and legs. What kind of leech the player characters encounter at any given time is up to the gamemaster.

SHASTA DEER

Not Classified

Identification: Shasta deer greatly resemble ordinary mule deer. Adults are about two meters long; their color varies from reddish-brown in the summer to bluish-gray in the winter, with a white rump patch and a black-tipped tail. Males have branched antlers, rather than tines extending from a single antler. Fawns are spotted.

Habitat: Deep forest throughout Shasta County. None have yet been spotted more than half a day's walk from Mount Shasta.

Magic Capability: Unknown.

Habits: Little is known of the Shasta deer's habits, as the deer flee when approached by people they do not recognize. Several observers, however, claim to have seen them with the so-called Shamans of Shasta and with local gypsy bands.

Commentary: These deer apparently live only near Shasta Dam and in the immediate vicinity of Mount Shasta. According to rumor, they have a clear but undefined link with nature spirits; they also appear highly intelligent and seem to remember those who treat them or their fellow wild creatures well. The deer also seems to know if those approaching it are friend or foe. A few people have claimed that the Shasta deer are actually spirits of the earth, but there is no justification for this bizarre theory.

The Tir Tairngire Border Patrol has offered a bounty of 50,000 nuyen for a live Shasta deer that exhibits spirit powers. Several people have taken up the challenge, though no one has yet captured a magically active deer. Shadowrunners attempting to earn the bounty have been harassed and—on at least one occasion—killed by locals, gypsies and Shasta shamans.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
6	8 x 3	6	—	5/8	4	(6)	7 + 2D6

Attacks: 5(M) Physical, +1 reach

Powers

Any given Shasta deer has up to three of the following: Concealment, Empathy, Enhanced Movement (Running only), Enhanced Reaction, Fading, Magical Sense, Magical Guard, Magical Resistance, Masking, and Silence. (Fading and Masking are faerie powers; see p. 138, **Paranormal Animals of Europe**.)

Notes: The Shasta deer should be mysterious critters, never appearing the same way twice. The gamemaster determines the abilities any given deer has, up to a maximum of three. The deer may or may not be dual-natured, according to the gamemaster's choice. If the gamemaster wishes, he or she may decide that the deer are spirits of the forest; have the ability to call nature spirits; are free spirits being held near Mount Shasta by Hestaby; are Hestaby in a different form; are shapechangers; are Shamans of Shasta; or are simply deer that happen to live in a magical place. Any or all of these things can be true; keep the players guessing.

MUTANT CRITTERS

Mutant critters in Shadowrun are mundane beasts affected by radiation poisoning or exposure. Though mutations may cause any number of changes in the afflicted creatures, all mutant critters share certain general characteristics. They are more aggressive than their normal counterparts; they often act rabid, attack unprovoked, and rarely retreat. Most of them are loners and will attack other members of their own species as enthusiastically as other creatures. Normal creatures tend to give mutants a wide berth.

Mutant critters also exhibit many of the characteristics described below; the gamemaster decides which characteristics, if any, apply to mutants in his or her game.

Size Change

Most mutant critters are anywhere from 50 percent larger to twice the size of their normal counterparts. Some mutants may be even bigger, though critters more than twice normal size are unusual. A few mutants are smaller than normal.

Physical Deformities

Physical deformities common to mutant critters include bone anomalies, mange and albinism. Exterior bony deposits are most common along the legs, arms, skull and spine; these deposits can break the skin, giving the creature a freakish look. A mutant critter may also have misaligned internal bones: a strangely arched spine, arms and legs disproportionate to the creature's size, or an oddly shaped skull.

Creatures with fur are prone to mange—patches of exposed skin, often raw and discolored red or black. Creatures with little or no fur may exhibit scabs, open sores, and/or discolored skin.

Creatures with armor or an exoskeleton may be missing pieces of plating.

The most common physical oddity is albinism—dead white or unnaturally light skin, with pink or red eyes. Many mutant creatures also have extra appendages, usually useless. In rare cases, a mutant may be missing an appendage.

Enhanced Attributes and Abilities

Some mutant creatures gain in Strength or Body over their normal kin. Others may have low-light or thermographic vision that normal creatures of their kind do not share.

Paranormal Abilities

Many mutated creatures show such paranormal powers as Astral Perception, Corrosive Saliva, Corrosive Secretions, Dismissal, Pestilence and Venom.

Creating Mutant Critters

When creating a mutant version of a normal creature, the gamemaster should follow certain guidelines. First, reduce the Intelligence of a mutated creature by 2 (to a minimum of 1). Next, for each of the above mutant characteristics chosen by the gamemaster, reduce the creature's Essence by 1. If the mutant has enhanced Attributes, decrease its Essence by 1 per point of enhancement. Paranormal abilities are unique, and no mutant creature should have more than one. If a creature has a paranormal ability, reduce its Essence by 3 (to a minimum of 1).

*Mike, the gamemaster, wants his group to face off against a mutant bear while they search the Big Sur Coast for a hidden research lab. A normal bear's stats (p. 233, **SRII**) are:*

B	Q	S	C	I
9/1	4 x 3	9	—	2/4
W	**E**	**R**	**Attacks**	
2	6	5	6(S) Physical, +1 reach	

Mike reduces the bear's Intelligence to 1/2. He then decides to make the mutant bear an albino (costing 1 point of Essence) that gives off corrosive secretions (a paranormal ability costing 3 points of Essence). Finally, he decides to make the bear twice its normal size just to scare the pants off the group (costing 1 point of Essence). The statistics for this mutant bear are:

B	Q	S	C	I
9/1	4 x 3	9	—	1/2
W	**E**	**R**	**Attacks**	
2	1	5	6(S) Physical, +1 reach	

Optional Rule: Mutant Paranormal Critters

The gamemaster can create a mutant version of a paranormal animal using the same guidelines as for adapting a regular animal. However, the gamemaster must be careful to balance the pros and cons of this choice, especially when dealing with creatures that exist primarily in astral space or that have meta(human)-level intelligence. Keep in mind that, unlike toxic critters (see below), mutant paranormal creatures are insane and in most cases do not act like their standard paranormal counterparts.

