



SHADOWRUN

ENHANCED FICTION



THE VLADIVOSTOK GAUNTLET

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Yuri's footsteps echoed in the open space of the warehouse, a rhythmic clang on the metal catwalk. His shift was almost over, and he and Oleg, the night watchman, were the only ones left in the building. He'd last seen Oleg about three quarters of an hour ago, when they'd taken a break together. Yuri thought the man was all right, if a little soft. Oleg complained plenty about how his wife treated him but did nothing about it, and he always blamed others for his misfortunes. Yuri didn't judge him though. He knew hardship and where it brought a man better than most. He was a janitor in a forgotten warehouse on the docks of Vladivostok. Oleg was a security guard in name only, in the same forgotten space where unwanted cargo went to die. No, Yuri was in no position to look down his nose at anyone.

He stepped down the catwalk's stairs to the ground floor. Halfway down, through a window offering a vantage point to the main door, some lights caught his eye. A black car was idling, and two dark figures were talking to Oleg near it. The car wasn't a rusted junker, so that raised his suspicions right away. The two men raised his apprehension further. The first one was a hulking troll, the other a burly bald guy. Both had aggressive, tense stances. Oleg was shrinking away, nodding. Vory men, here to do some dirty business. Nothing new. This half-empty warehouse—with the other half full of crap nobody wanted—sure as hell wasn't making money from its legitimate business. Yuri's boss, the building's owner, was a stooped old man with vinegar for blood, and without a doubt he was in bed with the mob. He was always eager to provide them a safe haven for whatever business they wanted done away from prying eyes. Oleg and Yuri had standing orders to look the other way when the boss said so. Oleg always obeyed, and on top of that he tried to make himself helpful to the thugs, looking for their approval. He thought they were real men, stand-up tough guys who didn't take shit from anyone. Exactly the kind of guy Oleg wished he was. Yuri, though, knew how widely Oleg had missed that mark.

For his part, Yuri stayed away from any of these shadowy deals. He didn't want to give his past the chance to sneak up and find him.

The main garage gate opened and a car zoomed in, tires squeaking on the smooth concrete floor. Yuri eyed the car and hesitated. The mobsters parked next to the spot he needed to clean before calling it quits for the night. He wanted to be done, but then again didn't want to go near them.

As he half-pondered what to do and half-waited for the car to leave, two Vory got out of the car. They were apparently having a fine time, as the troll finished a story and they both laughed throatily. Oleg was hanging around, trying to join in. Predictably, the goons turned to Oleg for entertainment, making fun of him and using him as the butt of the next few jokes, until one had an idea.

"Hey, Oleg, do you still have that bottle of vodka you keep around?"

Oleg stammered something, his desire to have something to share probably conflicting with his desire to keep the bottle to himself.

"Hey, what about the trunk? We gotta get this done," interjected the bald mobster.

"Relax Vovka, you gotta loosen up a bit. We'll have a drink then we'll deal with the trunk, neh?" The troll's lips twisting into a mean smile.

The man bristled a bit, mostly from being called Vovka. There was a moment of tension, the kind of thing that, with these kinds of people, might end with guns being drawn. Vory muscle lived on respect born of fear, and if someone didn't show the proper amount of respect, that mean they were not scared enough. And if they weren't afraid enough of you, then you can be sure they were entertaining the notion that they could take you on and win. If they thought that, they were one bullet away from acting on it. Bottom line was, respect was not a luxury. It was survival. You had no friends. You shared a joke with a guy, it meant nothing. The next minute, if you had to brain him, you did it.

As the two mobsters glared at each other, Oleg got nervous and broke the stalemate. "Uhm, yes, I have a bottle, in my office. Why don't you guys come, eh? We'll share a drink"

The two thugs ended their stare-off with a grunt and a nod. They grinned like wolves as they fell in behind Oleg, rolling on the way to the booze. Yuri waited for the footstep echoes to die down before he moved. He didn't believe in luck, but he believed in opportunity.

He went about his business, but he kept looking back at the parked sedan. He thought he heard something. He didn't want to have heard something. He could pretend he didn't have augmented hearing. A normal man wouldn't have heard anything. A normal man would finish his shift without sticking his head where it didn't belong.

Fuck.

He did hear something, and he had a good idea what it was. He slowly walked toward the car, regretting every step. He stopped, looking over the trunk. He heard it, a slight thud and what was maybe faint coughing. He moved his hand over the trunk release, and sighed. What was he doing? Why?

He opened the trunk. He didn't flinch when he saw the girl. She was bound, gagged, bruised, and bloodied, with her face swollen. One of her eyes rolled up at him and squinted ever so faintly. She looked straight at him. She didn't become agitated, didn't try to scream. She just fixed him with a level stare that said she knew the score, and that she knew he knew it, too.

She looked like she might be in her late twenties, though the swelling made it hard to tell. She was naked and bound tightly in a bunched up position. She had red hair and features Yuri guessed were foreign. He took it all in, and slowly his hand started to close the trunk. The part of him that knew he didn't need this had made the first move. This was Vladivostok. The whole city belonged to



the Vory z Zakone. Every week, the naked bodies of men were found dead in the rising rays of morning light, beaten till they were purple, frozen till they were blue. It was no place to challenge the brutal reign of the mobster. But just as his hand lowered the lid, she exhaled, a weak protest, all she could muster, with the eye fixated on him. Calm, despite everything, but insistent.

"Fuck it," he said aloud. As soon as he opened the trunk, he had known. He was a lot of things, a lot of them not good, but he wasn't, and never would be, the kind of person that could leave the girl in the trunk.

He placed an arm under her legs and the other behind her back and lifted her out. He had no illusions about life from this point onwards, so he left all of his stuff where it was, the trunk open, and headed out as fast as he could through the garage door.

He usually took the bus back to his place, but it was still close enough that he could get there on foot. He realized he'd have to take the long way through the alleys, lest someone see him carrying a bound, naked girl. That would raise questions, even in this neighborhood. It was freezing out, and misting. Not good for the girl, though he imagined that if she had the strength to talk, she'd agree it was better than being executed by Vory goons in a warehouse. As it was, she had passed out. Since she wouldn't protest at this point, he slung her over his shoulder and huffed into a jog. Thankfully he'd never told Oleg where he lived, so it would take the goons some time to get a lead on him. Not much time, but enough to regroup and think about where this new stage of his life would lead him. And how far he would have to go.

Yuri lived in a narrow apartment building clutching the sides of the industrial district. It was an odd building, the only residential unit amidst the warehouses. The nearest apartments were several streets down. The place suited Yuri. It was always quiet and people minded their own business. There was a constant rotation of tenants, many of them hanging on to the apartments as a last-ditch effort before sliding down into homelessness. Yuri would often see some of the past tenants on the streets, digging through trashcans or pushing their meager possessions around in a shopping cart. He would check to see if they recognized him, but they would never make eye contact. They generally stayed away from his building, as the warehouse alleys didn't have the kind of waste they could use.

A few others in his neighborhood were old timers, like him. There was an old man with the stubbly white beard and a crooked nose that always leaked, and a tattooed younger guy with a ponytail. Yuri couldn't figure out what the tattooed guy did for income, but it didn't seem like anything too bad. There was also a fat guy in the basement who watched trids all day. He didn't look like he was really all there. He just sat and stared. He probably ate a lot, though—he didn't seem like he was losing any weight—so Yuri figured he was taking care of himself somehow, or someone was taking care of him. These people some-

times nodded to each other, sometimes ignored each other. Tonight he'd prefer the latter.

Yuri climbed the stairs to his apartment with the girl over his shoulder. He couldn't pretend she weighed nothing anymore. Back in the day this would have been easy. But back in the day he had been outfitted with some good cyber—muscle enhancements, wired reflexes, cybereyes and ears—everything you'd want to make you efficient killer. The wired reflexes were still implanted in him, but they'd stopped working about a decade ago. The cybereyes worked well enough to let him see but did little else (he thought the smartlink still worked, but he hadn't tried to aim anything in years). The cyberears, they generally worked fine, giving him augmented hearing so that he could find trouble he'd be better off avoiding. The muscles had been re-possessed years ago. That had hurt like hell.

Grumpy, perspiring, and puffing, Yuri heavily walked the last few meters to his door, which was marked with stick-on 33. The second digit was crooked. The lock was a century-old physical model that needed an actual toothed key. It didn't even have a numpad, and certainly no AR overlay. The whole building was like that, which sometimes confused some of the newer tenants, who kept forgetting to hang on to their keys. Most of the doors had been broken into at least once or twice by their owners.

Once inside, Yuri dumped the girl on the bed that took up half of his tiny apartment. He then sat on the folding chair next to a pile of shipping boxes he used as a table, listening to the silence for a couple heartbeats. He wearily exhaled and reached for a bottle lying on the table. He poured himself a shot of vodka and downed it. He glanced sideways at the bloodied, naked girl lying on his bed and downed another, shaking his head. He muttered indistinctly to himself and started rummaging inside a box full of wires and dead electronics before finding what he was looking for—a huge Ruger Super Warhawk. It was an earlier model, mostly devoid of polymers. It felt heavy and cold in his hand. He checked the cylinder; fully loaded. He put it down on the box table and headed into the small bathroom, filled a small container with warm water, and grabbed a rag. Then he sat back down on the edge of the bed and observed the girl again. She was still completely out. He instinctively checked her pulse. To his surprise, she was still alive. He had expected her to be dead, mostly because that's what he was used to. Maybe this one would be different. He began cleaning her by gently dabbing at the dried blood.

By the time he was done she looked far less bloody but just as bruised, or possibly more so. He was about to put blankets over her when he hesitated. She needed clothes. He could get some—he had some, right there, in a box. But that would mean dragging them out, looking at them, acknowledging their existence and why they were there. Which he tried not to do much.

"Fuck it, you saved her, getting out some old clothes isn't going to kill you now," he said to himself. He sneered



and retrieved a dusty cardboard box out from under the bed and rummaged through it, periodically bringing out and inspecting a piece of clothing, only to toss it back into the box. At length he chose an old pair of blue jeans, which fit pretty snugly, and a red knit shirt. She was dressed then, but she still didn't wake up. So he settled into his chair and turned on the trid.

After about three hours, she moaned, waking him up before he realized he'd fallen asleep. He started and fumbled for his gun. Then he remembered where he was and what he was doing. His confusion abated, and he chided himself for falling asleep. His instincts were entirely shot—he wouldn't last twenty-four hours if he couldn't do better than that.

