

The cover art features a cybernetic mercenary in a black tactical suit and helmet, crouching on a large rock and aiming a futuristic assault rifle. In the background, a large, multi-story wooden lodge is nestled in a forested valley. A small helicopter is visible in the sky above the lodge. The overall atmosphere is one of a high-tech, cyberpunk setting.

SHADOWRUN[®]

CONSPIRACY THEORIES[™]

THE TANGLED WEB OF TRUTH

War rages in Central America, tensions between dragons are on the rise, and the Watergate Rift has been closed in a display of power that shook the city of DeeCee to its core. To many, the world is becoming more disordered and unpredictable—but there are those who look underneath the surface chaos and see order, or even a plan. They see people and organizations who pull the strings and make the world shake, and they wonder if they can find out what these people are up to before it's too late.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES is a deep dive into the underbelly of the Sixth World, a place filled with crackpot theories and insane ideas that would be laughable if it weren't for the fact that some of them are most assuredly true. If they want to stay alive, shadowrunners need to know this information to keep them a step ahead of the forces that may be massing against them behind the scenes. If they want to do more than survive—if they want to prosper—they really need to know this data, because any runner worth a damn knows that manipulating people based on what they believe to be true is a great way to make a few nuyen.

Bringing together plot elements from *War!*, *Spy Games*, and the *Dawn of the Artifacts* series, *Conspiracy Theories* adds a twisted element to *Shadowrun* games. *Conspiracy Theories* is for use with *Shadowrun*, *Twentieth Anniversary Edition*.

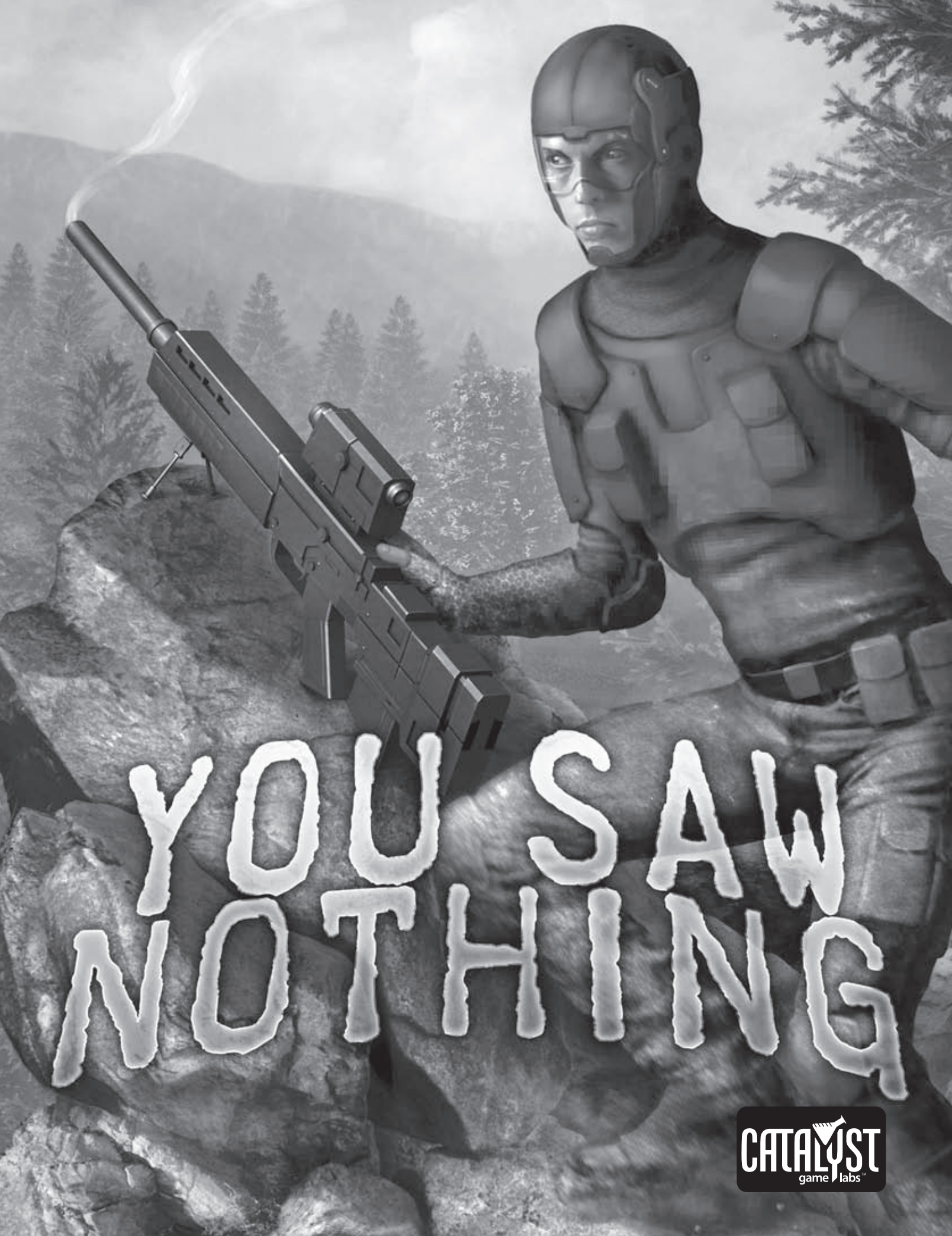


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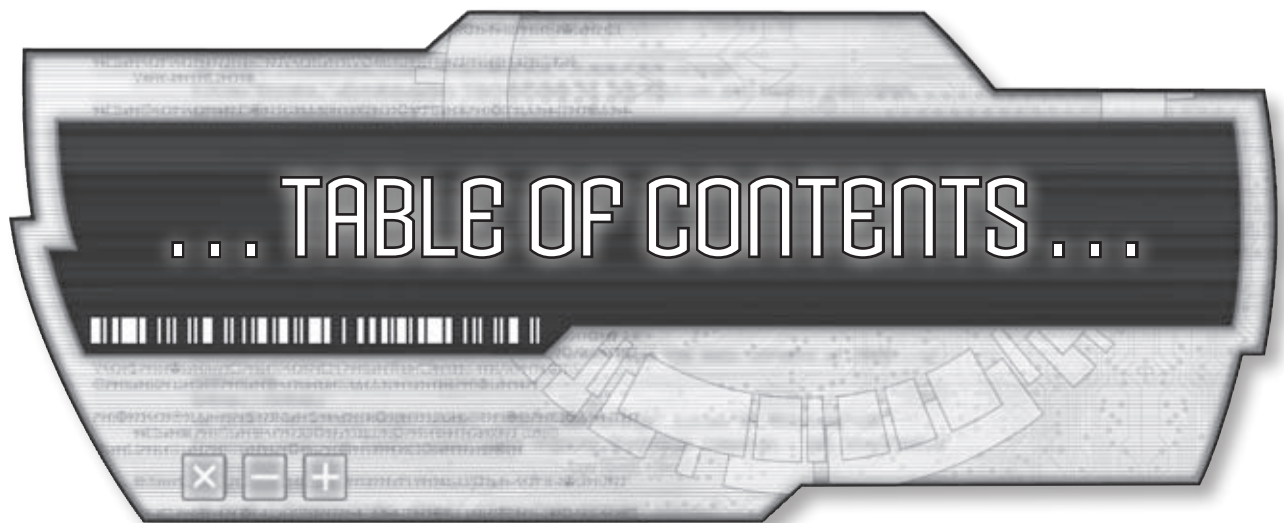


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NOTHING



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UNION #NIT AXO AXNO JCLAXX



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

> Enter Passcode

... Biometric Scan Confirmed.
Connected to <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>
*"Civilization is a conspiracy. Modern life is the silent compact
of comfortable folk to keep up pretences."*

JackPoint Stats

94 users currently active
in the network

Latest News

* <102673> Sorry, I let some maintenance slide over the past few days. Had to take care of some business, but all is good now. -FastJack

Personal Alerts

* You have 7 new [private messages](#).
* You have 8 [messages](#) queued for anonymous re-routing.
* You have received 3 new [Metalink](#) Friends add requests.
* You have 19 new [responses](#) to your JackPoint posts.
* PDA: Local Illuminati chapter meets tonight, 11:30 PM
* PDA: Sell that last dragon claw clipping before someone comes looking!