TOXIC CRITTERS

Toxic critters are paranormal creatures twisted and warped by radiation and pollution. These fearsome beasts may be some of the most dangerous creatures on earth.

To create a toxic critter from an existing paranormal animal, the gamemaster must choose the characteristics and powers that such an abomination would be likely to have. As with mutant creatures, the gamemaster can customize toxic critters to suit the needs of a particular adventure or campaign.

First, the gamemaster must choose a primary and a secondary toxic power from the lists below. These powers cost the critter no Essence because they draw on the pollution of the earth; however, this also means that the critter can only use them within certain limits. The critter can use its primary toxic power a number of times equal to the critter's Essence Rating; it can use its secondary power a number of times equal to the critter's Essence divided by 2 (round down). The powers can be recharged at the rate of one use per hour as long as the creature is immersed in toxic waste or in a toxic domain. This recharging is called toxic hibernation.

If the gamemaster wants to give a toxic critter unlimited use of a toxic power, he or she must swap that power for one that the paranormal critter already possesses. After such a swap, the creature no longer has to go through toxic hibernation to renew the toxic power in question. Finally, at a cost of 1 point of Essence the gamemaster can add one extra die to the toxic critter's Threat Rating. All these options allow the gamemaster to introduce a paranormal animal different enough from the usual to keep players off guard.

A toxic critter's only weakness is an allergic reaction to purified water or purified air. Treat this weakness as a Severe allergy (p. 46, **SRII**). Characters can use purify water and clean air spells (p. 139, **Awakenings**) to exploit this weakness.

Primary Toxic Powers

Blindness
Compulsion
Confusion
Engulf (Sludge)*
Enhanced Physical Attributes
Enhanced Senses
Fear
Noxious Breath

*Sludge is a combination of water and earth at their toxic worst. A toxic critter using Engulf as a primary toxic power causes the poisoned muck to open up and engulf the character. Per standard rules, if the critter performs any other action, the sludge attack stops. No armor protects against this attack. The sludge does Essence (M) physical damage.



Secondary Toxic Powers
Animal Control
Corrosive Saliva
Corrosive Secretions
Dismissal
Immunity to Poisons
Magic Sense
Pestilence
Venom

Mike the gamemaster is upset that his player group did not flinch when their characters saw the mutant bear. He decides to toss something unexpected at them—a toxic nova scorpion. Mike takes the standard nova scorpion and adds 1 die to its Threat Rating, which lowers its Essence to 5. He then adds Confusion as a primary toxic power (5 uses) and Animal Control as a secondary power (2 uses) to the scorpion's standard powers of Concealment and Venom. Finally, he tosses in a couple of normal nova scorpions; this makes it tough for the player characters to tell which scorpion is the toxic one, and also makes the critter's Animal Control power that much more useful. The toxic nova scorpion is ready for action.