He turned his attention to the woman. She was moaning and struggling in bed. He touched her forehead; she was burning hot. He applied a wet cloth and made her swallow pills, of which he had many, while she mumbled incoherently. He didn't think she was talking in Russian, which reinforced his earlier guess she was foreign. He didn't understand the language, so it wasn't English either. It wasn't one of the Chinese dialects he could recognize, and probably not German, either. It was hard to say.

Whatever it was, there wasn't much he could do right now. He walked around his place, drank some water, and went back into his chair. There was a lot of night left, and he decided she could not be moved. Falling asleep unguarded in front of the trid was a mistake, but he'd need to get some kind of rest. If they hadn't found him in the last few hours, which he'd spent blissfully sleeping, they probably weren't going to show up here immediately, so he might as well sleep. He just needed to be in a better position.

He pushed a chair over next to the bed, in a spot away from the window. If the door opened, he'd be out of view of anyone in the hallway. It was as good a position as he was going to get. He rested his gun in his lap, then set an alarm clock for seven in the morning. Then he slept.

When he opened his eyes, he immediately knew the alarm hadn't worked. There was too much light. He looked at the clock and saw it was half past eight. He'd made another mistake. At this point, he had a hard time believing he'd ever been any good at this. He had likely only survived this long due to luck.

He gritted his teeth and shook his head, muttering to himself. He glanced at his guest and froze in surprise when he saw she was wide awake and staring at him from the cot. He looked at the gun sitting on his lap. He didn't know how long she'd been up, but it was likely she could have grabbed the weapon if she wanted to—she was lying less than a meter away from him. He saw her eyes track his own gaze at the gun, then bounce back at him. She showed no reaction to the firearm. She was impossible to read.

"Been awake long?" was all he could think to ask. He wondered if she would understand his Russian.

She blinked. She opened her mouth to speak, but had to close, swallow some, and try again. She settled on croaking out a "Yeah."

The silence felt uncomfortable now. He thought she must be wondering if he was going to rape her or something, so he felt he should explain. "The gun ... it's not for you, it's to protect you. Me. Well, us. And. I hope the clothes fit, they—"

"It's fine. They're fine," she cut him off, looking away.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I just ..." he said, waving embarrassingly in her direction.

"It's fine." She returned eye contact. "It's fine; I know what you did. It's fine." She paused for a moment, then added, "Thank you." Yuri grunted something in return, nodding. He looked away and started to think of something else to say. He felt like he had been more in control of things when she was unconscious.

"Whose are they?" she asked him, startling him. He thought about the question but didn't understand. He was about to say so when she clarified for him: "The clothes, whose are they? Your wife? Your girlfriend?"

"Oh," he said. He was hoping that wouldn't come up. "Nobody's. They don't belong to anybody anymore." One look told him that her curiosity was not satisfied. He gave her a bit more. "My wife. I had a wife. She's gone now."

"Oh. I'm sorry," she said.

They always said that. Which, he supposed, was nice of them.

"Got anything to eat?" she asked.

He didn't, but the night's rest and a judicious amount of painkillers had done wonders for her recovery. She still looked battered and bruised, but she could move. In theory, if they were careful, they could go out. Which would probably be for the best, since he didn't plan on being here any longer. A full half-day had gone by. With angry mobsters looking for him, it wouldn't be long before they found his place. He hoped that the fact that they hadn't found him yet meant that they weren't that good at their job.

He grabbed the gun, some pills, and the few useful things he owned and headed with the girl to Dyadya Yarov's Titty Coffee Bar.

Yuri couldn't help but chuckle a bit at the girl's expression on seeing the bar. Inspired by 1950s American diners, Dyadya Yarov's was a tin trailer with neon signage. The unwashed outside was just a prelude to the inside with cracked and torn synth leather seats and grimy wooden tables. The window corners were abysses of black and yellow grease where flies came to die.

Yuri and the girl took their seats, though she had a hesitant look at the bench to make sure she wasn't going to sit on something that was going to infect her.

"Dyadya Yarov's Titty Coffee Bar, huh? Why do you call it that? The sign outside just says 'Dyadya Yarov's'?" she asked, trying to access the Augmented Reality menu with difficulty.



Yuri chuckled. “Yeah, that’s what the regulars call it. Yarov is a real guy, he’s the owner. He used to be a captain of a merchant trawler that did the rounds between Vladi and Japan. He always wanted to own a joint like this, you know. So one day, he’s talking to the Japs he does business with, and they know about his dream, so they say they got this old central Matrix system for managing restaurants. Real cheap, they’ll do him a deal. It was garbage to them, of course. Over there, they got some real slick electronics, fancy stuff. This one was totally obsolete, but you know us Vladis, we’re always taking their junk. So old Yarov takes it, sails back, sells his boats, and sets up this place.”

The woman nodded. “What does that have to do with the name?”

“Hold on, I’m getting there” said Yuri. He smiled a little, and the woman might have tried to smile too. “So old Yarov finally sets up and installs the system ... and it’s in Japanese. All of it. Including the menu system, as you may have noticed”

“Actually, no, I can’t get it too ...”

Yuri leaned over and slammed the center of the table, hard. The flickering AR system came to life, displaying a virtual hologram of an over-excited, barely dressed Asian teen girl, who babbled something in Japanese and then waited expectantly, a big smile on her face.

“I... see...” said Yuri’s companion.

“Right, well, that’s what he gets. This sophisticated AI waitress speaks only in Japanese, right? Yarov asks some techs he knows to look at it, but nobody can figure out the code, so that’s that. For years, Yarov operates with this Japanese waitress. People get by because apparently the food items are numbered-based, so you memorize the number of your dish—eggs and toast, for example, is number 3, and coffee is number 1.” Yuri waved at the AR waitress to get her attention, and fingered the number 3 twice, and the number 1 twice, and the waitress holo giggled, bowed, and disappeared. “There you go. People get around it.”

“Okay.”

“And where do the titties come in, right? Okay, well, one day Big Boris, this trucker everyone knows gets drunk after a night shift. He’s talking big, acting crazy, and he decides to give the virtual waitress a huge freakin’ tip. Then, the weirdest thing happens. The holo waitress you just saw, she starts stripping.”

“Wait, what?” the woman said. “Why?”

“Big Boris and the others all can’t believe it, so they keep raising the tip. The little holo girl just goes at it, gives them a real show, if you know what I mean. Turns out, the Japs sold old Yarov a computer system from this pachinko parlour or something. She’s a little stripping waitress! I’m sure she tells you that’s part of her services, just nobody ever understood what she said, so it took forever for anyone to discover it.”

“Oh my god!” The woman actually laughed, shaking her head a little, until her laugh ended with a cough that made her wince and hold her sides in pain. It was a good

reminder to Yuri of what he was doing and what was at stake. He had to remain focused.

Despite her pain, the woman’s mood had lightened. She managed another smile. “Thanks,” she said.

“For what? Making you laugh?”

“Yeah. And everything else. I’m Soren, by the way.” She extended a hand. Yuri grabbed and shook it, then realized too late his grip was crushing her slender, bruised hand. “Yuri,” he replied simply.

A tired looking grey-faced ork emerged from the kitchen, dropped their ordered food in front of them, and poured two soykafs. He didn’t ask them anything, didn’t make eye contact, then left. Soren ate hungrily, like someone might snatch the food away from her at any moment. Yuri watched and wondered what happened to her in the last twenty-four hours.

The conditions of her situation were peculiar. Yuri knows the Vory z Zakone, and especially the Vory from Vladivostok, and what had happened to Soren didn’t fit with their normal way of working. The woman had obviously been beaten and tortured. The Vory has an old-fashioned side—they’ll beat up men all the time, no worries, but they’re a little more gentle when it comes to women. There must have been a specific reason. Maybe she had information they needed. But what? And why send her, alive, to be disposed of in a warehouse? It was too elaborate—if they wanted her dead, in this town, they would’ve just pumped two in her head and dumped her somewhere. No need for the live cargo in the trunk.

Yuri watched her eat and thought about maybe just straight-up asking her. But he thought of the look she gave her in that trunk, when their eyes met. That moment was perfectly preserved in his mind’s eye. Those green eyes, holding his, with a look that said she knew the score. No panic. Something was up with her. She knew what was going on, and she likely would be careful about what she shared.

She caught him staring at her after she had inhaled half her plate. She looked up briefly, then focused back on her food. “So, why did you rescue me?”

Yuri didn’t answer at first. He was more ready to ask questions than answer them. “Umm,” he said. “I don’t know. I mean, it was the right thing to do.”

She stopped eating and looked up with a cocked eyebrow. “Seriously?”

He shrugged.

“So, you’re, what, the janitor over there? A janitor with a gun?” she asked.

Yuri saw the girl was sizing his own character up just as much as he’d been trying to size hers, except she didn’t seem to have any hesitations about it. He remembered enough from the old days to tread carefully. “Yeah. That’s right. I am, was, the janitor over there; and I have a gun, and I know how to use it. Okay?”

Soren frowned and nodded, then drank some coffee.

Yuri made his own move before she could start her questioning again. “What about you? What’s your story?”



She took a second sip of her coffee, a longer one. Her expression didn't change, but Yuri could see the wheels spinning as she got her story straight in her head. That told him most of what he wanted to know about who he was dealing with.

"Long story short, my father is a wealthy man. He's in Denmark, by the way. My mother is French. That's where I'm from, originally"

"Where, Denmark or France?" Yuri wasn't really interested in the answer; he mainly wanted to observe her while she spoke.

She swayed in her seat. "Both. I move between the two. I'm here for an internship at Evo. Anyway, these thugs found out some stuff, thought they'd make a quick buck by grabbing me, ransoming me to my father. They didn't know my father." There was bitterness in her voice. Her hands were wrapped around her soykaf mug, her mouth right over the lip of it, her eyes fixed into the distance. "Things didn't go so well. They decided to, you know, up the pressure. Beat me up a little, scare my dad. But still it was taking too long, so I think they got nervous and decided to get rid of me. That's when you found me."

Yuri nodded his head. He didn't believe a word of it, but there were half-truths in there.

And one full truth: The girl sitting in front of him was dangerous.

"So, are we paying for a show?" asked Soren playfully, their breakfasts finished.