First Degree

You are hidden from all contacts.

Your Current Rep Score: 65
(83% positive)

Current Time: 26 October 2073 2:14

PREFERENCES

FEEDS

TASKS

LINKS

HISTORY

Welcome back to JackPoint, omae;
your last connection was severed: 33
hours, 8 minutes, 20 seconds ago.

Today's Heads Up

- * How a part of the world blew up, and some people made good money off of it [Tag: [Artifacts Unbound](#)]
- * We couldn't get all the good stories into a single posting. [Tag: [Street Legends Supplemental](#)]

Incoming

- * Keep up. No one ever died from being too current [Tag: [State of the Art](#)]
- * The corps are hiring. Can you live long enough to get paid? [Tag: [Corporate Intrigue](#)]

Top News Items

- * Lofwyr says Celedyr is behind intercepts of S-K communications in Great Britain. [Link](#)
- * Gov. Brackhaven officially kicked off his 2074 re-election campaign with a rally held at the foot of the Space Needle. In his remarks, the governor said that Seattle has become a safer, more livable community, but fights still need to be waged to ensure future prosperity. A group of pro-Ork Underground supporters briefly interrupted the rally in support on the upcoming Proposition 23. In discussing Prop 23, Governor Brackhaven said, "I am confident that on November 7 the voters of Seattle will make the right decision." [Link](#)
- * Woman found slain in Denver confirmed as a victim of the Mealtime Killer. Victim discovered at home with throat torn out, words "Midnight Snack" scrawled in blood on the wall above her body. Other victims in Seattle, Portland, and Las Vegas had similar messages left behind. Knight Errant says they are coordinating efforts with other cities. [Link](#)



CHAT

MESSAGES

FILES

POSTS

NEXUS

SEARCH

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Posts/Files tagged with
"Conspiracy Theories"

Paranoia Won't Destroy Ya
The Powers That Be
Bubbling to the Surface

[More]

CONTINUE

ADVANCED
SEARCH

SAVE

Active

TomStar
Firewall

Active

Jack-in-the-Box
Antivirus

Active

SpamWitch
Filter

On/Receiving

Commcode

Excellent

Signal

Active

Hidden
Mode

Local
Map

... IT'S THE FALL THAT'LL KILL YOU ...

FastJack was armed to the teeth, at least in a metaphorical sense. He had loaded a full combat suite onto his commlink, and as he approached the node he took the JackHammer into his virtual hands and held it ready. The node he was approaching was supposed to be a representation of an idealized Arcology Mile, before the Twins, and before El Infierno. It was a system of orderly function and efficiency instead of chaos and ruin. One of these gleaming towers of commerce hid the Horizon Office of Special Projects, and inside of it was the Dawkins Group. FastJack had been studying and probing the Horizon system off and on for a year and had held off his response. He wanted to wait, assess the situation, and have a plan. He hacked Zurich-Orbital, the Aztechnology Heart of Darkness, and the Vatican, but now this was becoming personal.

The virtual sun felt warm. This was idealized Los Angeles, where the sun was always golden in azure skies, and the smell of oranges and ocean wafted through the node. Everything was hyper-real, slightly oversaturated, and perfect. Perfect colors. Perfect lines and subtle architectural features of Southern California Modernism, Art Deco, and the modern wonders of architecture that could only exist with computer designs and materials that did not exist seventy years ago, before nanotechnology and magic. No one could sense he was here, thanks to stealth routines, data scrubbers, and agents running pre-programmed deception codes that made everything seem normal until it wasn't.

FastJack didn't like engaging in cybercombat. It was uncouth for a man of his age and skill level, but this was a search-and-destroy mission. It was also a message to the Dawkins Group, and Horizon in general, that if they wanted to wage war on him and his friends, then he would return the favor tenfold.



FastJack stared at the three-dimensional holographic photo array against the backdrop of a blank wall. He sighed at the faces of the sixty-four members of JackPoint, including Fatima, and an equal number of guest users ranging from Duante in Lagos to Otaku-Zuku in Neo-Tokyo, and the likes of Dr. Kristine A. Martin and Eliohann. A gross of metahumans, and one dragon's e-ghost, no longer constituted a private intelligence-sharing network.

It was a conspiracy of thieves.

He knew that the corporations maintained data on individual shadowrunners and had done so for decades. He had implemented security features so that the site did not repeat enough for people to

gather network analysis, no matter how many people were logged on. Even when it would, the amount of information collected on data traffic should have made analysis considerably difficult. Part of the reason he recruited Puck was to ensure that there weren't other means that he couldn't predict that technomancers might be able to find.

He didn't count on a prodigy. There were stories about people who could see what even the best computers and cyberlogicians could not see. They had advanced social network analysis software, pattern recognition algorithms, and other analytical and predictive mapping systems, but those all adhered to certain programming limits. Magic didn't care for the limits of human and scientific potential, though he expected that it would be the otaku and now technomancers who'd bypass that limit. But there was no divide between the meat world and the Matrix anymore. He had lost sight of the "real" as he adapted to ensure his footing as the best hacker-decker-hacker in the world.

Horizon didn't miss this. The intuitive human brain once again prevailed over technology, and now he and his allies were targets. It helped them that their analysis drew attention to JackPoint through the non-deckers. Orbital DK was the exception, but she had security and access issues that made her unique. Even Fianchetto was not sufficiently up-to-date on his counterespionage efforts against a dedicated hunter like Horizon, though they did pick up enough disinformation that it was not for a lack of precaution on his part.

A blonde woman of indeterminate age walked up next to him and handed him a coffee mug. He took the cup, not quite sure what to make of the web of lines connecting each of the users to each other, and to external nodes. His analytical programs ran models, and he would pick out certain users and try to think of what he knew about them, hoping for an intuitive leap that the software just couldn't make.

"I appreciate your trust in me. We have dossiers on most of your users, but the personal attention you took to try and preempt Horizon was more than anyone else would have been able to accomplish." She waved away the array and brought up the ten original dossiers that brought JackPoint to Horizon's attention.

The ten who set off Dawkins' campaign to disrupt and destroy the group from the inside, and cause them to hack into the network itself. He had to assume that they had the roster, and kept coming back using the backdoor he left open. He kept it there so that he could track them, but it had some unintended consequences. The anonymous postings ceased to be amusing, but they had provided him with variables that even Horizon could not anticipate. The spies told him not to go down the path of trying to anticipate actions and reactions when he kept the backdoor open. He had to fight every fiber of his being not to shut them down.

"The bias of the analyst and of the Dawkins group affects how they react to JackPoint, and that's not something any algorithm can account for. Even with all we know about Ms. Davis, Integration Analysis, and the Consensus, it's still trying to measure the reaction logically when people do not act that way. If we take Cline and what is known about the Consensus, then it is a massive network dynamic model. The unique attribute the ten share becomes clear from a logic-based analysis."

Urgent Message.....



"They won't break. Ever," FastJack said. "That's one of the things I've come to look for in the users."

"And yet they are not dogmatic. There are principles each adhere to, but they are so fuzzy and hard to gather from statistical analysis." The woman's voice remained level, almost a monotone, as she spoke.