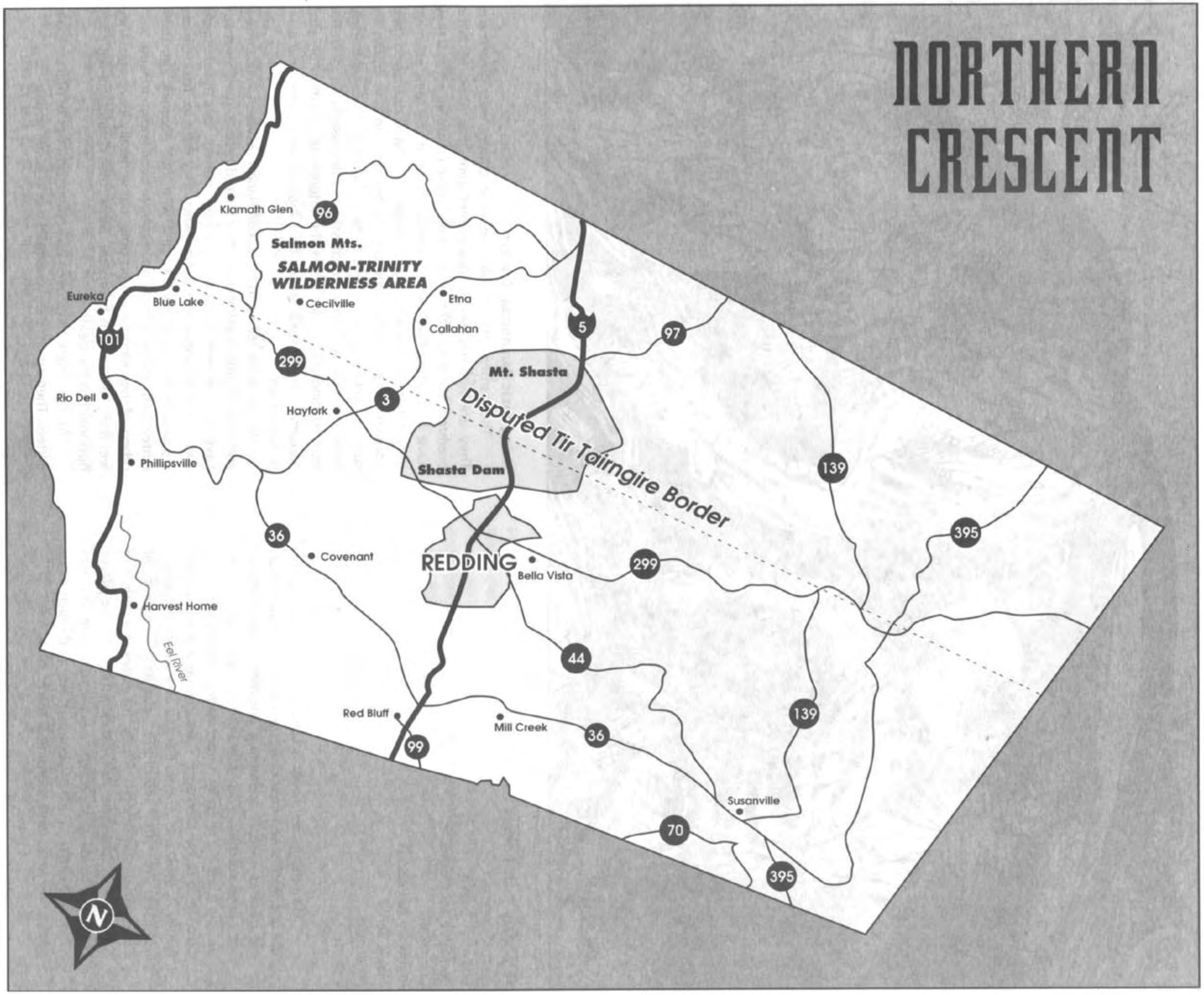
Using Toxic Paranormal Critters

The gamemaster should use toxic critters with great care. They are not necessarily more intelligent than their nontoxic brethren, but they often seem to be. These creatures act as if they have an agenda that closely parallels that of the toxic shaman; they apparently exist to punish those who have destroyed their domain. How or why toxic critters develop, no one knows for sure. However, they all seem to be paranoid and vengeful. They track and stalk their prey mercilessly, not necessarily for food. The toxic paranormal critter raises the interesting question of what happens when Nature strikes back against the people who have poisoned her.