Yuri half grinned and was about to answer when the door to the diner opened. A stocky, bald man with a bit of a paunch wearing a cheap duster stepped in. The man's eyes scanned the small room and found Yuri's eyes. In a split second, similar reactions occurred. Pupils dilated, mouths went incrementally slack, and hands dropped to their sides. The man, who Yuri had made as the thug from the warehouse, was quicker on the draw. He fired two shots from a medium-caliber pistol, evidently with explosive rounds. One hit the back of the bench behind Soren, causing a small explosion of wooden shards. The other missed Yuri's face by about a centimeter and shattered the vitrine of the booth behind them.

Yuri may have been slower—he couldn't suppress a pang of regret over his busted-up wired reflexes—but he was accurate. He raised the big Ruger and aimed down the tritium-illuminated iron sights. His smartlink helped guide his arm—damn thing still worked. One high-caliber slug slammed into the gunman, jerking him backwards, and he slumped to the floor. That was it for him.

Yuri grabbed Soren and dashed for the kitchen. He flew through the tiny cooking space, the ashen-faced ork cook dumbly staring at them. They crashed through the back door. Unfortunately, Yuri did not crash through the troll waiting for him there. He hit a wall of muscle and bone and rebounded hard. He lost grip of Soren and his Ruger, both falling to the side. Yuri shook his head and looked straight up into the grinning face of the troll. He had time to feel

sorry for himself for the upcoming few moments before the troll picked him up and threw him across the alley. He landed in some molding boxes.

He got up painfully and saw the still-grinning troll advancing on him. Yuri spit out dirt and roared "Come on, then!" He fell into a Systema fighting stance.

The troll waved an arm as large as a tree trunk and connected with Yuri, sending him flying a meter or two. The troll advanced to continue the pummeling, but Yuri threw a crate at his face. It didn't bother the troll much, but it slowed his charge. Yuri reached into the trash around him and started throwing anything that felt solid at the troll's head. It annoyed the giant metahuman more than hindered him. The troll roared and ran headlong toward him. Yuri ran right back at him, which caught the burly street fighter off guard. Yuri slid between the troll's legs and nimbly got back up on his feet behind him. Before the troll could wheel around, Yuri gave him the strongest pushing kick he could muster. The troll lost his balance and fell head-first. Yuri reached into the trash and threw a few things at the troll before his hand found something cool and solid. Meanwhile, the troll raised himself to his knees and roared again, far more angry than before. "Playtime's over, huma—"

The last letter didn't sound out as Yuri slammed a rusty crowbar into the troll's head. The first blow confused the troll. The second, third, and fourth had more effect. Yuri slammed over and over again. He was aiming for the metahuman's skull, but hit its horns a few times, breaking off a piece. Some blood splattered up from where he hit, fury driving each strike.

When he finally stopped, it was more due to exhaustion than anything else. The troll had long stopped moving. He huffed and puffed, looking down at his work, before tossing the crowbar. Soren ran over to him, big-eyed. Between breaths of air, Yuri swallowed and tried to comfort her "All right, it's ok, that should do it—"

His sentence died in his mouth as the troll slowly rose to his feet. The troll made a sound that started as a low throaty moan and built into an angry bellow.

"Oh shit," Yuri said. His mind raced to think of a way out as the metahuman's enormous arms blocked all lines of exit.

Yuri's mental checklist of options was reaching its bottom when the wolf landed. An enormous animal as big as a bear, it growled at Yuri and Soren, fangs bared and dripping with saliva. The wolf's growls turned to a sharp yelp at the thug fired two shots from a gun he had just whipped out. Yuri could see that the troll, despite his massive size and evident life of violence, was wide-eyed and terrified by the large beast. It was telling he hadn't resorted to his weapon when fighting Yuri, confident in his abilities to pummel him barehanded. Not so for the wolf.

Unfortunately, Yuri already knew what would happen next. The gunshots hurt the wolf. Its fur was matted with blood and gore where the large-caliber rounds had pene-



trated. The shots hurt—but they did not kill. The gory red holes dried up and closed in a matter of seconds, and then the wolf turned on the troll. The thug shook his head, open-mouthed. He squeezed off another round, with similar effects. Before he could point his gun and fire again, the wolf leaped. Easily reaching the troll's elevated throat, the wolf threw its full weight against the metahuman while its powerful jaw locked down. The sound that came next was only quantifiable as a scream for a split second before it transformed to slushy gurgle.

The beast roused dormant instincts and training in Yuri. Mentally, he was back in the plains of Siberia. His higher thought processes shut down, and his wiring took over. He snatched his gun, grabbed Soren by the wrist, and yanked her, in one swift motion throwing her over his shoulder. His legs leaped over detritus and pounded against the pavement. He didn't need to turn to see what was happening. He knew the wolf had changed priorities and was leaping after them. He could mentally project the leaps and bounds the wolf would make: one over the dumpster, a side leap in the alley, a push-jump against the window still, and a final bound onto him. It played out in his head in a split second. He reviewed options, discarded most. One was kept: the door to his right. An ancient wooden portal with a cracked and faded green paint job, it shattered in a single blow. He used his kick as momentum to continue running without pause. The sudden change in course worked, and the wolf flying a centimeter behind him. He felt a sting against his shoulder and knew its claws had nicked him.

The door opened on stairs that led to a dark basement. Yuri quickly looked for ways out. There was a narrow slit of a window on the far side that let in light, but it was too small for them to get through. Yuri's overdriven tactical mind knew what he had to do, though his sense of self-preservation lodged a quiet objection. He ignored it.

He threw Soren to the ground and wheeled back against the stairs, drawing his Ruger back out in one swift motion. The wolf had already thrown itself into the door and was bounding down the narrow stairs. The tight confines forced it to move head first, just as Yuri wanted. He only had one shot at this. Muscle memory aimed the gun for him—with help from the smartlink—and he squeezed off round after round.

Not all the rounds hit, but the last one hit the thing's skull, right between the eyes. The huge slugs blew the skull apart, and the wolf crashed down the rest of the narrow passage. Yuri narrowly spun himself out of the way, still taking a paw to the face. His vision swam and saw stars, but he knew he'd succeeded because the paw had been limp. Had the wolf been alive, he'd no longer have a head.

"What the hell ...?" Soren said between gulps of air.

"Yakut shapeshifter. Gotta aim for the head." Yuri looked down at Soren. The urgency of his movement had made him throw her to the ground pretty roughly. She had a split lip from where she banged her face against the ground. She was looking up at him in shock. Her eyes were

unfocused, blanched, and disconnected. Yuri knew the expression well, both from others looking at him and from him looking in a mirror.

He pinched her at the eyebrow, where she still had a cut from her beating. She winced and cried out in pain as he lifted her to her feet. Pain gave her instinctive anger and she swatted his hand away from her. "Ow, you mother-fucker! Get your hands off me!"

She had spirit, this one. "Good, stay with me. Come on, let's get out of here." He stepped over wolf corpse and legged the first two stairs before turning and giving Soren a look telling her she needed to come along. She looked at the pile of fur and shuddered, then ran up all the stairs.

Yuri looked at the dead shapeshifter before checking his cylinder. It was empty. A shudder ran down his spine as he turned and followed after the girl.

The Darkin Sewage Treatment Plant was a typical example of Russian bureaucracy. It had been built as part of the demands of Evo when the megacorp picked the city to host its headquarters, as a show in environmental consciousness. Before then, Vladivostok unquestionably pumped its sewage straight into the black waters of the Pacific. Years ago, when Evo was called Yamatsetsu, the megacorp announced it was moving its headquarters to Vladivostok. There was plenty of fanfare and hoopla, with politicians practically shoving each other over in an effort to take credit for the move. They needn't have worried—there were enough projects, graft, and kickbacks to go around. This plant was one such project, built poorly for high cost thanks to the combined efforts of corrupt politicians and organized crime figures. The money to build the plant was available, but the money to properly maintain it was not. The facility suffered from resource starvation, an unequivocal failure that ran limply for a few years before countless problems forced its closure. The city then quietly went back to pumping its waste into the ocean.

Abandoned, the plant now served as a home for Vladivostok's neo-anarchists. Dreamers, rabble-rousers, ideologues, and the disenfranchised lived in a commune, sharing the skills required to keep their social experiment going. Their motto came straight from Marx: "From each according to skill, to each according to need." Evo and the other corporations of the city unwittingly contributed to this counter-movement as their electricity, goods, materials, and even funds were siphoned and stolen away by the neo-a foot soldiers.

For the most part, they were idiots. They were formed from the street youth desperate for a family and high on their own sense of invulnerability and righteousness. Yuri couldn't help but shake his head at their naivety in thinking they could change the world. He'd been the same before, and he'd come face-to-face with cruel reality. He couldn't help but see himself in them, and he hated it.



Yuri tried to set aside his prejudice as he made his way down into the bowels of the plant to the spot where the neo-a's made their bunks. He recognized a few of them from prior visits, though they'd all gotten a bit bigger. Their bodies grew and matured, but it was the look in their eyes that aged the most. Every time, he only ever saw half of those he'd seen before. This city had a high attrition rate for dreamers.

Garou served as a sort of father figure for the group. He and Yuri went way back and he was probably the only friend he ever had and ever would. Garou was coupled with a woman named Vera. Vera was stunning, in her wild, non-consumerist way. She eschewed luxuries other women would consider vital—face cream, hair products, and the like. Her skin was a little rough, her hair was a woolly tangle, and she never wore makeup, but Yuri never thought her beauty suffered for it. Perhaps, though, she could have been a little less severe—a life without smiling had left deep stern lines in her face. Her eyes glittered occasionally, but with annoyance, not merriment.

They were pretty eyes, or at least they had been the last time Yuri took a good look at them. Vera had been friends with Yuri's wife. He hadn't been able to look her in the eyes for a long time.

He told Soren to wait in a basement room lined with pipes while he met his old friend. He shook hands with Garou, then accepted an offer of moonshine vodka. They made small talk for a few minutes, reminiscing about the same old content they always talked about, before getting down to business. Yuri filled him in on the happenings since picking Soren out of that car trunk, detailing the encounter with the shapeshifter and his suspicions in regards to the girl.

Garou nodded his head throughout, listening intently, and stayed silent for some time after Yuri had told his tale. "This is bad trouble, my friend"

"Could be worse," Yuri said, mainly out of reflex.