"It's something you either know, or you don't. And I know all of them, rather personally, just as I do with the rest of JackPoint."

The woman nodded. "To someone who understands Horizon and the Consensus, what do you see?"

"People who will never buy in to whatever they're selling."



A window popped up in front of FastJack's icon. It was a message broadcast through his tactical software.

In position. Ready?

He sent a one-word reply *Go*.

In the meat world, the Office of Special Projects was under attack. FastJack's preparations kicked in, and his Wild Weasel agent was on the move. He bypassed the security measures, leaving the IC masquerading as friendly looking icons. Horizon didn't use lethal IC, but they used psychotropic in these nodes. That was far worse to him, but there was nothing that he needed to worry about. He tracked the movements of the three women in the Horizon building as the missile icon was creating distractions and inputting false data. The stiff arm interjected between cameras and other sensors and the analysis and recording machines that would make their job so much harder. He watched the scorpion ambush the company spiders, and he began to feed false data through the security system. No, there was not a group of operatives alternately breezing or bluffing their way through the highest security.

Jack watched their movements and remembered to breathe in the meat world. Once they breached the physical security of the offices, he went to work. It was difficult waiting for them for what seemed like an eternity while they moved with all due haste. Still, meat was not as fast as light. He had mapped out the system quite accurately, and now he had to coerce the nodes to appear for him. He had planted a bit of code months ago and had used it only twice. It would erase itself after this use, and he would have to figure out a new way to re-enter the node, assuming there was anything left when he was done. The node appeared, and he entered the most clandestine part of the Horizon system. It felt differently. Singularity and Dawkins technomancers held dominion over this area.

He spent enough time with Perri and others, like Puck and Netcat, to have some understanding of how to combat technomancers. They could use the system against him, and they acted very intuitively. That was the problem with the new kids, though, the technomancers who had never been otaku. What many of the first generation like Perri and Puck understood was the fundamental science and logic behind the functioning of the Matrix. They understood the rules, and how to break them. What he had learned in previous encounters was that as

good as they were, these technomancers relied too much on the idea of the Matrix as a metaphor. Jack grew up typing in command-line code. Age and wisdom gave him perspective that they would never have.

Sprites and complex forms were quite complex, and they were often able to do things that software could not. But they were still code, and that code could be manipulated and altered. They could use the system against him, but he could use it against them as well. That was his skill, seeing the abstract and underlying nature of the Matrix, and he was beginning to believe that this was a fatal flaw in Horizon: There was an element of faith in their work. That faith could power their virtual machines, but the machines still had substance that could be attacked while they were wrapped in the metaphor.

Inside the node, FastJack began his assault. He raided the datastores he was hunting for while his compatriots were in the real world taking care of hardcopies, backups, and the like. They were also sending a message to the actual people in the Group that he and his allies could reach them anywhere at anytime, especially in their "home."

The technomancers reacted to the system's disruption as data burned and cracks appeared where the code was being torn apart. Some of them broke through the stealth and spoofing, and he brought JackHammer to the ready. He did not want to kill them, but he was going to make them hurt. The node began to show leaks in data. Imagery poured through as technomancers stripped the façade of slick, friendly workers for sleek combat machines. They attacked him in unison, and he swung JackHammer in a wide arc, laying waste to their sleek and futuristic icons and making them look like broken toys.

FastJack unleashed the full force of JackHammer on the node and struck the ground with a resounding thunder and lightning show. After the battle with Jormungand, Perri had tried to convince him that he should rename the program Mjolnir. He passed. After all, Thor died battling Jormungand in the legend. He, however, stood victorious. Reinforcements appeared, and these people were much faster. His icon began to vibrate at a blur, and as one of the defenders made contact, FastJack's icon simply vibrated through the sword-like program, penetrating the hacker's armor before reaching into the heart and destroying the persona. When he and people he knew intimately were responsible for the foundations of combat programs, the only thing he had needed was time to develop countermeasures that would spoof the very base code, making them think he wasn't even there. And FastJack had made sure he'd had plenty of time.



"Well, that's that. Every institution wants to force the world into its line of thinking, but for as much as Horizon sells the creativity and uniqueness of the individual experiences of its employees ..."

"... Those are simply data points to be modeled," the blonde said. "JackPoint members tend to see themselves as principled and righteous, even folks like Kane. That's why it has been so easy to amplify the fear



of technomancers in Clockwork, and resentment of them by Glitch, and the animosity between Haze and Pistons.”

FastJack sighed. “I heard from a third party that Haze has been trying to have Pistons killed. He has become very hostile towards her, and that has gotten Kay distracted and angry because of his ... relationship with her.”

“It’s a shame they want to disrupt JackPoint. Look at these different webs.” The woman made several gestures and the large web returned. She began to highlight each one as she spoke. “Puck must keep some of those people awake at night, knowing that you entrusted him with access. Kay has political connections throughout the UCAS and ties to the New Revolution. I suppose they didn’t realize that everyone in DeeCee does. No matter. Sticks and Man-of-Many-Names have the bug spirit and Ares links. There is a burgeoning set of groups tied to the Draco Foundation and Daviar. I’m still amazed no one caught her recent drop-in. There are several Catholics, including Fianchetto and Thorn. I bet Horizon sees an approach through that, but it won’t fly. Each has unique perspectives on their faith, but confronting that is a test of wills that Horizon seems content to avoid right now. The fact that they are congenial and still have the odd team-up despite decades of fighting for opposing sides must throw off Horizon’s models. Icarus and—” she paused ever briefly “—/dev/grrl have ties to NeoNET.” The woman let out a sound like a muted grunt. “I don’t suppose that he has shown special interest in their activities.”

“No. He prefers playing the Mystery Man.”

“Hmm. Then there are the guests like Roxy’s ex-wife and Kaminsky, whom I sincerely believe is neck deep in Alamos 20K. The jury is still out on whether DefCon5 is even human. Kernel may be the only man alive who knows what happened when Rolf Bremen disappeared. Anyway, my point is that JackPoint had, and continues to have, access and knowledge on a number of dangerous threats and individuals.”

“Like you?” FastJack looked at her solemnly.

“No. I’m just in this for the power and fame. I mean insect spirits, rogue AI, hostile spirits, and things that I’m learning of that I rather wish I didn’t know about. Kay may not be trying to restore a dead country, but he’s definitely up to no good in Denver. Ecotope, Aufheben, Thorn, Fianchetto, and the mercs, and even Kane, all have ties to the same kinds of groups: terrorists, spies, freelance mercs, and people who ...” She trailed off.

“Sam ...”

“Are you compiling data on recent events in DeeCee?”

“Among other things. It’s actually a compilation on much of the strange business and secret groups that have been making noise of late. Actually, they are probably the kinds of groups the Dawkins Group would go after.”

“Indeed. I have an idea.”



The node was burning, collapsing, and on the verge of taking him with it. He had what he came for: the dossiers that had been assembled on JackPoint and its members, including analysis and concepts of operations to infiltrate and co-opt the group and specific members. He bashed the shredded files repeatedly with JackHammer, using it to feed a viral code that would erase and overwrite the data repeatedly before destroying it for good. Once that was complete, FastJack inserted a piece of code into the access system and made a new exit for himself, leaving the node as it crashed for good behind him. He checked his diagnostics. He didn’t realize that the combat had left him damaged, but the medic programs had run their course while he was busy with other tasks. It did leave him a bit weary, which could have made him disregard the fact that his icon had been harmed. Moreover, it made him pause to wonder if perhaps he had been overconfident in reacting to their attacks and programs.