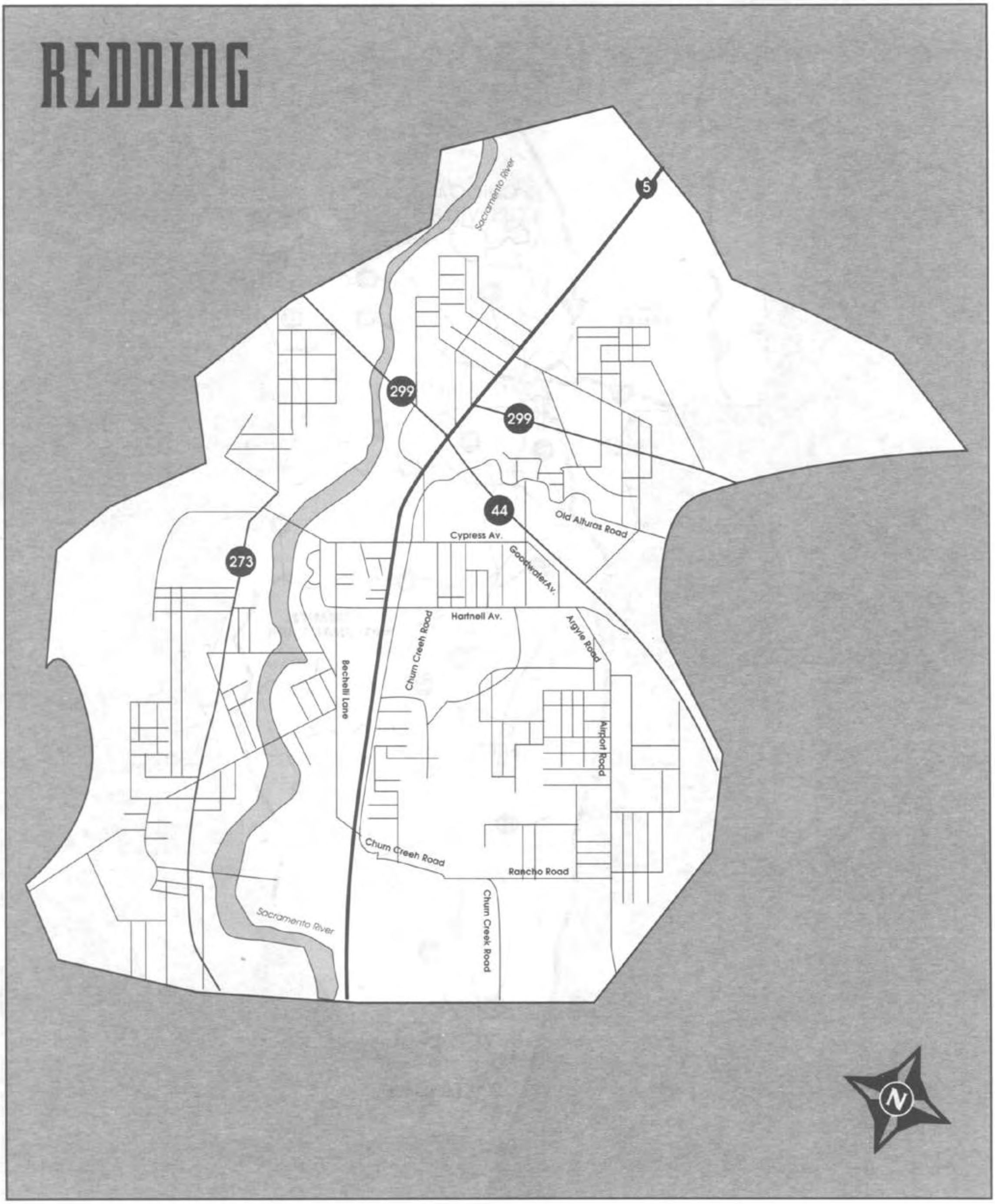
So far, there seems to be no correlation between toxic critters and toxic shamans aside from their shared nature. Toxic shamans have been known to work with toxic critters, but the shamans claim the creatures come and go when they want to. Toxic critters are usually loners, rarely traveling with their nontoxic kin. Toxic critters with animal control powers have been known to work with others of their kind for a short time, but generally leave once they feel their "mission" is complete. Most toxic critters will fight any opponent to the death.