"I'll tell you this, it doesn't add up. You're right, she's holding back on you. I mean, you can probably get the story from her, am I right?" Yuri nodded "But question is, why you would? What's she to you? Why are you even in this?"

Yuri nodded, a smile curling his lip. "Because it was the right thing to do."

Garou waited to see if this was a joke. When it became apparent it was not, he scoffed and shook his head, downing his vodka. But, Yuri could tell, he understood. He didn't necessarily agree, but he understood. Where they'd been, where they were now, Garou could understand a man drawing a line in the sand. It was a decision everyone made for himself.

"All right. Well, if you're going to see this through, go ahead. Let me know if there's anything I can help you with." Yuri nodded and they both drained another shot of vodka.

After leaving Garou, Yuri went to find Soren. She was in the bunkroom, playing with a little girl and her rag doll.

Yuri gave the little girl a smile, but he must have looked like a monster baring his fangs because the girl gave him big eyes before scurrying away. He shrugged.

"Her mother is 16. She lives here," Soren told him, somewhat sadly.

"It's not as bad as you think. They watch over each other" he said. Though he couldn't help but think of all the kids that weren't here since his last visit. They both sat awkwardly in silence.

"You're gonna have to come clean with me, Soren," he said after a while.

He didn't know how she'd react, but she still managed to surprise him. She simply said "Didn't buy it, huh?"

He gave her a stare, and to his satisfaction saw she didn't really want to look at him. "So you really just saw me and thought about doing the right thing, huh? A complete stranger," she said.

Yuri saw she was sticking on that, but it was the truth, so he didn't know what else to say.

Fortunately, Soren wasn't done talking. "Vera came to see me earlier," she said, looking at her feet. "She told me about you. She was worried I was going to hurt you, so she wanted me to know what sort of man you were."

A cold dread passed over Yuri. He would have preferred coming up with another justification for rescuing her than this. But, cat was out of the bag now. She went on relentlessly in a slow tone, baring his life before him. "She told me about you. You were a soldier. Special unit, tasked with 'pacifying' the Yakut rebels. When you'd had enough of that, you left, and joined up with the Vory and became an enforcer. Went to prison, as most do, but that's when it happened. You had a young daughter and a wife, and ..."

"And she was a drug addict," Yuri said. "She wasn't smart. Lena was like a little girl, all instinct and passion and no judgment. She needed me. She couldn't do it without me; she was too emotional, prone to self-destructive fits. My mistakes had taken me away from where I could care for her. There was no one to help her. She had no friends, no family. My family had been the army, and when they turned out to be pig fuckers, I'd turned to the Vory. They pretended to be what I was looking for. They talked about rules, brotherhood, and a code. But when the chips were down and I was away in lockdown, none of them turned up to care for her. She spiraled out of control. I was sitting on my bunk when I got the news. She'd gone on a bender, crazed and depressed. She'd killed herself, and taken our baby with her."

Yuri noticed his knuckles were white from gripping the cot they were sitting on. Soren was looking at him sideways.

"How do you come back from that?" he said. "How do you build that back? A man takes a wife, and brings a daughter to this world. It's his job to protect them. You lose that; you let that slip from your hands, what do you have left? What is left of you? All I can remember is holding my daughter against me. She was just the right size for me to hold against my chest."



"I don't blame my wife, I don't. She wasn't strong, she never was; I always knew that. I was supposed to be the strength for both of us. I failed."

"After that, I quit the Vory. But they said I couldn't do that. They told me I was in for life. They said they would kill me. I said okay. I wanted them to kill me. I wanted to die. In the end they just left me, broken and useless."

He shook his head. "They should have killed me. That gun I carry, from my apartment, I got that for myself. For *myself*, understand? I've stared at it so many times. I never could, though. All the bad I've done, I could never leave. I could never leave things like this. I have to do something." Yuri formed the word carefully in his mouth. "To *atone*."

Soren nodded slowly. Her poker face would have won her a million nuyen in the casinos of Primorye. "You think I'm it."

"Yeah. I guess so. Maybe." agreed Yuri.

Suddenly she was angry. "I'm not it, Yuri. I'm *so* not it. You want to know who I am? I'm a liar. Yeah I've lied to you. I'm not some princess in distress, sorry to tell you." Yuri heard an all-too-familiar note in her voice—self-hate. "I'm a thief. A specialized thief. I stole something, a specific something, belonging to a very powerful Yakut leader. He wants it back. Bad enough to make deals with the local mobsters to get them to pick me up and hand me over so he can not-so-politely ask me where I've stashed his precious thing. I'm in trouble because I brought it on myself. And now you're in it."

If there was an expression Yuri could read on her face, it was something close to regret.

Yuri frowned. "But the Vory don't work for the Yakut, Otsana hates—ah." As it sometimes does, everything fell in place for Yuri at that moment, just as he finished his sentence.

"Yeah, well, I'm not from around here, that was true, but it was my understanding that the Vory and the Yakut don't get along very well, so you can imagine my surprise when they turned up to nab me. I guess they got a good offer."

"No, no" said Yuri. He talked rapidly, all the puzzle pieces aligned before him. "The Vory are far from being united, Soren. Bloody Otsana—that's the boss around here, she's in charge now, but only after having won a messy internal war. It used to be some Vory were for the Yakut, some against. They all fell in line behind Otsana, or they pretended to, but there's no way all those old feelings disappeared overnight. Some captains still have sympathies and contacts. Your Yakut friend simply reached out to a rebellious captain, who went at it for himself. But they tried asking you where it was, right?" Soren nodded. "Yeah, that explains your bruises and the beating. They made a pass at it for themselves. What self-respecting crook wouldn't? They didn't know what you had, but they figured whatever it was would fetch them more than turning you over would. They could try to sell it to the Yakut, or just hit the open market. But you're a smart girl. You didn't tell them anything. So last night, they weren't bringing you to the

warehouse to kill you. That's where the handoff was going to be."

"Guess so," said Soren.

"That wolf that jumped us, that was one of the Yakut. There isn't much love lost between the wolves and the Vory, so they aren't exactly working together, which explains the torn-up troll. But now we got mobsters and giant fucking wolves gunning after us because of something you have stashed."

"Yup," sighed Soren. Everything was on the table now. "So now what do we do?"

Yuri's brow furrowed as he thought about it. "All right, you know where you stashed the thing you stole, right? First step, we have to go get it. After that, I'm gonna call some people."

"That simple?" asked Soren, eying him somewhat incredulously.

"That simple. Assuming we survive the giant wolves trying to gut us."

They waited until nightfall to make their way to the Stalin Industrial Complex, where Soren said she had stashed the stolen artifact. The Stalin Industrial Complex, a district to the northeast of the city, comprised warehouses and factories where workers toiled in pitiful conditions. It was usually quiet at night. The night sky, illuminated by floodlights, was tinted a brownish hue, like muddy water. No star shone through the haze; industrial concerns eclipsed their light. Corporate security kept a watchful eye everywhere, usually more on the lookout for tired workers taking an unauthorized break than outside troublemakers. The Vory didn't cause trouble here. Tails between their legs, they recognized the dominance of an alpha male whose ferocity made theirs look childish: the megacorporation. The factories here churned out bio-material for Evo's augmentation lines, the by-product of which was fine nanoparticles and other misunderstood compounds, an unholy stew of unregulated hazardous materials. Many of the workers here developed what they called "Stalin's Cough," a deep hack that conjured up thick material of a very unhealthy color and eventually led to total pulmonary shutdown. No doctors had studied the condition. No articles about it could be found about it in medical journals. That would require Evo to acknowledge that something was going on. And to care about it. They did one thing, though—they supplied replacement lungs and tracheae to the worst of the sufferers and only garnished five percent of their salary for pretty much the rest of their life as compensation.

Yuri was intimately familiar with all of this. His mother, raising him by herself at that point, had talked of salvation when the Complex went up. The factories were hiring, with decent salaries and even benefits, more than anything a broken-down single mother could ever have



expected. A few years later, she was little more than an indentured slave, working to pay for replacement organs. While most obliterated their minds with BTLs, Yuri's mom was an old-fashioned sort and self-medicated with alcohol. He heard she died while he was in the service. They didn't let him go back to attend her funeral. He still didn't know what happened to the body. He preferred to think she's buried somewhere, even if in some sort of unmarked grave, as that was better than the alternatives.

Soren was being dodgy about explaining exactly what she'd stolen, despite her recent honesty towards him. She wasn't lying to his face anymore, but she wasn't exactly being forthright either. That made Yuri uneasy, but at this point the only way out was through. They had borrowed a vehicle from the neo-anarchists, a jury-rigged car that was a Frankenstein of parts. They parked as close as they could get to the building Soren indicated, a large three-story warehouse. While recently built, like everything else in the Complex, it looked like something from the turn of last century. It featured a cracked and chipped brick-and-mortar outer shell, with piles of leftover construction materials encircling its docking bays. It wasn't quite abandoned, as it offered the cheapest storage rates in the entire district. Bottom-feeding corporations stored goods destined for third-world markets here. At present, the only activity was a miserable gate guard smoking a cigarette in a feeble attempt to warm himself. The gate was the only opening to the two-meter wall that protected the warehouse. There were no cameras, sensors, or alarms. Yuri and Soren decided to park the car next to the wall, climb onto the roof, and jump the useless wall from there.

The night brought cold rain. The grounds surrounding the warehouse were muddy since the pavement was unfinished and the gravel layer left in its stead had eroded away. Forgotten crates of rotting perishables and large rusted-through cylinders lay discarded, as if some hoarder had accumulated them and never found the time to do anything with them.

With all the cover, there was no challenge in sneaking into the edifice. Soren guided them to the broken and unlocked back door she'd originally used.

They were both glad to be inside and away from the freezing downpour. The interior of the warehouse smelled of dust and paint, leaving a coppery taste in their mouths. Chains with large hooks swung lightly, moved by the slight current the duo had caused by opening the door. Large wooden crates and rusty metal containers took up much of the space. Yuri was taking it all in when he felt a touch on his elbow. He caught Soren giving him a look as she headed for stairs in the back, indicating him to follow.