Retreating to a safe spot, FastJack re-ran diagnostics on himself while he checked on the agents and operations that were keeping the field team alive and unseen. Observing the raw data from the sensors he used to feed false information to the rest of the security system, he watched them raid and destroy the databases, leaving the offices in shambles with a combination of weaponry that seemed like overkill. He could hardly deny the effectiveness of the nanoweapons and directed energy weapons they used against the hardware. He sighed, thankful that they hadn’t killed anyone. He admired their effectiveness as they evacuated. They were fast, yet thorough. Exiting the Horizon node, FastJack checked his diagnostics results, but there was nothing out of the ordinary. He would have to check again.



“It seems the one thing you want to ensure is that we’re making the right approach. The idea of discussing conspiracies and clandestine groups and plotters is an opportunity to expose the JackPointers’ own perspectives, prejudices, and willingness to be open with what they say they know versus what you know they know. Now that the backdoor is closed, there should be some encouragement among them to open up. It is also time to start addressing the fact that there are methods being used specifically to aggravate existing prejudices and conflicts. One of the assets you have, and they couldn’t account for, were the dynamics of Slamm-0! and Netcat, and your comment about Puck. There is a mutual interest that almost seems familial or tribal, and that should be encouraged.

“Meanwhile, I think it’s time that we pay them a visit and let them know who they are dealing with.”

“I agree,” FastJack replied. “I keep thinking that once I act, there are numerous ways that this backfire and take me and everyone else down. Then I remember that I took that leap a long time ago, and it’s the fall that’ll kill you. We just haven’t hit the rocks yet.”

... INTRODUCTION ...

I shouldn't have to explain this. We all know that conspiracies play an active role in this world, because we're part of them. Conspiracies are our stock in trade. If people didn't make secret plans that were not supposed to be revealed to the world, we'd be out of work.

But there's a difference between the conspiracies in which we regularly engage and the big conspiracies, the ones that encourage people to look at you funny if you talk about them too much. It's one thing to believe that there are people secretly meeting somewhere to knock over a bank, or to crack into the valuable paydata stored on a corp's wired node. It's entirely another thing to believe that the Queen of England, Lofwyr, and the Wuxing quint are gathered in a dark room at the top of the Egyptian pyramids discussing the best way to raise Atlantis from its deep-sea grave.

The world being the way it is, it's difficult—and unwise—to neatly label the various conspiracy theories circulating around the world as either plausible or implausible. Sure, it may sound crazy to believe that a secret magic organization is planting people in governments of several nations in an effort to dominate the world, but a few years back it sounded crazy to believe that an organization with the benign-sounding name of the Universal Brotherhood was hiding a nightmare that would devastate one of the largest cities in the Western Hemisphere. In the Sixth World, you can't dismiss something just because it sounds crazy.

That's one of the reasons I asked some of the members here to put together this posting. If we're going to stay current on what's going on, then we need to have a broad reach, or else we're going to miss something important. I'm not saying everything here is true—in fact, I'd wager good money on the fact that a lot of it is not—but some of it is, and knowing about it before it blows up in your face could save your life.

But besides being prepared, there's another reason to get a handle on this stuff. You may not believe the stuff talked about here, but someone out there does. We all know how passionate conspiracy theorists can be, talking endlessly about their pet obsessions, chasing down seemingly random leads in the pursuit of an obscure truth, and believing in something against all rationality simply because they have a scrap of information that points them in a particular direction. These people are out there, and they're waiting for you to manipulate them. You can't dig into their skull, though, unless you understand some of their pet theories. A New Wyrms Order believer isn't going to pay attention to you if you don't demonstrate knowledge of the cornerstones of their philosophy. But if you can talk the talk, you can gain instant trust. Instant credibility. The believers will listen to you, maybe even do favors for you. Once you get your hooks into them, you can direct them as you please. Knowledge of conspiracy theories is a tool for the manipulation of others, and that's something all of us can use.

To start us off on this journey, Plan 9, Snopes, and Fianchetto combined their talents to give an overview of conspiracy theory basics and reasons why you should or shouldn't believe them in **Paranoia Won't Destroy Ya.. In The Powers That Be** we get a look at some of the more plausible conspiracy theories making their way around the world today; **Bubbling to the Surface** catches us up on some of the crazier ones. Then we look at two cities, London and DeeCee, that are both important world capitals, and both havens for conspiracy theories.

So use this information well, even if you don't treat it as unimpeachable truth. And once you find out which one of the crazy theories in this posting actually has a good amount of truth in it, let me know. I hate to be caught unaware.

—Fastjack

New Message





Posted by: FastJack

Conspiracy Theory: A theory that explains an event as being the result of a plot by a covert group or organization; a belief that a particular unexplained event was caused by such a group.

—**Aetherpedia**

“The central belief of every moron is that he is the victim of a mysterious conspiracy against his common rights and true deserts. He ascribes all his failure to get on in the world, all of his congenital incapacity and damfoolishness, to the machinations of werewolves assembled in Wall Street, or some other such den of infamy.”

—**H. L. Mencken 1936**

From the latest trid fare to yesterday's headlines, it seems that conspiracies are all the rage. Beyond the hype, beyond the smoke and mirrors, there is something going on. The importance of conspiracy theories in today's world is not based in what they are theorizing about, but in the demand for theorists to look for patterns. This search for patterns is an important part of being metahuman. Not all events occur within a vacuum—quite a few, in fact, are connected to each another. Those connections, when observed, provide context for the world in which we live. And this context is important to how we process information. To understand this, we need to look back to the pre-Matrix world. There was a point when the internet became a truly global network, and hundreds of millions of people began communicating through it. In those early days it was all text-based communications that lacked context, resulting in discussion forums that were full of barely moderated shouting matches and strawman arguments. Only with the reintroduction of context to the discussions did a semblance of civility return to the forums (it also didn't hurt that deckers' skills reached the point where they could fry a smartass in a heartbeat).

To get a better understanding of some of the patterns people are looking at and how they affect the way we understand the world, I decided to try something a little bit different. Normally we have a single poster who will give you their opinion on a particular subject. Given how wildly varying the topic of conspiracy theories

is, I decided to go with a three-pronged approach. We start off with Plan 9; let's call him the true believer. Then we move on to Snopes. Frequent visitors will know him as the skeptic. In the middle of it all we have Fianchetto, just paranoid enough but not too much. They'll share their opinions on how you should react to the growing surge of conspiracy theories, and how their rise might affect you and your work.

PLAN 9

Let's take a moment to review the particular situation of your ordinary, everyday runner. An anonymous entity, represented by a person only known as Mr./Ms. Johnson, hires you, a deniable asset, to engage in a covert activity to achieve ends that will be invisible to the world at large, or disguised as something else. For you and me, that's business as usual. But it's also the very essence of a conspiracy. Since we are engaging in criminal conspiracies on a regular basis, it might be prudent for us to understand a little bit more about the world of covert planning and secret schemes, and to open our minds to the fact that conspiracies regularly go on all around us.

Dismissing the Pre-emptive Dismissals

There are several strategies people use to dismiss conspiracy theories out of hand, without having to grapple with any difficult truths they might present. Critics have a handful of arguments that they feel inoculates them against the possibility of the existence of conspiracy theories. Now, I don't have the time, space, or inclination to review all of the arguments that these critics employ, but we can take a look at some of the more prevalent ones.

Argument number one: “Bureaucracies, be they corporate or government in nature, are staffed with career bureaucrats whose sole purpose in life is to cover their ass. Individuals of this type are risk-averse, and conspiracies carry a great deal of inherent risk. Therefore, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to engage such a body in a conspiracy theory.”