To date, there have been no known sightings of mutant toxic critters. Then again, the Awakened world is still young.

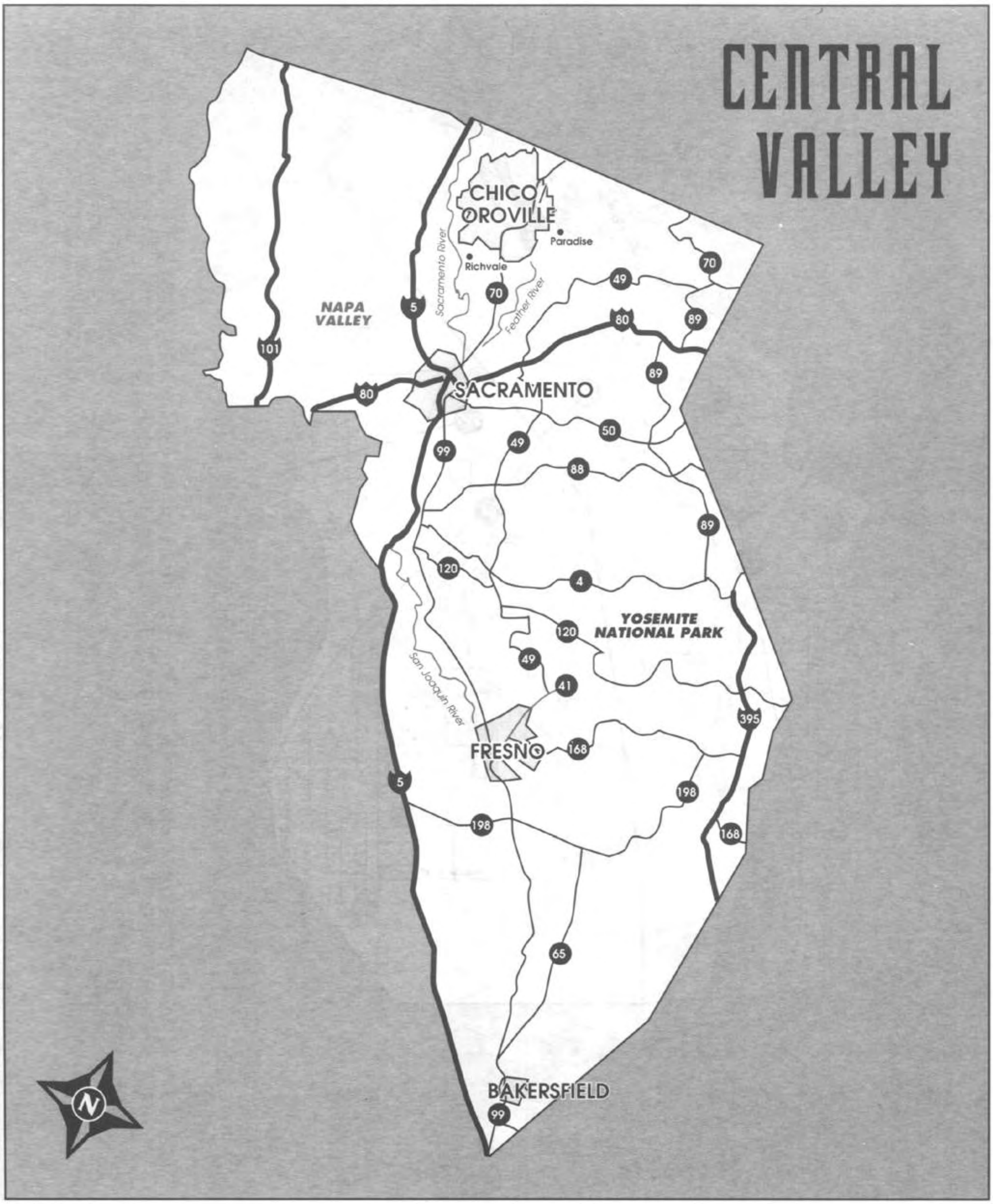
NORTHERN CRESCENT



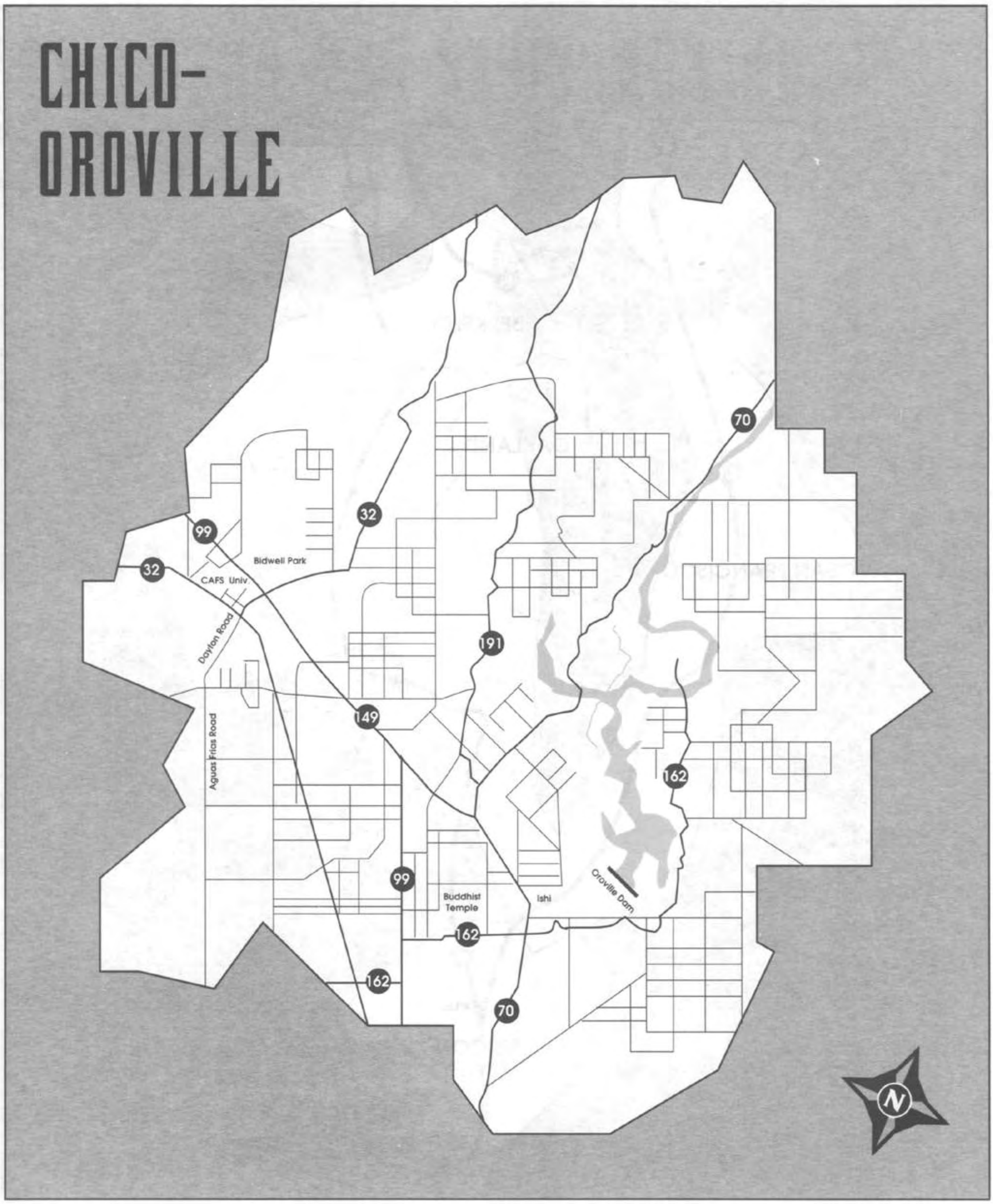
REDDING


Sacramento River
5
299
299
44
273
Old Alturas Road
Cypress Av.
Goodwater Av.
Hartnell Av.
Churn Creek Road
Argyle Road
Bechelli Lane
Airport Road
Churn Creek Road
Rancho Road
Churn Creek Road
Sacramento River
N