He followed her up the steel staircase. He could not stop his instincts from running on overdrive. His mind subconsciously mapped the layout of the building. Three stories, clutter everywhere. It was a real maze. There could be an entire platoon of enemies hidden in the warehouse, waiting to slit his throat. Frowning as he gazed around, his

eyes accidentally landed on Soren's rump. His gaze would not have normally lingered more than that, but he couldn't help but notice she swayed her hips more than strictly necessary. As he pondered this, she turned her head and gave him another look laden with meaning before whipping her head back forward in a tussle of red hair. She giggled and accelerated her pace. Yuri resisted smiling and continued behind her.

He lost sight of her but could follow easily by sound. She'd gone all the way up to the third floor and then into the middle of the room. As with the other floors, countless crates and boxes were stacked around, creating a labyrinth. Soren wasn't making herself difficult to find. Yuri navigated his way, following her sounds, until he reached a surprising sight. In the middle of the room, nestled in a space between crates, was a little squatter's nest. A fluffy cover was laid out, with a small electrical light, a few basic ration bars, and some bags keeping it company.

"Surprise!" beamed Soren, twirling. "How do you like it, hmmm? My little nest!"

"What is this?" Yuri said.

"I squatted here, for a while, after, you know, my adventures in Siberia. Made my way here, found this place, where I knew I wouldn't be disturbed, settled down for a bit, with the intention of letting the heat blow over. My next move was going to hop a ship to Japan or America or something, but, well, the best laid plans of mice and men, right?"

Yuri grunted, though his mood had shifted. He analyzed the surroundings. "So where is this thing you stole?"

Soren plopped down on the fluffy blanket and rummaged through the bags surrounding her. "Ummm," she intoned, concentrating, before exclaiming "Ta-da!"

Yuri looked at what the girl was holding. It was a square plastic casing, about three centimeters wide and a centimeter thick, made of a cheap transparent plastic cover and a white plastic backing. Through the cover was visible a bronze metallic disc, held in the center of the casing by little plastic tabs securing the disc through a central hole. It looked old, the surface of both the casing and the disc scratched.

Yuri knew what this was. He'd seen this before. It was old technology, very old, pre-Crash 1.0. It was a data disk. Nobody, not even the poorest shithole countries in the world, used that technology anymore. There were precious few computers in the world could read them. That meant the disk was essentially useless, even if it contained the bank account number of Evo's CEO. That being said, he had seen disks like it. The Yakut sometimes used them, since they had the computers from way back when. This was rare, though. It seemed only the bigwigs used them. Whenever Yuri's unit would uncover some of these computers or disks, the UGB spooks would always come down for a visit and take everything.

So the disk in the case Soren was holding might just be worth something, to the right people. It was definite-



ly worth something to the Yakut. Yuri bent forward to her height to grab the casing, with the follow-up question of “What the fuck is...” on his lips cut-off, his last syllable mashed as Soren pressed her lips against his.

The kiss surprised him. He jerked back. She retorted with a gaze heavily laced with invitation. Yuri hesitated. “Soren, I don’t know if ...”

“If what?” she countered. “We’re alone here. I spent eight days up here, nobody, not a fucking person, came by, except for one time when they delivered something, and even then they didn’t come up here. Trust me, we’re safe.”

Yuri started to protest again, but she cut him off. “I’m not asking you to marry me, Yuri. Don’t you think maybe you deserve something for being such a good guy with me? Or is it that you don’t find me attractive?”

Yuri shook his head. “No, no, I mean, you’re very attractive, it’s just ...”

She grabbed his shirt and pulled him down against her, kissing him much more strongly. He held for a moment, but then answered her. With a breath, his mouth found hers and kissed back, hungrily. Blood pounded up to his head. Hands moved by themselves. Their mouths worked against each other, until flesh became uncovered, and they kissed that.

“How long has it been for you?” asked Soren in a breath.

“A while,” answered Yuri

“You still remember how everything works?” she asked him playfully but aggressively, placing one of his hands on one of her naked breasts.

“I remember,” he said. He remembered enough not to think too hard about it. Their frantic kissing and pawing settled to a rhythmic pulse. She led, breathing hard with every move, her face hovering just above his. He found his pace, remembering what to do. Remembering things his wife used to like.

“What was that?” she said, stopping suddenly.

“Something I thought you’d enjoy,” he answered, disappointed she’d stopped. He feared he’d lost his touch.

“No, no, stop. Listen! What was that?” repeated Soren, with plenty of alarm in her voice.

Before Yuri actually listened, he knew he’d fucked up. He knew his enemy well, and he knew he’d slipped. He did not doubt Soren had heard something. He did not doubt what it meant.

He gently pushed her off of him, quickly slipping back into his clothes, then grabbed the Ruger. He heard it too now, creaking in the floors below, the gentle rattling of disturbed objects. He left Soren in the nest as he silently crept toward one of the greasy windows overlooking the yard outside. It was dark, especially with the rain, but the first place he checked confirmed his fears: The gate guard was lying inert in the mud. Just as he watched, trying to find blood, the corpse was brusquely dragged out of sight. Then, he saw the shadows. Black against the rainy darkness, forms darting across the yard. There were several. Too many.

Then, slowly and menacingly, one large specimen trod right into the center of the lot. It looked up, straight at the window it seemed. Yuri jerked back reflectively, and then eased back slowly. He spied the giant wolf standing there. Then, it began to shudder and spasm, with limbs grossly deforming. In a few seconds, a broad-shouldered and muscular naked woman stood where the wolf had been. Her disheveled and unkempt mane of hair plastered to her scarred face as the rain beat down on her. The cold did not seem to bother her at all. She kept staring, shooting a mean, savage scowl up to Yuri’s window.

Yuri edged back to Soren, who had dressed and packaged what she could, including the disk.

She looked at him for news. “So? What is it?”

Yuri brought his index to his lips and gestured for her to follow.

They moved gingerly, wary of creaking floorboards, and made their way to the metal stairs at the back of the room. Yuri carefully peered over the edge, jerking back as he saw a mangy wolf, emanating a soft growl, slowly paw around the stairs, sniffing everything.

Yuri closed his eyes and silently cursed. His mind calculated the odds and situation. He didn’t know exactly how many shapeshifters were around, but whatever the number was, it was too many. When he’d been a soldier, carrying out raids against Yakut civilian encampments in an effort to draw out the enemy, the wolves came in packs of two, three, maybe up to five. They were sneaky, vicious, powerful, savage, and fearless. They always died, but they’d take soldiers down with them. These days Vladivostok was the center of a covert political battle for the future of their cause. Stories of Yakut shapeshifters prowling the dark night and savaging Vory men and other enemies of their cause were almost common. But even in those stories, it was usually a single shifter or a pair of them.

But this, this was unprecedented. There must be at least a dozen, if not more. A battle-hardened squad of heavily armed Russian Spetsnaz would think twice about engaging them. Yuri, alone with a single pistol—hand cannon though it might be—stood absolutely no chance. Fighting was not an option. They would not negotiate. Escape was the only option, but how?

There weren’t any smart moves to be made, so Yuri consigned himself to simply making those that were left. He led Soren all the way to the left. A small room, perhaps intended as an office, opened into the main storage area. Yuri turned the handle, relieved it wasn’t locked, and swung the door in, silently closing the door behind them.

The room was pitch black at first, only revealing itself slowly in shades of bluish-grey as their eyes adjusted to the faded light entering the room from a small grimy window. Yuri heard Soren slowing her breathing down. He did the same. They were as quiet as they could be.

As they stood silent in the darkness of the room, Yuri picked up the sounds he feared the most. The slow creak of the floorboard heralded an advance. Then came the heavy



weight of the massive beast as it advanced, paw following paw. It paused in front of the door, and the horrifying sounds of wet nostrils flaring hit his cyberears. That was followed by beastly wet snuffing sounds as it took deep breaths, almost trying to shove its entire muzzle under the crack. Yuri was dimly aware of Soren's fingers digging into the meat of his hand as she pressed against him. The world was filled with the sounds of Yuri's thumping heart and the beast's wet sniffing.

Then it stopped. There were sniffs, followed by an aggressive growl, and then paws against wood as the wolf-thing ran into the main warehouse labyrinth. Puzzled for an instant as to what smells could be distracting it, Yuri realized with relief that the same situation that'd cause him to drop his guard was now working in his favor. The site of Yuri and Soren's lovemaking, musky and sweaty, must have caught the monster's attention. It wouldn't last long, though. Yuri didn't waste time formulating an escape plan. He headed for the grimy office window. It opened to the night outside, on the side of the building opposite to where their car was parked. The warehouse was built at the foot of a cliff, and a wall of sheer rock was all he could see. However, a drain pipe ran the length of the building, within arm's reach of the window, with cargo containers only a dozen or so meters below them.

Yuri tried to slide up the window to open it, but years of mold and rust made that difficult. Yuri bared his teeth as he tried to silently apply force to it. It budged in centimeter increments as he worked to shimmy it open. Once he had it open a bit, he placed his hand underneath and pushed up, getting much better results, though he couldn't help the scraping sound it made. The gap wasn't very big, Soren would squeeze through with help, but it would be an awkward fit for Yuri. Still, there was no plan B, so he gestured for Soren to go through the window.

She shot him an uncertain look but didn't hesitate long before climbing out feet first. She grimaced as she shimmed herself uncertainly, blindly looking for some sort of nook to latch her foot in before sticking out an arm and trying desperately to reach the drain pipe. Yuri watched over her, trying to offer her advice on how to maneuver her body to grab the pipe without falling.

A howl outside their door let him know it was time to hurry. The door shuddered as the beast threw itself against it. Soren yelped and frantically renewed her efforts to grab the pipe. After another bang against the door, it splintered but held. Yuri figured a third charge would do it when his enemy surprised him.

The shapeshifters were wolves first; they disliked using their human forms. When fighting them, Yuri had grown accustomed to battling the giant beasts, as he rarely saw them use human form.

However, that didn't mean they couldn't still change at will. And this cunning wolf had just figured human hands open door knobs much better than paws. So, Yuri had a moment of surprise when the door simply swung open, revealing a bearded, hairy naked man.

The man-beast acted first, lunging at Yuri with a yell and horribly transforming into an animal howl as it lunged. Its bones making sickening cracking sounds as its limbs swung in awkward angles. Yuri regained his senses quickly enough to quick-draw and fire his Ruger as the man-beast charged straight at him.