This is, in truth, an excellent argument. Especially when you consider that the average citizen interaction with bureaucrats is



Steve Bu

from the department of motor vehicles or the customer service representative from Saeder-Krupp. These sorts of individuals do not conjure up images of the masterminds who would be required to manage some of the more outlandish conspiracies out there. The great majority of corporate and government institutions simply do not make sense as cogs in a conspiracy machine.

Note, though that I used the term “majority” in lieu of “all,” and the reasons for doing so should be relatively apparent. These institutions of which I speak are not entirely staffed by mindless drones. In fact, there is a fair percentage of ambitious and, dare I say, ruthless souls who inhabit positions of power within these organizations and who are quite capable of pulling off intricate plans. Don’t be too quick to write off those mindless drones either. They certainly have their uses within the bigger picture, including serving as the fall guy.

- That’s part of the secret. If you acknowledge that bureaucrats are risk-averse, you then have to understand that they manage risk by doing what their supervisor tells them to do. By turning one lone highly placed individual, you suddenly have multiple layers of a bureaucracy working to serve your purpose.
- Kay St. Irregular

Argument number two: “Well, these bureaucracies are incapable of decision making without a mountain of paperwork or committee oversight. Both of which preclude the development of conspiracies.”

The best response to this one is to ask whoever is spouting it if they’ve heard of a device known as a paper shredder, or if they know how easy it is to wipe a drive or a node, or if they think it is possible that people can lie while giving testimony to some committee. Ratcheting back the sarcasm just a notch or two, let’s remember that not everything an organization does is documented or discussed in a meeting. There are individuals out there who believe they understand a situation better than anyone else, and they take it upon themselves to act decisively and unilaterally. Particularly when they want to avoid wider attention.

Argument number three: “Interdepartmental cooperation is the exception rather than the rule, and a conspiracy of any reasonable scale will often require precisely that.”

This is yet another plausible argument against the creation of a conspiracy—as long as you don’t factor in back channels. What I mean by that is, not everything has to go through department heads. A lot gets done when you bypass the dead weight (which normally means upper management). Greasing the bureaucracy can be as simple as having the right friends in a Wednesday night poker group and asking them for a favor, or as complicated as blackmailing individuals into compliance.

Argument number four: “The checks and balances, be they corporate or governmental in nature, are in place to prevent a wide range of conspiracies from taking place.”

It would be nice if the world worked that way, and this argument sounds good to people who have an inordinate amount of faith in systems to work as designed. I would imagine, however, that few of us are counted in that number. After all, all we need to do is look back at those individuals who broke the system.

Nicholas Leeson, a derivatives broker who collapsed the Barings Bank after accumulating nearly £208 million in losses through unauthorized trading.

Ivan Boesky and Michael Milken, whose insider trading and other financial shenanigans helped bring down what was at one point the fifth-largest investment bank in the United States.

The rise of the cartel-backed ORO Corporation, the manipulation of the Resource Rush, the Nanosecond Buyout, and on and on. The system gets broken—or at very least gamed—all the time, all too often without any consequences for those rolling the dice. I can hear Snopes proclaiming that the system works because these individuals were caught, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule. I will just list one example.

- Please don’t put words in my mouth. I don’t disbelieve in the conspiracies you spout because I have a huge amount of trust in corporate or governmental systems. I disbelieve in them because there isn’t any evidence to prove them, and often there is evidence to contradict them. I’m a truth-and-accuracy guy, not a systems-will-protect-us guy. As I’ll make clear later, I have no problem believing in a conspiracy theory when the evidence is there to support it.
- Snopes

During the Border Wars in 2005, 25 billion euros in cash simply went missing from a warehouse in Krakow. For those of you who cannot wrap your head around what that really means, imagine semi tractor-trailers filled with cash being driven away from a warehouse and no one noticing it. No one was fired. No one went to jail. There were no congressional hearings. It made the news briefly and wasn’t talked about again. Sometimes, systems are intentionally built to be labyrinthine so that things can be lost in various bureaucratic corners.

- I’m not going to argue with that last point much, other than to say that sometimes the labyrinthine design is not purposeful—it’s the accumulation of decades of regulations and inertia. Conspiracies do not always have to shape things to be that way, because they can sometimes take advantage of things that are already there.
- Kay St. Irregular

Argument number five: “If conspiracy theories were actually real, wouldn’t the people talking about them end up dead?”

There really isn’t any need to go around killing the few of us brave enough to expose the conspiracies when you can marginalize us. It’s a very simple tactic. Instead of debating the merits of our position, they apply derisive labels to us. There isn’t any point in killing a member of the “lunatic fringe.” On the contrary, such individuals are to be pitied by the enlightened masses. It is quite productive for those manipulating the narrative to discredit and marginalize those who oppose them. Any evidence that a conspiracy theorist comes up with presents no real problem as the powers that be will simply trot out one of their experts to routinely dismiss any questions that arise.

They sometimes do this pre-emptively. I believe that there have been instances where conspirators have leaked elements of the conspiracy *du jour* to members of the so-called lunatic fringe. While the information in question might be of interest if it came

out from “legitimate” sources, the fact that it’s first revealed by the lunatic fringe makes the mainstream media dismiss it outright. Then, even if they hear that information repeated by other sources, it still has that taint, and reporters will be likely to dismiss it. Thus, people are silenced without the convenience of having to kill them. After all, no one questions why the lunatic fringe lacks credibility, but if corpses start turning up, then there are questions that are harder to just spin away.

Urgent Message.....

PARANOIA IS NOTHING MORE THAN WATCHING YOUR BACK

What the rest of the world calls paranoia is standard operating procedure for those of us who work in the shadows. The reason we constantly look over our shoulders is that we engage in activities that are guaranteed to aggravate powerful entities. The level of aggravation you cause should be directly correlated to the amount of paranoia you should exhibit on any given day. If we’re going to be honest about it, “paranoia” is the wrong word, since it carries connotations of irrationality and delusion. Since there really are people after us, what we are talking is not paranoia—it’s normal, healthy caution. We’re talking about how to be prudent as we go about our daily lives.

Think about the precautions you take when you’re on a run. You wear gloves so you don’t leave fingerprints at the scene. I can only assume that you often wear some sort of disguise, be it magical or mundane. If you engage in weapons fire, prudence would dictate that you either police your brass or use caseless ammo and, regardless, you either swap out your barrel or ditch the gun completely afterwards. More than likely you use some sort of encryption and voice alteration for your tactical communications. You have a rendezvous point if you get split up during the course of a run, and you have security protocols to ensure that if one of your teammates is compromised, they don’t lead the opposition back to you. Once you’re done with the vehicle that you stole for a run, you sanitize it and maybe even go so far as to have your buddy take it to a junkyard and put it into a compactor. In short, you don’t leave a whole lot to chance for the simple reason that you don’t want to end up in the metroplex prison sharing a cell with an extra from *Deliverance V*. None of your friends think you’re paranoid. On the contrary, they think that you’re professional.

So, we’ve determined that conspiracies do actually take place, and they’re far more common than the talking heads on the trid would lead us to believe. We also know that our business is about the facilitation of conspiracies. Armed as we are with that information, why should we care about the larger conspiracies that are gaining so much attention?

As is often the way in conspiracy matters, we’ll answer that question with a question: Do you care who you work for? Think

about that for a minute. If you’re like me, you’ve done a number of runs for various employers, but more importantly you’ve done a number of runs *against* various entities. Knowing who it is that you are aggravating is a pretty important aspect of our business. If you do a run against Ares, and a couple months down the road you get offered work from one of their fixers, doesn’t that set off a bit of an alarm? I know we’ve all heard the line that corps don’t carry grudges, that they’re only interested in the bottom line. That sounds great for a bedtime story, but the reality is these corporations are staffed with flesh-and-blood people, and people remember who screwed them. Is Damien Knight going to have sleepless nights because you pulled the run against one of his facilities? No, but maybe the assistant security manager who was up for promotion and now finds himself no longer in the running might actually have a bit of a grudge.