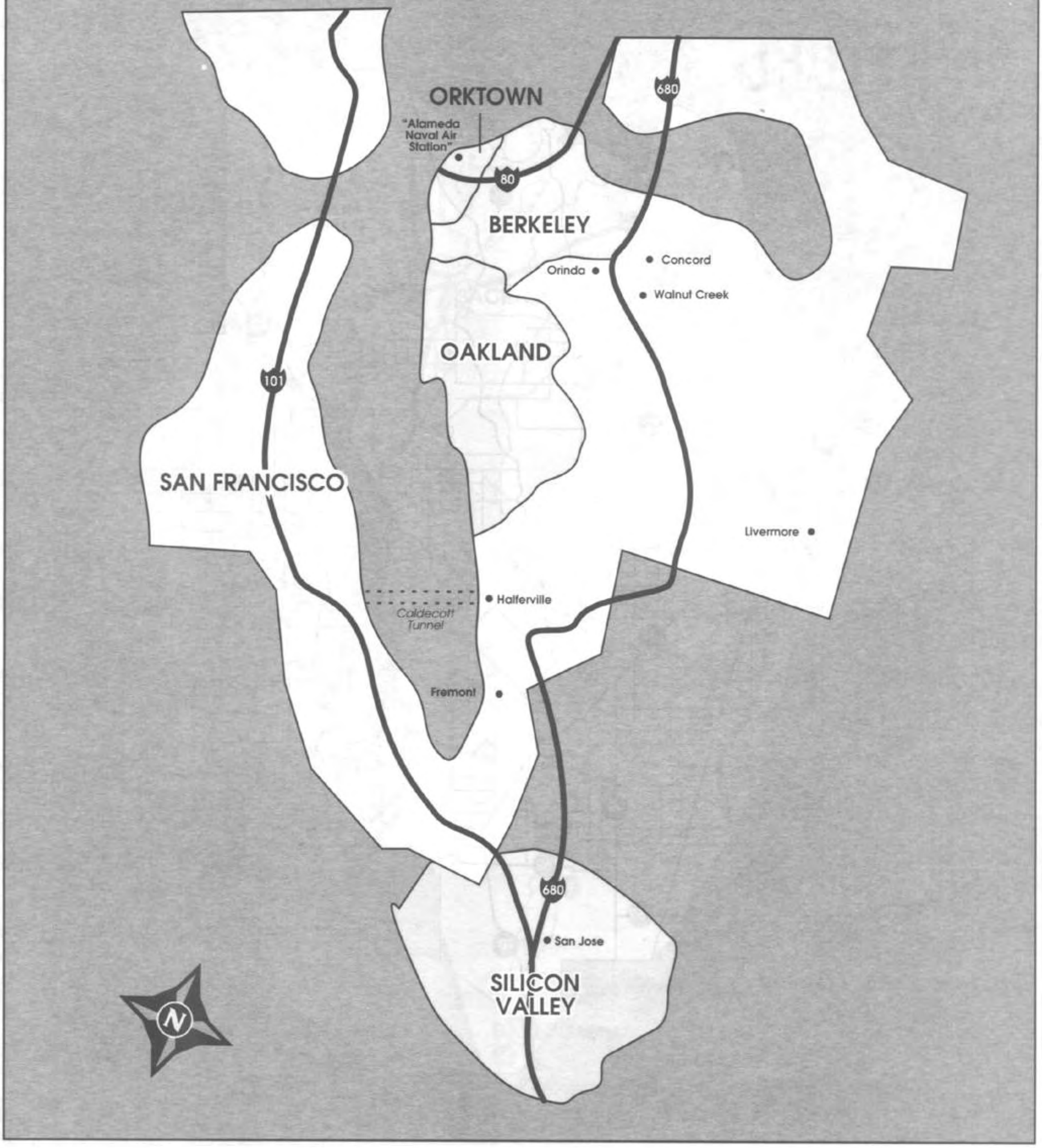
CENTRAL VALLEY



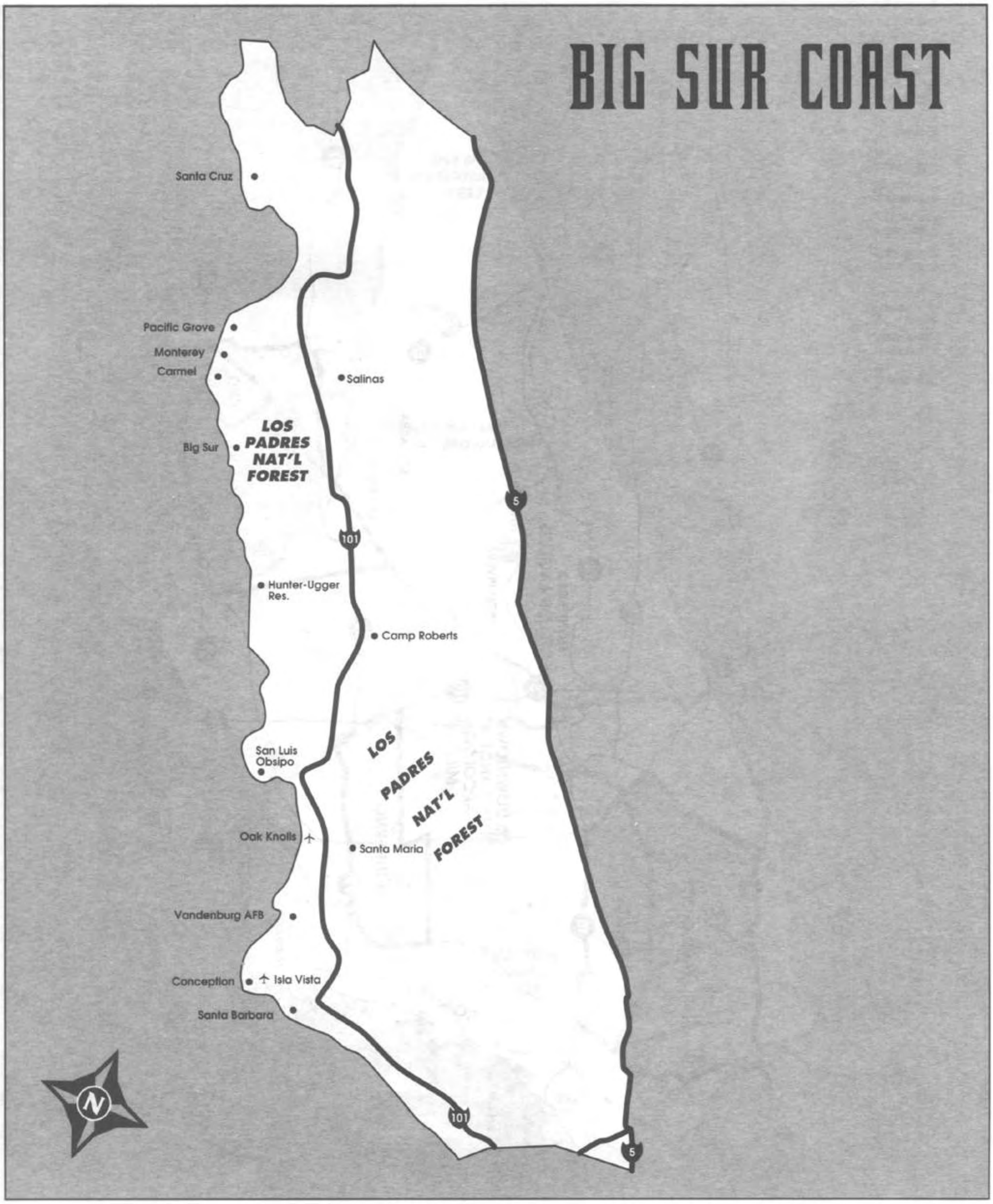
CHICO-OROVILLE



SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

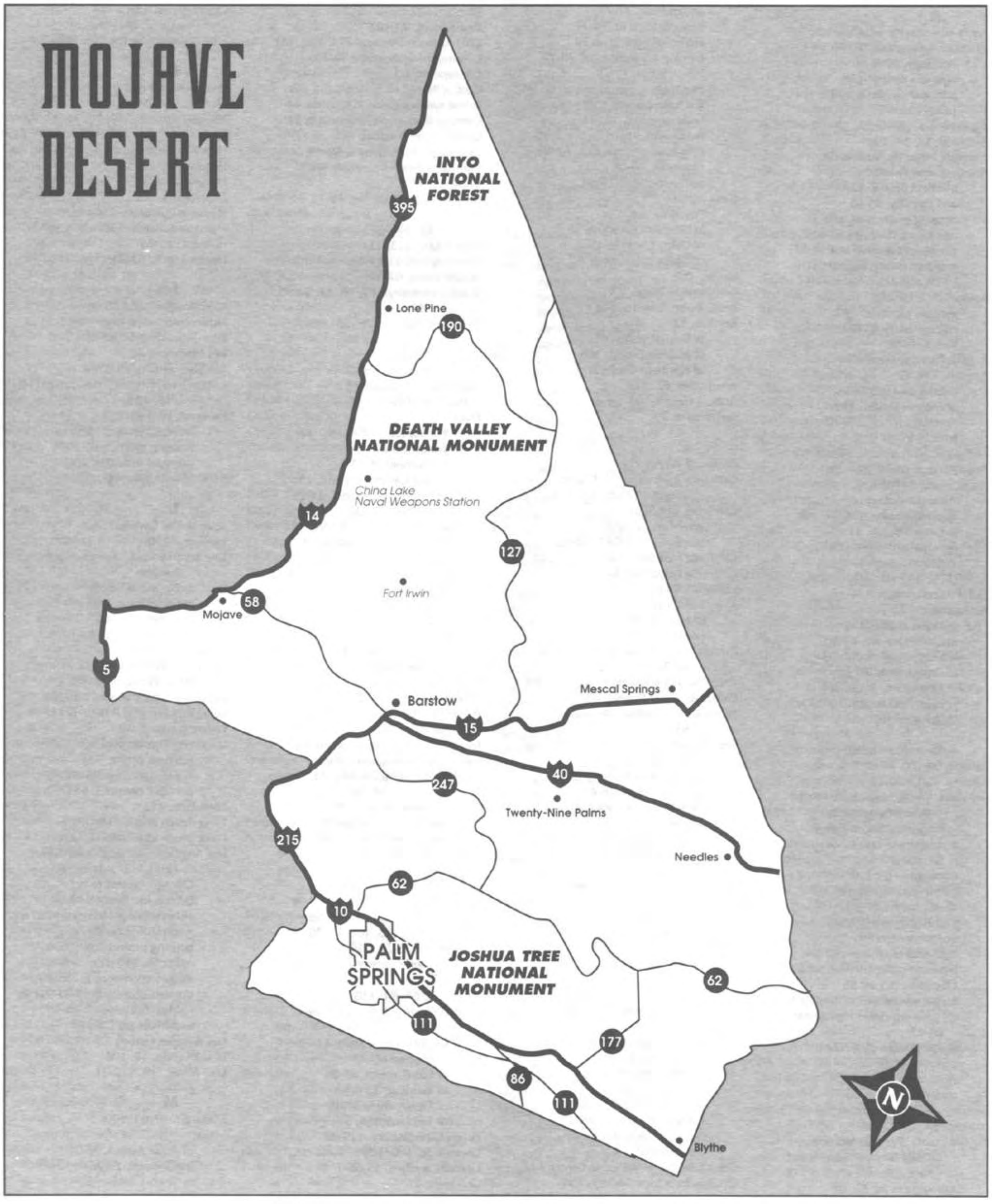


BIG SUR COAST




LOS ANGELES
405
5
210
101
134
101
UCLA
STUDIO CITY
405
WESTSIDE
10
110
210
10
60
57
60
MONTEBELLO
EAST LOS ANGELES
5
WHITTIER
PICO RIVERA
SANTA MONICA
Venice Beach
Marina Del Rey
110
DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES
ARCOLOGY
MILE
710
El Segundo
COAST TOWN
LA HABRA
57
EL INFIERNO
LA MIRADA
91
91
91
REDONDO BEACH
FUN CITY
TORRANCE
CARSON
405
HARBOR DISTRICT
VWD
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710
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San Pedro
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MOJAVE DESERT