The shot blew a pulpy hole out of the man's body. Soren, still hanging in the window, jerked at the shot. She slipped out the window, nimbly catching the pipe. She slid down the pipe in what can be best described as a controlled crash, landing with a resonating and hollow boom into the container below her.

The point-blank shot with the Ruger stopped the man-wolf mid-charge as it gurgled in pain, one hand-claw grasping at his open side. Just like they always did, the beast found enough strength to yell an inhuman, full-throated, defiant roar. The beast was so close spittle hit Yuri in the face. Yuri adjusted aim and fired his cannon into the thing's face. An impressive explosion of gore, brains, and skull erupted in all directions, and the nearly headless corpse fell to the ground.

Yuri wiped blood and spit off his face with the back of his arm. There was no more secrecy—his location would be clear to all the pursuers. In a quick, imprecise motion, Yuri swung his legs out the window, grasping desperately the inner side as he discovered for himself why Soren had so much trouble grabbing hold of the pipe. He needed to extend his full arm to grab the pipe, but doing so would require him to let go of the ledge, and he would fall. The unnerving feeling of half his body dangling into nothingness panicked him, as his legs kicked out into nothing. He had the sinking feeling that what he thought was a bad plan, was, in fact, a terrible one.

He didn't have much time to dwell on it, as two more wolves bound into the office, snarling and growling. Yuri's eyes widened as they leapt toward him, and he awkwardly raised his gun arm and fired. He did not see if he hit anything, as the movement caused him to lose hold and slip, falling down two stories. The air was painfully purged from him lungs as he slammed against the metal container. The world went black, but sheer will forced him to remain conscious. He gasped emptily as he tried to breathe air back into his collapsed lungs. Soren didn't seem to rate him getting his wind back as the current priority; she grabbed him and pulled him up. He mechanically did as she willed, wartime survival instincts overriding concerns of bodily damage. It was simple—keep moving or die.

Soren made them jump off the container, knocking more air out of Yuri's lungs and hurting him all over. Then she led him into a run. The experienced shapeshifter hunter in Yuri told him they couldn't just run anywhere; they had to run a precise course designed to put as much distance between them and the likely position of the wolves. He needed to make sure Soren did that, but he just couldn't manage anything other than a blind race, led by the hand by Soren.



They ran right into a trap, of course. Soren shrieked as the hidden beasts sprung. They'd almost made it, mere meters from the front gate. He also saw four beasts—no, five—encircling them, snarling and growling. The large, muscular woman he'd seen earlier stood among them, the sole pack member in human form. She leered at them with a savage grin of satisfaction and pleasure at the upcoming task of tearing them apart.

Yuri, panting, the world spinning, raised his Ruger. The effort made him stumble, and he shook with a barrage of empty coughs.

"Filthy human thief girl. Killer of kin cubs. I'll rip you apart," she said slowly in Russian, her voice sounding like her lower job didn't fit right with her upper jaw.

"Fuck you," was all Yuri could manage to say. He pulled the trigger of his Ruger until it clicked. Sadly, he hit nothing but air.

The she-bitch's vicious grin grew bigger, her faced deformed, her mouth much bigger than it ought to be and full of jagged fangs.

The last thing Yuri remembered seeing was her snarling face turn to angry shock as the wolf next to her slammed to the ground, riddled with slugs. Shouts and the rhythmic sound of automatic fire filled the night as car loads of armed men came out of nowhere and assaulted the group. Soren leaped on him, throwing him to the ground. Another slam hit his struggling lungs, and this time it was too much. Yuri blanked out.

He came to with a start. He felt conscious, but not all of his senses seemed to be online yet. He could not see and could hardly move. But reason slowly returned to his brain, and he started to understand his predicament. He was bound and in some place dark, cramped, and rumbling. Most likely the trunk of a car. He sensed the warmth of a body next to him.

"Soren?" he asked tentatively.

"Yup. Glad you're still alive. Feeling better?" she asked.

He ignored the question, since there were more important things to worry about.

"Where are we? Back of a car, right? What's going on?"

"Yeah, we're in a trunk. You fell pretty badly, I don't know if you remember that. We were surrounded by the wolves, but then these guys showed up and shot everything to hell. The wolves—the ones that didn't get killed—ran. I have to say, though, they don't go down easily. But anyway, I think you passed out at some point there, though I'm not sure. I was busy thinking I was going to die. Anyway, the wolves ran and these guys said we were coming with them. They didn't really give me a choice. They hoisted you in the trunk and then made me get it as well."

She paused momentarily, thoughtful. "I guess we've come pretty much full circle then, huh? Except now you're in the trunk, too."

Yuri was in no mood to appreciate the irony. Though real movement wasn't possible due to his bindings, he flexed the muscles of his limbs. His right arm responded with sharp pain, and his thighs and knees were sore. He figured the legs were just bruised, but that felt like a fracture in his arm. Not a bad one, though. Memories of snarling wolf maws centimeters from his face before he dropped from the window flashed in his mind, and he was grateful that a fracture was the worst wound he had.

"Yuri?" Soren said after too much silence had passed.

He sighed and figured it was as good a time as any to let her know what was going on. "The people that have us are Vory. I called them. They are Otsana Kovalenka's people. They are probably taking us to her now."

It took Soren a moment to reply, and Yuri was glad he could not see her face while she was considering her response. "You called the Vory. The people who are going to kill me. That's who has us now? Great."

"Don't worry. They aren't going to kill you. These aren't the same people that kidnapped you earlier. I know we—" he stopped and corrected himself "—that is, they all look the same, but the Vory are far from united. We're gonna cut a deal with Otsana. We might have to give up your disk though. You still have it, right?"

"I have it, but no. If you think I'm giving up this damn disk, you're dreaming. It's all I have to show for this bullshit."

"You'll have your life. At this point, we'd both be lucky to get out of this and still be breathing." The bumpy rhythm of the car abruptly slowed, then stopped. "We must be there."

There had been a few slow, tight turns before the car stopped. If Yuri had to guess, he'd say they were in an indoor parking lot. Doors slammed and the trunk opened. Heavy hands hauled Soren out in an instant, then pulled him out. He was dropped on his feet, in the predicted garage. Half a dozen burly men surrounded them, many of them orks, wearing black synth leather and armed with SPAS automatic shotguns or the latest Kalashnikovs. They had a professional look to them, the hardened look of people whose job was violence. A thick ork hand pushed against his shoulder. "So you're alive, dipshit?"

Yuri looked at the owner of the arm. It was a merc that went by the name of Gangrel. They knew each other from Red Army days. The ork had, like Yuri, graduated out of the bullshit of the Army, finding gainful employment as a private hired gun. Sometimes he contracted with the Kovalenka crew.

He was the one Yuri had called when he realized they were in way over their heads. It was the best idea he could come up with. He had told Gangrel a little, just enough, to relay to Otsana's ear that they had something she'd be interested in. Now that that was done, the next part was surviving the encounter with the Red Queen.

Gangrel and the others walked them to a tiny elevator and up into a posh building. Judging by the beats resonating through the walls, they were in a nightclub, though they were navigating the back passages. They passed a



few doors, all of them guarded by a pair of tough-looking guys with plainly visible rifles.

After a few moments, they emerged into a part of the club. Yuri knew it; it was called Infectious. Smack in the middle of trendy Sukhanova Street, it was one of the most popular joints in the city. The club's investments in high-end sound systems and accompanying augmented visuals were impressive. They had the latest engineered bioluminescent algae and fungi from Evo painted on the walls, which pulsed and released intoxicating spores into the air in rhythm with the music. Jaw-droppingly gorgeous vixens grinded and writhed to the music, stripping to reveal bodies crafted from the dreams of men by the hands of Vladivostok's gifted bio-sculptors.

A hand gruffly shoved Yuri from behind, keeping him from taking everything in. Yuri's temper flared at the manhandling, but it was merely a signal for him to move. They ascended a flight of marbled stairs to a VIP booth, presumably where Bloody Otsana was holding court.

Yuri and Soren were brought into the room, their entourage of Vory men dispersing to the unlit corners of the hall to leave them standing before Otsana Kovalenka's presence. Back in Yuri's day, Otsana shared control of the Far East with two other bosses, forming a status quo through standoff. But power shifted, the detente broke down, and a bloody war and well-publicized executions left only Otsana standing. Over the years, Otsana had grown into her role of iron-fisted empress, and knew how to look the part. Inside Infectious, she held court. Yuri and Soren stood before the self-styled Vory queen. She sat in a chair—a throne, really, made of intricately carved wood and wrought black iron. She wore a plain tan dress and a few select pieces of tasteful jewelry. Standing at attention by her feet were two unusual things: a pair of artificial dogs. Their bodies were wrought from an intricate and delicate curvilinear alloy, with clockwork for joints. Modeled after greyhounds, they were sleek and elegant.

Gene-engineered animals were common, especially in Vladivostok, backyard of Evo, the most prominent transhuman and genetic research corporation in the world. These were the antithesis of Evo's perfect genetic lab constructs, built of alloy, oil, circuitry, and electricity. The madness of using techniques that went against the current of progress was only matched by the artistic splendor of their rendering. As he watched them, the automatons moved, twitched like real animals, their clockwork spinning delicately. Yuri thought they were the most beautiful things he'd ever seen.

Soren's shifting brought him out of his reveries. He noticed Otsana had been quietly gazing at them for some time as she sipped wine from a delicate crystal glass. It had been a while, but this was not the first time Yuri had been in such a situation, and he found he was still somewhat used to it. Soren, however, was beginning to squirm a little. He thought if she'd been Russian, she might have fared better. The Russian character was designed to deal

with the Otsanas of this world. You stood and you waited. Maybe you died, maybe not. If not, there would be vodka later, and that was that.

Tonight, however, Yuri wasn't one of her soldiers, so he figured he might as well shake up the game a little. "Madam Otsana," he said, bowing a little.

It was very polite, but one did not speak to Bloody Otsana unless spoken to, and even then, very reluctantly. Otsana snapped her eyes at him, and shifting in the corners told him bodyguards were readying for the execution order. But she eyed him, frowning.

"I know you," she stated.

"Yes, madam. I worked for you. Before," he said, keeping a certain lack of interest in his voice.

Otsana nodded slowly. "Yes, I remember. A wolf-killer of some talent. But not the best of soldiers. What do you do now?"

"I was a janitor"

Otsana laughed derisively, a laugh echoed from her cronies standing in the shadows around her.