- There is another factor in this, and that is that sometimes holding a grudge and watching the bottom line can be closely tied. Sending a message that anyone who messes around with you will have to pay a price can be effective in discouraging runs against you, which can enhance the bottom line. We all know that there are corporations who want us to be scared to move against them.
- Mr. Bonds

But what does some measly corporate grudge have to do with conspiracy theories? Well, a conspiracy theory is a way of trying to see the bigger picture, rather than being limited to the small portion that is handed to you. At its core, a shadowrun is all about providing plausible deniability for the client so that they can achieve the desired results without being implicated. We understand our basic role, but we also need to understand that there is considerable risk in not knowing who all the players are and how they’ll react to what we do. Especially if there are players involved that we have aggravated previously, or if our employers have developed a tendency to tie off loose ends to cover their tracks.

Once you start seeing the bigger picture and comprehend just how precarious your position is, then you can truly start taking precautions to safeguard yourself. I can hear the chorus of runners professing that they are off the grid, operating under the radar, and little more than wraiths. Hate to break it to you, but the fact of the matter is, that just isn’t the case. You may not have a SIN but the powers that be know who you are (they found you, they paid you—they were able to gather at least that much evidence of your existence). That reputation you’re so proud of and spent years developing in the shadows? It turns out that they pay attention to such things. And why wouldn’t they take notice? You are an asset to them, one that they need to have a handle on. They know who you are, where you live, and they might have someone keeping an eye on you right now. How is that possible? The next time you go into Club Penumbra, take a moment to scan the crowd. On any given night at least a third of the shadowrunner community is in attendance. Yeah, you heard me. That is how small our little band of brothers (and sisters) is in Seattle.

- Taking census of people who make their living hiding off the radar is notoriously difficult. That alone is enough to make me doubt your count.
- Baka Dabora



Our numbers are simply miniscule in the grand scheme of things. We are cogs in their machine. And we are people who occasionally get paid, which means for every one of us, there are ten people on the street thinking they can replace us, waiting for the minute we fall to take our place. The corps who use us, who treat us as part of their inventory, understand this. So this, in the end, is why you need to believe in conspiracy theories—because people are, right now, conspiring against you. Corporations are figuring out how to shunt you aside and replace you with someone cheaper, or to make you disappear in return for something you did. Guys on the street are talking to each other about ways to make you disappear so they can take your place. The plots are in the middle of being crafted, and if you don't realize that, then you'll be too slow, too late, when they're sprung on you.

Edit: I don't know how it is that Snopes was able to get a copy of my position paper before I had a chance to submit it to FastJack. Not pleased that this has taken place and rest assured that there will be some form of retribution.

SNOPES

Conspiracy theories and horror trids thrive because of one simple thing: the willingness of the audience to be scared by something that doesn't exist. Now, I'm not falling into Plan 9's trap. He wants me to say that there are no conspiracies, then he'll point out that ah-ha, yes there are, so don't listen to what Snopes is saying. I'm well aware of the many, often baroque conspiracies that have taken place in history. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot. The Watergate break-in. The Universal Brotherhood. I'll even posit that there are some conspiracies out there that I've never heard of, either because they were never successful at achieving anything of note, or because they were quite successful at keeping their machinations hidden.

Here's where the divide is, though. I'm unwilling to see the world as nothing but a web of conspiracies. I'm not going to start believing that we're all pawns in some group's master plan for world domination. I'm willing to believe that some plots are going on behind closed doors (as I mentioned, I'll be proving that later on), but I'm not going to listen at every closed door I see in an effort to disclose the secrets that door is hiding. I know that some doors, most doors are just doors.

The real problem of conspiracy theorists is that while horror trid fans are willing to go in, watch their show, then get on with their lives, the conspiracists are not content to be entertained for a brief period of time, instead sinking further and further into their delusions. Now, normally I wouldn't have any problem with the lunatic fringe. Live and let live and all that. Unfortunately, my chosen career is one where I find myself surrounded by individuals armed to the gills. Some of them are a wee bit twitchy as a result of their cyber implants, and they also happen to be card-carrying members of Nuts-R-Us. This becomes a real problem when the gillette that is supposed to be covering your back is more interested in talking about the latest alien abductions instead of doing his job. There is just something really unnerving about a street sam who is all gung ho about mixing it up with the sec boys but can be brought to tears if you tease him about alien anal probes and aircraft contrails.

Plan 9 is pretty good about cloaking his latest evidence-free conspiracy argument in the garb of logic, but let's take a look at

some of the weaknesses of his various defenses. I guess we'll start off with his argument about "bureaucracies" and how they are not entirely staffed with ass-covering bureaucrats. He's right that not everyone within a bureaucracy is going to be the typical bureaucrat. But there are enough of them in each and every bureaucracy or department to ensure that the "ambitious" and "ruthless" ones are held in check. It isn't that the "mindless drones" are cowed into submission by their bosses or coworkers. It's more of a case that it has been drilled into them to CYA (cover your ass) at all times. And thank God for it because without that simple little acronym, all of the evil ones would be running around unchecked. So yes, the ruthless ones are out there. But Plan 9 underestimates just how much effort it takes to overwhelm the inertia of most bureaucracies. Doing so for any sustained period of time is not something a small group of conspirators can usually pull off.

Next we come to the "decision making" defense and that a nice combination of data deletion and lies allows conspirators to go about their dark deeds at will. The trouble is, anyone who has even a small level of experience in erasing backgrounds understands just what a monumental task it is to pull off. We aren't just talking about electronic records, in triplicate (though it would be difficult enough if we were, since the records are usually stored pretty securely). There are physical records in off-site storage facilities to ensure that data simply don't go missing. Since the second Crash, this isn't just a policy. It's a mantra that has been tattooed on the inside of the bureaucrats' eyelids. The loss of personal records in Crash 2.0 was in some ways worse than the nuyen value of lost financial data, because reconstructing them meant going through decades of physical records (assuming physical records existed at all). Even with OCR scans of hard copies, there are still massive gaps in tens of millions of personal files and records. Regarding the financial system, the fear that the bureaucrats and corporate directors harbor in regards to another Matrix crash is large enough that they have quietly been backing the system up with actual cash and commodities such as precious metals and gemstones. Other systems are being backed up in various ways depending on the risk of losing the data. There are trails for all kinds of data, if one only takes the time to look.

- But there are also, as you point out, gaps, and where there are gaps, there are people who know how to exploit them. If you're not careful, your debunking will support my conclusions as much as I did.
- Plan 9

Now, with all this record-keeping and associated data entry, there's going to be a desire to create some back channels to get things done quicker and less securely. These back channels do, in fact, exist, and I'm willing to posit that a lot of activities get fast-tracked by this method. But this doesn't negate the fact that records are kept, notes are made, and the records that are created are protected.

One issue you have to deal with is that in governments, you have career bureaucrats who are going to be around after the current administration has been voted out. These individuals, even the ambitious and ruthless ones, are not fans of being called before subcommittees and forced into giving testimony. As a matter of fact, they positively detest it and for good reason. If

they have to testify, they are publicly on the record, and that sort of visibility makes you give away a lot of the benefits of being a faceless bureaucrat. Now, for a high-ranking bureaucrat, this might not be a problem. Let's say you're in such a position, you find yourself in hot water, and you get yourself sacked. That's a shame and all, but six months later you're likely to find yourself employed as either an adviser to a lobbyist firm, a think-tank thinker, or a government contractor. Whatever the case, you'll probably be fine. At the other end of the spectrum, though, you have your mid-level to low-level bureaucrat. If one of these guys gets burned, they will probably go to jail, be re-assigned as a janitorial engineer, or swallow the muzzle of a pistol. Keep in mind that these are the guys that are generally doing the real work, which means they're the ones who know what's going on. It takes a really big leap of faith to entertain the idea that these guys are going to put themselves on the line for bosses that in four years' time will probably be gone.