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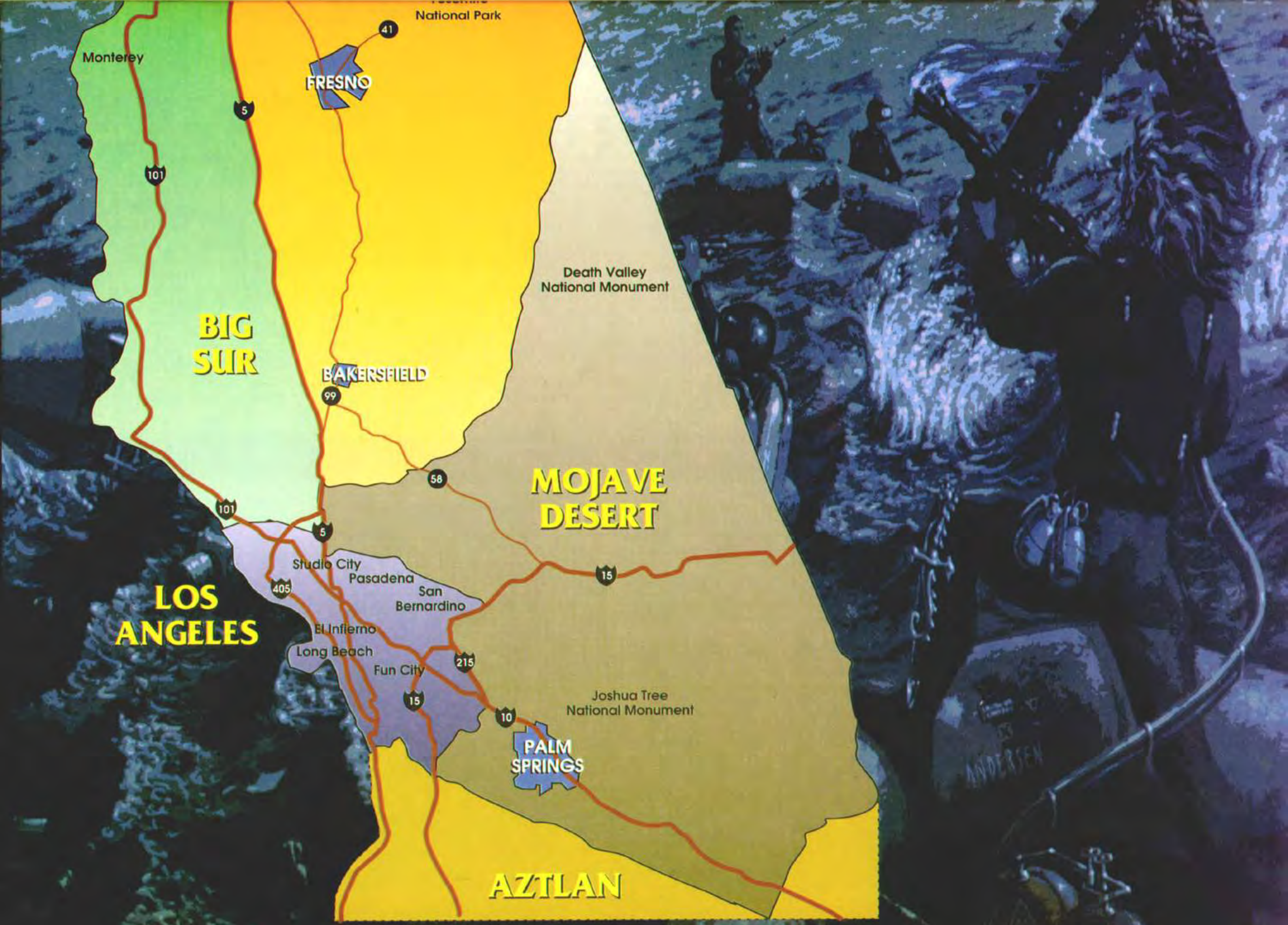
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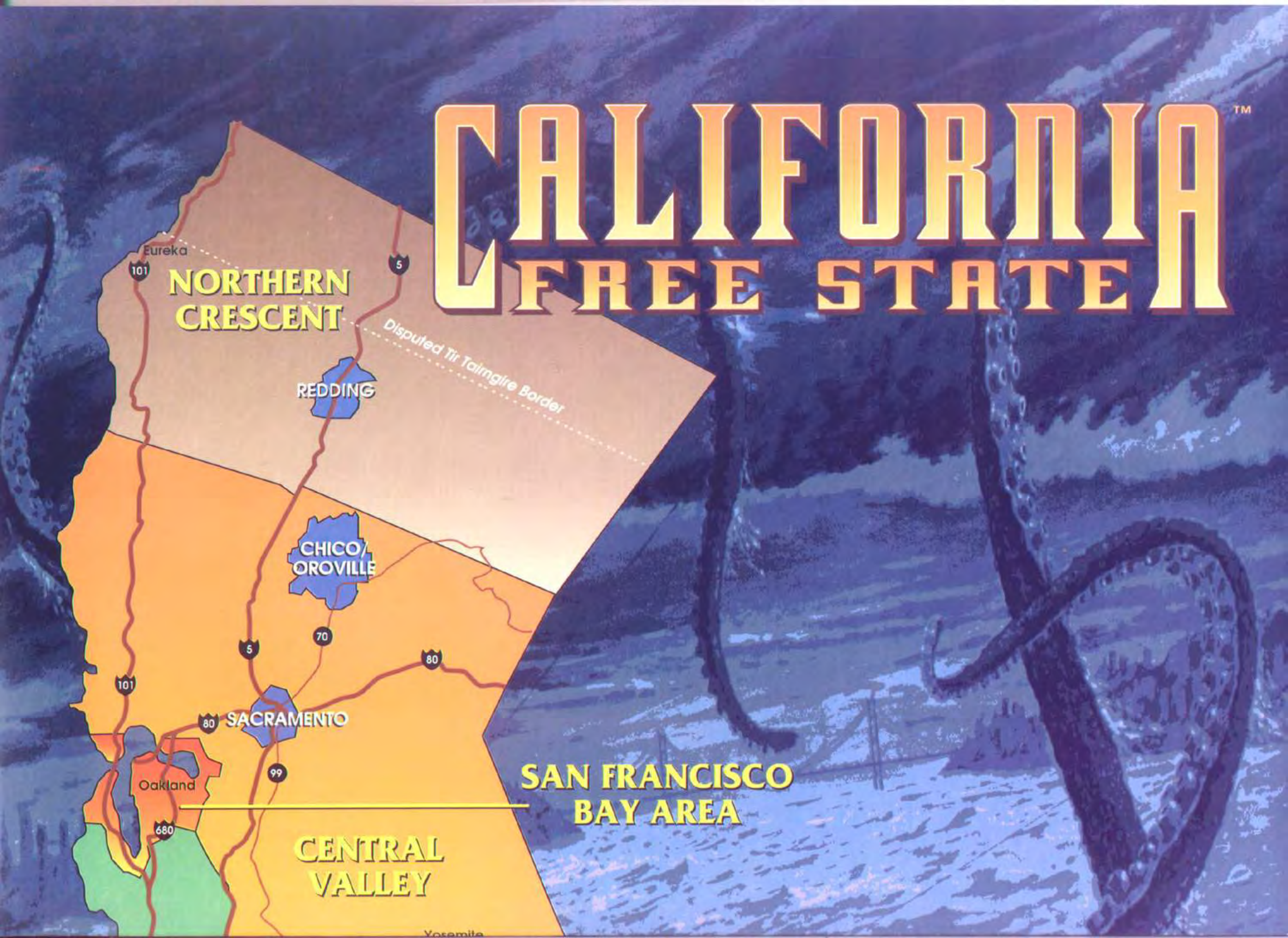
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