"A fucking janitor! You turned your back on your brothers for a fucking mop and bucket?" Laughs from around her, aggressive like finger jabs.

When he was younger, words like that drove his life. He would have killed anyone and anything to prove himself a man who could stand with other hardened warriors. He would have done anything to get an approving nod from the Boss, whoever that might be, and skinned anyone alive to avoid reprobation like she'd just done. And Yuri knew that all the men in this room were still like that. But he didn't care about that anymore. Bosses paid lip service to the tenets they extolled as virtues. Everything was simply designed to keep talented people loyal, paying them in feelings of pride, a cheaper currency than money. She'd have to work harder than that to get to him. Yuri had nothing she could take.

"It is as you say, Madam," he said evenly.

Otsana's smile chilled on her face, an evil glint in her eyes. She turned her eyes to Soren, looking her up and down. Rumours circulated Bloody Otsana had a pastime of torturing pretty girls. Yuri tried to keep that out of his mind. "And what is this?" she said.

Yuri saw Soren opening her mouth to respond, and he was pretty sure that whatever was about to come out would not be polite. So he jumped ahead before she could speak. "We have some news and information on your enemies, Madam."

She looked at him again, ticking her wine glass on her lips. He had once again talked when not being spoken to. Hell, if he was gonna rescue a girl from a car trunk, dodge hitmen, and fight giant wolves, he may as well go for broke and challenge the most notoriously violent mafia boss of the Far East, right?

"Is that so?" she asked.

"We have a disk. From the Wolf King himself. Personnel files, contacts, plans." He turned to Soren and gestured for



her to show the disk. She clenched her jaw but did it. An enforcer appeared at Soren's side and snatched it from her fingers, bringing it to Otsana.

"More interestingly, we can also tell you that one of your lieutenants is working with the beasts. He took my friend here so he could get his hands on the disk, with the intention of returning it to the Wolf King." He was going to say more, but he caught himself and stopped. Sometimes, when dropping bombshells around violent and powerful people, less was more.

Otsana took the disk and looked at it, though Yuri figured she was just playing with it to buy time while she thought about the real problem: which of her lieutenants was defying her. Otsana's ascension to the throne was far from being a unanimously popular thing. Both of her defeated rivals had led organizations with hierarchies, and all those underbosses understood they were fucked when she took over. Those that had balls (without accompanying brains) acted against her and were purged. But the smarter ones smiled and greeted her with apparent loyalty, merely waiting in the wings to betray her. Yuri knew that she'd hate any betrayal, but betrayal to the wolves, the things she hated more than anything else, would really sting. She'd take it as complete rebellion, and she would find whoever was responsible and skin him alive with a rusty nail. She would cut out his eyes before making him swallow them. She would *hurt* him.

Yuri watched as Bloody Otsana worked the disk over and over in her hands, her eyes unfocused, her breathing becoming faster and harder. In the corner of his eye he saw Soren turn her head fractionally towards him. He met her sideways look. He did his best to look like he knew what he was doing. She did not look re-assured.

Otsana was still looking at the disk. With Yuri's luck, she'd have something that could read the thing sitting in a back room, and she'd throw the disk in and find out Yuri was selling nothing but bullshit. For all he knew the disk had nothing but borscht recipes. The only way for this to work was for Otsana to need at least a week to read the thing, and for Yuri to be long gone by the time she did.

The Queen of the Far East finally turned her attention back to the pair. "Well," she said. "Thank you for this. I suppose this concludes any need I have for you. Perhaps I should kill you now."

Yuri didn't move. He didn't breathe. She'd said it hypothetically. It wasn't fact yet. The mob bosses' men all had their eyes on her, waiting for the order.

She clearly enjoyed hanging two lives on the edge of a razor. But then it was time for her fun to be over. "Get out of my sight," she finally said.

Yuri exhaled the sweetest breath of his life and was instantly manhandled out of the audience room by Otsana's thugs. They were roughly pushed back into the nightclub's

main room. Guards shut the doors to Otsana's audience room, and gave them a dirty look as a cue to get out of here while they could.

Soren's mouth was open. She looked like things had happened a little too fast for her. "Come on," he said, grabbing her hand. He took stairs down into the main dance floor—no way were they exiting through the back door—and bee-lined for the main door. They brushed past dancers, making contact with warm skin covered in cool sweat. Cutting through the people was like going through an underwater jungle, the air steamy with pheromones and reflected lights glistening in the obscurity. The hot air swam with supposedly aphrodisiac gene-engineered spores, designed to tug at the mind, promising delirious drowning in an ocean of sex and euphoria. Thankfully the assaulting promise of sweet oblivion was swift, and they emerged into the outside air, pushing out through the front doors.

Sukhanova Street was alight in neon and AR overlay. Intoxicated scantily clad girls laughed loudly as they crossed the street, trying to run in their overly high heels to the McHugh's on the other side, waiting to serve up post-clubbing burgers. A pack of gangster wannabes catcalled after them, inviting them to hit another club with them.

The wet streets glistened with reflected lights and active metahumanity, and the sharpness of the cold air dazzled Yuri. He looked at it all, a little stunned, finally realizing how close he had come to death while somehow staying alive. Soren grabbed his elbow and started walking down the street, toward the piers. "Come on," she said.

They walked silently. She eventually spoke. "You know, quite frankly, this is bullshit. We're empty handed, I'm broke; I was kidnapped, tortured, shot at, almost eaten by wolves, and almost killed by an ice-cold Vory bitch."

"She wouldn't have killed you, she would just have tortured you," Yuri said absently. Then he looked at her wrinkled mouth and smiled awkwardly. "Minor distinction. Sorry. Never mind."

"The thing is, I did all that, and I'm still here. The sun will rise in the morning, and I'll be here to see it." She mounted her elbows on the railing and stared out into the absolute blackness of the Pacific Ocean. "So what do I do about it?"

He walked up next to her. She turned and looked into his eyes. He knew he didn't know her well, but at least he knew her, and she seemed willing to stay with him a while. Wherever he may be.

Behind him, cars honked, neon flashed, basslines thumped. It all seemed to be fading as he stood there, becoming more distant. He could leave it all, drop it in a heartbeat. His job, his home, what passed for his acquaintances. His past. For the first time in years, he felt like he could leave it all behind.

He looked out across the Pacific.

"Ever been to America?"



GAME INFORMATION

YURI YEHzOV

MALE HUMAN

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
3	3	3	4	2	5	4	4	4	3.4	8	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Armor (B/I): 6/4

Active Skills: Firearms skill group 3, Automotive Mechanic 2, Close Combat skill group 2, Dodge 3, First Aid 1, Infiltration 3, Outdoors skill group 2, Etiquette 1, Negotiation 1, Perception 3

Knowledge Skills: Neo-Anarchists 2, Russian Red Army 3, Shapeshifters 4, Smuggler Groups 2, Vladivostok Vory 3, Vladivostok 3

Languages: Russian N, English 1

Qualities: Bad Rep, Big Regret, Guts, SINner (Criminal)

Augmentations: Cyberears [Rating 2, w/ audio enhancement 2], cybereyes [Rating 2, w/ thermographic vision (inoperative, no effect), smartlink, vision enhancement 1 (inoperative, no effect)], wired reflexes 1 (inoperative, no effect)

Gear: Amor vest, commlink [Sony Emperor w/ Renraku Ichi]

Weapons:

Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, DV 6P, AP -2, SS, RC —, 6 (cy), w/ smartlink]

SRS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edg	Ess
3	3	3	3	4	4	5	2	4	3.4

Initiative: 8 + 1d6

Movement: 6/12/+2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Limits: Physical 4, Mental 6, Social 4

Armor: 9

Skills: Etiquette 1, Firearms skill group 3, Automotive Mechanic 2, Close Combat skill group 2, Dodge 3, First Aid 1, Infiltration 3, Outdoors skill group 3, Negotiation 1, Perception 3,

Knowledge Skills: Neo-Anarchists 2, Red Army 3, Shapeshifters 4, Smuggler Groups 2, Vladivostok Vory 3, Vladivostok 3, Russian N, English 1

Qualities: Bad Rep, Guts, SINner (Criminal, National (Russian Federation))

Augmentations: Cyberears [Rating 2, w/ audio enhancement 2], cybereyes [Rating 2 w/ thermographic vision (inoperative)], smartlink, visual enhancement 1 [Inoperative)], wired reflexes 1 (inoperative)

Gear: Armor vest, Renraku Sensei (Device Rating 3)

Weapons:

Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5, DV 9P, AP -2, SS, RC —, 6(cy), w/ smartlink]

SOREN LIND

FEMALE HUMAN

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
3	4	4	2	5	3	3 (4)	4	3	5.8	7	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Armor (B/I): 0/0

Active Skills: Con 5, Disguise 2, Dodge 3, Escape Artist 2, Forgery 4, Gymnastics 3, Infiltration 4, Negotiation 3, Palming 4, Perception 2, Pistols 2, Shadowing 2

Knowledge Skills: Art 3, Con Games 2, High Society 3, Historical Artifacts 2, Worldwide Fences 4

Languages: French N, Danish 5, English 4, German 3, Italian 2, Russian 4

Qualities: Linguist, Liar, Quick Healer

Augmentations: Cerebral booster 1

Gear: N/A

Weapons: N/A

SRS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edg	Ess
3	4	4	2	4	3 (4)	3	5	3	5.8

Initiative: 7 + 1d6

Movement: 8/16/+2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Limits: Physical 4, Mental 5, Social 7

Armor: 0

Skills: Con 5, Disguise 2, Escape Artist 2, Forgery 4, Gymnastics (Climbing) 3(+2), Negotiation 3, Palming 4, Perception 2, Pistols 2, Sneaking 4

Knowledge Skills: Art 3, Con Games 2, High Society 3, Historical Artifacts 2, Worldwide Fences 4

Languages: French N, Danish 5, English 4, German 3, Italian 2, Russian 4

Qualities: Bilingual, Quick Healer

Augmentations: Cerebral booster 1

Gear: N/A

Weapons: N/A



SIBERIAN SHAPESHIFTER (WOLF)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4	4	4	5	2	3	2	3	2	6	7	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Armor (B/I): 0/0

Active Skills: Athletics skill group 3, Infiltration 4, Intimidation 2, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 2, Shadowing 3, Unarmed Combat 3