Now we'll move on to "checks and balances," which is a superficial argument when applied to vast conspiracies. If you noticed, Plan 9 was very selective in exactly whom he used as examples. Yes, Nicholas Leeson did in fact bring down Barings Bank and is an excellent example of systemic failure of an internal regulatory system. What you need to understand about Leeson, though, is that he wasn't trying to commit some grand conspiracy. There was a mistake made, and he was trying to cover his ass. Although I have heard allegations that there was in fact £25 million found sequestered away in other bank accounts that Leeson had access to. From everything that I have read about that particular case, it leads me to believe that it was conspiracy of one which, as we have seen over the course of time, is the very best sort of conspiracy.

- Not that I'm taking sides here, but I think Leeson's motives are immaterial. He might not have been *trying* to bring down the bank, but he *did*. Thus, the actions he took could have been replicated by someone else who was trying to bring an organization down. He provided a blueprint that a conspiracy could follow if they so chose.
- Fianchetto

Many of the other conspiracies Plan 9 mentioned have a singular trait in common—they were conspiracies of necessity. What I mean by that is that there wasn't a long-term plan in play. Ultimately, the people involved were acting for short-term benefit, hoping that they could turn things around. It's pretty much the same sort of mindset that you find with the person who's maxed out their credit cards and decides to go to an online casino and double down, hoping that they can win back what they owe. That is to say, they didn't set out to become jugglers, they just kept having to deal with various balls thrown their way.

I actually had to do a fair amount of digging regarding the 25 billion in cash that went missing from that warehouse in Krakow. Plan 9 is correct that there were no records for the disbursement of that cash, and on the surface it sounds really nefarious. But war is great for harboring chaos, and large governments are ripe for being stolen from. From what I've seen, this was not a massive, pre-planned act of theft, but rather

a number of people who went after targets of opportunity. In short, people saw cash, so they took it. Not that complicated, and certainly not in the league of the ornate conspiracies Plan 9 sometimes outlines.

Now let's talk about "marginalizing" the lunatic fringe. If I see a duck, I am pretty much going to call it a duck. Running around waving your hands wildly in the air screaming about alien anal probes is not the way to convince me that you are even remotely sane. We are not marginalizing anyone. They are doing it to themselves by acting and talking like they are. And it seems pretty sad to me that these people are getting all whiny about the fact that the rest of us observe their lunacy and then say, "Look at the lunatics." If you don't want to be seen as a nut job, then my advice would be not to act like one.

- It is a pretty neat trick, the whole marginalizing tactic. It works pretty well—label somebody a racist or fascist, and from that point on there's no reason to listen to that individual because they are obviously not worth listening to. That's certainly the goal of the opposition to Brackhaven.
- Sounder
- It's not enough to just put out the label, though. You need to get it to stick. Politicians have been calling each other names for centuries, but good operatives know that you need to present the right evidence along with the name to get people to believe it. That creates a fair amount of work for us—a line of work that only stands to increase with the various 2074 elections on the horizon.
- Dr. Spin

I think that one of the greatest roadblocks to any major conspiracy theory is that people the world over basically want to be left alone. They want to go to work, do their job, come home, have a beer, watch the trid and, if they're lucky, get some action in the bedroom. People really are not all that complicated, which is fortunate because it's the love of those simple pleasures that keeps those ruthless and ambitious bureaucrats in check. The good life does not involve putting yourself in a position where you will no longer be able to enjoy the simple pleasures. A lot of this drama is the result of people that really need some sort of hobby, preferably one that has some social interaction.

So Plan 9's debunking of arguments against conspiracy theories has in turn been debunked. Where does that leave us? As I said, any student of history has to admit that conspiracies do sometimes happen. But the amount of effort it takes to sustain one and to keep it hidden also argues against the vast, world-dominating conspiracies that people have been going on about for so long. Some conspiracies are out there and known to us—the Mafia, the Yakuza, and so forth. But the Templars, the Rosicrucians, the Freemasons, the Trilateral Commission, the New World Order, the Illuminati—none of them are in charge. None of them are sitting behind the scenes, pulling the strings of the world. Yes, there are people who are trying to take over the world—always have been. But if the great dragons haven't managed to take everything over yet, do we think these lesser beings could pull it off? So let's stop looking for one One True Power that controls the world, and let's start seeing it as it is—dozens of competing powers, all plotting in their own way (sometimes, yes, covertly) to increase



their share of whatever pie they're interested in, while dealing with entrenched bastions of power and paperwork that favor nothing so much as immobility.

How does that help you out while you're working the shadows? The main benefit I see is that it allows you to get a glimpse into the mindset of the people who believe in the larger, sillier theories that are out there. For a lot of them it is the driving force, something that actually consumes the greater part of their day. Perhaps it is not that far removed from a form of religion for these people. Within conspiracy circles, people put forward more and more absurd theories, and gain prestige for doing so. Knowing what motivates such people allows you to push those buttons, giving you the chance to manipulate them. Unfortunately, doing this requires that you actually spend some time reading these theories (I'd recommend finding sites that summarize them rather than tackling the primary sources—we all have limited amounts of time and sanity to spend on this sort of thing). Armed with the right information, you should be able to play on the basic fears and interests of some of these people to get the desired results.

So, how do you know when you're dealing with a grade-A believer? One of the first signs I noticed was the grammatical "they," "them," and "us" routine that peppers their speech. They see the world as divided into two camps, and that becomes clear pretty quick if you get them talking about anyone powerful. If you have a chance to hang out at some of the Matrix spots these guys and gals frequent, you'll pick up on it very quickly, as they tend to put extra emphasis on those three words. Also, they tend to over-emphasize the conspiratorial angle in when talking about minor gossip. If the conversation turns to Teiko Ikemoto, they won't talk about her music, but instead will theorize about who it was that was behind the character assassination that got her released from her Mitsuhamas contract (and yes, I realize I'm using an actual conspiracy as an example here—as I keep pointing out, I'm interested in facts, no matter where they fall). And finally, they have this ability to speak faster and faster as they get deeper into their subject, as if they have to get whatever it is inside of them out as quickly as possible. Once you identify them, feel free to yank their chains as much as you want, with my blessing.

FIANCHETTO

Hello, my name is [blank] and I believe in conspiracy theories. Well, not all conspiracy theories but some of them, sure. Does that make me a nut job? I would say no, but then again who actually would be willing to own that particular title? For me it isn't about believing everything that's floating around out there, but I have been in the business long enough to know that not everything is as it seems. Keeping your mind open to the possibilities that there are things going on far beyond your very limited perspective is not a bad thing. Just be sure to keep one foot grounded in reality. At the point where you believe that Eisenhower met with aliens and traded cow lips for alien technology, you have officially drifted into the fringe. In my humble opinion, of course.

Paranoia gets a bad rap and this is really the result of the paranoid fringe. Those of us who are mainstream paranoid tolerate the kooks with their tinfoil hats and their inexplicable fear of black helicopters. We are enlightened and understand that history is replete with examples of actual conspiracies, some

that have been successful and others not so much. Were the Knights Templar being paranoid in 1312? Publicly, it was the position that the order engaged in heretical activities. We know now the important fact that it was about money. How about the practitioners of Falun Gong in the People's Republic of China? Were they paranoid in 1999? The communist government passed legislation to outlaw heterodox religions and targeted Falun Gong practitioners, but others suggest that this persecution was actually politically motivated. Imagine that!