Knowledge Skills: Siberia 2, Vladivostok 2, Vory 2

Languages: Yakut N, Russian 2

Powers: Allergy (aspen wood, Severe), Enhanced Senses (hearing, low-light vision, smell, taste), Natural Weapon (wolf form) (DV 5P, AP —), Regeneration, Sapience, Shift (Human), Vulnerability (aspen wood)

SRS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edg	Ess
4	4	4	5	3	2	3	2	2	6

Initiative: 7 + 1d6

Movement: 8/16/+2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Limits: Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 5

Armor: 0

Skills: Athletics skill group 3, Intimidation 2, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 2, Sneaking (Urban) 4 (+2), Unarmed Combat 3

Knowledge Skills: Siberia 2, Vladivostok 2, Vory 2, Yakut N, Russian 2

Powers: Shapeshift (Human), Regeneration, Sapience, Natural Weapon, Claw (6P, AP -), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low Light Vision, Smell, Taste)

Weaknesses: Allergy (Aspen Wood, Severe), Vulnerability (Aspen Wood)

VLADIVOSTOK VORY 2 ZAKONE THUG: HARDMAN

MALE TROLL

The troll known as Hardman isn't fast or smart. He isn't an especially good shot, but he doesn't need to be. He is simply a hulking mass. His Vory bosses know they just need to send him to scowl at someone, knowing he has the backing of the mob, and the problems usually disappear. Of course, with the Vladivostok market flooded from Evo's sometimes bizarre but always useful bio-augmentations, you can expect this Vory foot soldier to be packing some cutting-edge enhancements.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
9	2	2	8	2	2	2	2	2	4.5	4	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 13/9

Armor (B/I): 7/5

Active Skills: Automatics 2, Clubs 2, Etiquette (Vory) 2, Intimidation 4, Pistols 2, Tracking (Urban) 2, Unarmed Combat 3

Knowledge Skills: Evo Augmentations 2, Law 1, Safe Houses 2, Smuggling 1, Vladivostok 3, Vory Politics 3

Languages: Russian N

Qualities: Moderate Addiction (alcohol)

Augmentations: Mender endosont, plastic bone lacing, Reakt, smartlink, tracheal filter 3

Gear: Commlink [Novatech Airware w/ Iris Orb, Analyze 3, Encrypt 2, MCT Bloodhound 2], plastic hip flask filled with vodka, lined coat, restraints

Weapons:

Ares Predator IV [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -1 SA, RC —, 15(c), w/ smartlink]

Sap [Club, Reach —, DV 5S, AP —, -2 concealability]

SRS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edg	Ess
9	2	2 (3)	8	2	2	2	2	2	4.5

Initiative: 4 (5) + 1d6

Movement: 4/8/+1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 13/9

Limits: Physical 9, Mental 3, Social 4

Armor: 9

Skills: Automatics 2, Clubs 2, Etiquette (Vory) 2, Intimidation 4, Pistols 2, Tracking (Urban) 2, Unarmed Combat 3

Knowledge Skills: Evo Augmentations 2, Law 1, Safe Houses 2, Smuggling 1, Vladivostok 3, Vory Politics 3

Qualities: Addiction (alcohol, Moderate)

Augmentations: Plastic bone lacing, reaction enhancers 1, smartlink, tracheal filter 3

Gear: Lined coat, medkit (Rating 2), Renraku Sensei commlink (Device Rating 3)

Weapons:

Ares Predator V [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP -1, SA, RC —, 15(c), w/ smartlink]

Sap [Club, Acc 5, Reach —, DV 10P, AP —]



VLADIVOSTOK NEO-ANARCHIST COMMUNITY

(GROUP CONTACT)

Membership: +2 (20-99)

Area of Influence: +2 (Sprawl-wide)

Magical Resources: +1 (Minority)

Matrix Resources: +1 (Active)

Uses: Safe houses, black market gear, community information

Places to Meet: Abandoned buildings, public areas

Similar Contacts: Other neo-anarchists communes

Vladivostok's remote location has always fostered a decidedly frontier-town attitude of self-reliance amongst its residents. Some take this to the extreme and reject the rule of faraway Moscow and the omnipresent pressure of the megacorporation Evo. These individuals make up the neo-anarchist community of Vladivostok.

The harsh environment of the remote city, both in terms of weather as well as the scarcity of urban refuse to use for scavenging means that banding into a tight-knit community of inter-dependent, like-minded individuals is even more of a necessity than anywhere else. Helping these disenfranchised is the quickest way to gain loyal, if not reliable, friends in the city.

GANGREL

(CONTACT)

Metatype: Ork

Uses: Black market goods, Vory intel, Mercenary intel

Places to Meet: Nightclubs, bars

Similar Contacts: Mercenary, Vory foot soldier

Born in a tough part of St Petersburg, Gangrel ran afoul of the law and was offered a deal to join the Red Army or go to jail. Noted for his aggressiveness but relative intelligence and survival sense, he was transferred to the units fighting the Yakut rebels. While unconventional warfare took its toll on him just as anyone else in those units, he bore it well enough, sticking it out and being promoted to sergeant. After some time he quit the forces, but he retained a taste for warfare. In a moment of honesty he realized he had no other skills in life, so he became a mercenary, selling his trigger finger to the highest bidder. His willingness to unquestionably shoot anything when told to, along with his keen tactical mind, has made him a favourite of Bloody Otsana. Some rumors, spread only by those who have had too much vodka, would suggest Bloody Otsana has taken a "personal interest" in the mercenary. If you know what we're saying.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
7	3	5	6	2	3	3	4	2	6	8	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 12/10

Active Skills: Automatics 4, Dodge 3, Etiquette 2, Gunnery 2, Heavy Weapons 2, Intimidation 3, Negotiation 2, Perception 2, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 3, Survival 3, Throwing Weapons 3, Unarmed 4

Knowledge Skills: Black Market Dealers 2, Small Unit Tactics 2, Vladivostok Mercenaries 4, Vory z Zakone 3, Bloody Otsana 3, Yakut Awakened forces 4

SRS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	Edg	Ess
7	3	5	6	4	3	3	2	2	6

Initiative: 8 + 1d6

Movement: 6/12/+2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 12/10

Limits: Physical 8, Mental 5, Social 5

Skills: Automatics 4, Etiquette 2, Gunnery 2, Heavy Weapons 2, Intimidation 3, Negotiation 2, Perception 2, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 3, Sneaking 3, Survival 3, Thrown Weapons 3, Unarmed Combat 4

Knowledge Skills: Black market Dealers 2, Small Unit Tactics 2, Vladivostok 4, Vory v Zakone 3, Bloody Otsana 3, Yakut Awakened Forces 4

PLACES OF INTEREST

DYADYA YAROV'S TITTY COFFEE BAR

A thoroughly confusing mix of virtual stripper joint and authentic Americana dive, Dyadya Yarov's Titty Coffee Bar isn't exactly known as a prime spot for Vladivostok's movers and shakers. The eponymous Dyadya Yarov is a man known for fairness and respecting hard workers, even if they might be criminals. As such, it's a hangout for the city's more low-profile independent operators. The Vory can have the bright lights and high life of Sukhanova Street; indie smugglers, crowbar B&E hustlers, and burned-out mercenaries rub elbows at the Titty Coffee Bar. It's a good place to meet those who operate under Bloody Otsana's radar, as well as some hackers who have begun showing up after hearing rumours of the famous stripping AI from Japan. While the regulars of the coffee bar don't typically understand a word of the techno-babble from the new kids, the gist of it seems to be there might be even more to the little dancing persona than anyone realized so far.

INFECTIOUS

Currently reigning as the biggest and most popular of Vladivostok's Sukhanova Street nightclub district, Infectious is decadent clubbing at its best. Known as a "stripper nightclub," the club features the best audio equipment pumping out avant-garde dance music from Vladivostok's creative and in-demand musicians. The club has recently



upgraded its installation to include Aphrodite Active Bio-Matter from Evo, dialing up the sexuality of the place to 11. Already attracting the most beautiful young people of the area, Infectious adds its own hired strippers, enhanced with top-of-the-line Evo biomods, performing lascivious strip acts and dancing on raised stages surrounding the dance floor. Combined with the Aphrodite fungi spewing out what is essentially aerosolized eX, sexuality oozes out of every pore of this club. Well known to be not only run by the Vory, but to serve as the courtroom of “Bloody” Otsana Kovalenka, reigning tsarina of the Far East Vory z Zakone, the club is *the* place to be for those looking for a night of perdition. Just don’t make the owners mad at you.

GEAR

CLOCKWORK GREYHOUND

Genengineered pets are common amongst the rich, as mechanical ones having fallen out of favor. A rare, master-crafted product, however, is always desired by the elite, no matter what it is. An artisan product, the Clockwork Greyhound is a perfect blend of art and technology. Meticulously crafted, obsessively designed by modern-day Gepetto and reclusive genius Yaroslav Ciocoi, Clockwork Greyhounds are an amazing sight to behold. Gears and clockwork, ranging from tiny brass pieces controlling precision movement to large cast steel cogs powering limbs move constantly, a artistry of function and aesthetics. Only a handful of these creatures exists, each taking around two years of work to create. They are highly prized, one-of-a-kind status symbols.

HANDL	ACCEL	SPEED	PILOT	BODY	ARM	SENS	AVAIL	COST
+1	10/50	100	3	2	1	2	18	220,000¥

SRS

HANDL	SPEED	ACCEL	BOD	ARM	PILOT	SENS	AVAIL	COST
3	2	1	2	1	3	2	16	225,000¥

EVO APHRODITE REACTIVE BIOMATTER

All the rage in Vladivostok’s avant-garde club scene, Evo’s line of Reactive BioMatter consists of various genengineered fungi and algae of various textures, some soft like down, some textured like skin. They are reactive to various things such as touch, light, and temperature. Depending on the stimulant, the Reactive BioMatter will produce feedback such as changing color, glowing, changing texture, or even releasing scents and spores. The Aphrodite product is a best seller in Vladivostok’s sex-laden nightclubs. The Aphrodite Reactive BioMatter is easily applied to any surface and emits a gentle glow when in semi-darkness, but it’s most sought-after feature is the organism’s ability to exude spores into the air with effects similar to the party drug eX (see p. 75, *Arsenal*).

NAME	AVAIL	COST
EVO Aphrodite Reactive Biomatter	8	1,000¥ per square meter

CREDITS

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