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the lunatic fringe are the deniers. While I personally find the lunatic fringe to be a much more lovable bunch of guys, the deniers are pretty much, arrogant, self-righteous pricks. The deniers will go to incredible lengths to tell you just how stupid you really are for not agreeing with them. As opposed to the lunatic fringe, who are more than happy to share not only their theories but whatever "evidence" they may have. They may be wrong, but at least they are cheerfully wrong, and I believe that is worth something.

The surprising thing about the deniers is that they spend a lot of time talking about being open-minded in their search for truth, but if you offer up any resistance to their way of thinking, they shoot you down. To them there are only those people who believe in conspiracy theories and those who do not; no shades of gray, only black and white.

From my viewpoint, the willingness of the deniers to embrace the concept that events happen within a vacuum puts them (and those around them) at a considerable disadvantage when it comes to understanding the world. Not all events are linked together, of course, but all events have cause and effect. Understand the cause, discern the effect, and you can put an event into its proper context. I believe that a lot of the resistance to conspiracy theories is ingrained in the part of the human psyche that is conditioned to believe that things can't go terribly wrong. This is known as the normalcy bias, and the danger of it is that it can prevent people from understanding the probability and likely results of a disaster. There are two great examples of this that leap to mind. One came when the U.S. dollar was removed as the world reserve currency. It was a disaster that had been predicted/hinted at, years in advance, yet the residents of the old U.S. of A were taken by surprise when it happened. Suddenly the greenback was worthless, as countries dumped their stockpiles of dollars and refused to buy U.S. Treasury bonds (thereby not funding U.S. debt). The U.S. couldn't help itself by printing more money, as they were suddenly required to buy their imports (including oil) with currency other than dollars. As the federal government attempted to inflate their debt away, the hyperinflation (also predicted extensively) laid waste to the anemic economy, and in my own opinion set the stage for the upcoming conflict with the Native Americans.

The second example of our lack of preparedness for a disaster is Crash 2.0. Unlike the first Crash, which had its direct cause in a virus, Crash 2.0 was a multi-lateral assault on many branches of our global infrastructure. The traffic from the Novatech IPO, Deus' shenanigans, and Winternight's EMPs combined to take down structures that we thought were unassailable. We came out of it with a reinvented, decentralized Matrix, and the familiar feeling that *this* time, we'd made things safe. We find it easy to forget that as soon as one storm of the century passes, the clock starts ticking on the next one. It may be a long-term clock, but it's

winding down, and there are people looking for ways to speed it up. Crash 2.0 only served as encouragement to them.

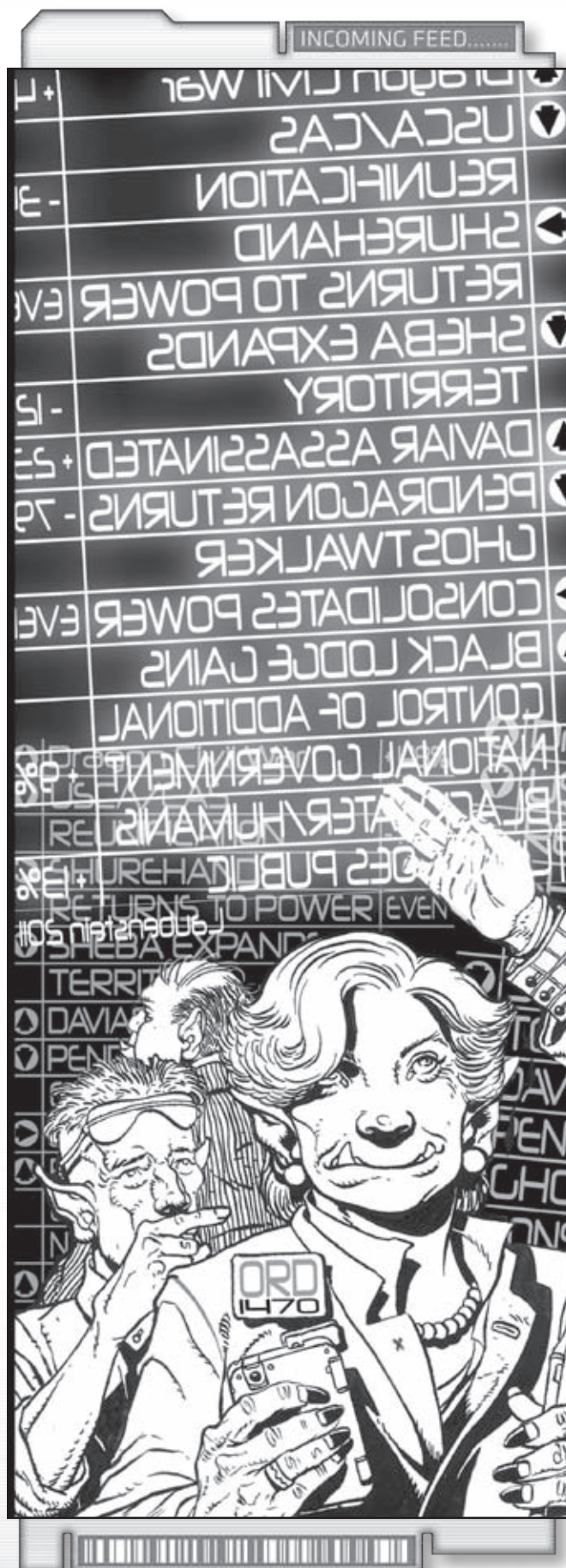
- Or discouragement. They did a lot of damage, yes, but did they achieve their goals? Pax's nihilistic vision didn't carry the day. The Matrix rebounded and is stronger than ever. And Deus—well, I suppose it still remains to be seen just what Deus gained or lost in the whole transaction.
- Glitch

The point is, we cannot let our tendency to want normalcy lure us into complacency. I believe that's one of the deniers' motivations—they want to shoot down conspiracy theories because there is often a significant amount of inconvenient effort involved in believing them. This can make them very vigilant in guarding against anything that even hints of a conspiracy—actual dissent or criticism diverging from the accepted party line is lumped in with fringe conspiracy theories and dismissed. This is fine if you're satisfied with being fed all of your information from the evening news trid cast, but if you actually have an interest in finding out the deeper truths of the world, you cannot afford to fall into this trap. Just because I'm willing to ask questions and not instantly accept what is reported through mainstream media outlets does not mean that I'm part of the lunatic fringe. Looking for verification and even contradictory points of view should actually be seen as an admirable trait. It comes down to figuring out what is sufficient inquiry and what qualifies as full-on paranoid delusional behavior.

I'd also like to take a moment to speak on behalf of being professional and realizing you can disagree with people on some matters, including issues important to you, and still have a use for that person in your life. I have been on two teams that had a mix of the kooks and the deniers. Downtime discussions sometimes became a bit heated, but when we were on the job, people stuck to their work and did what they were supposed to do. Skills are valuable, even if they come along with someone who has a few views that don't fit into the mainstream.

When FastJack offered me the chance to contribute to this section, I floundered around for a while until I was able to read his intro. That intro really sums up the importance of conspiracy theories for me—what matters is patterns of events and the context they can provide. As a runner I need to have the biggest picture possible, compiled with all the information I can find, to allow me to make the best decisions possible. Just as a stockbroker researches various aspects of corporations and the market, a runner has to understand the events that are taking place. If you limit yourself to only paying attention to what's going on with the local gangs, the Yakuza, the Mafia, you are missing out on about two-thirds of what is really happening in the world. This is situational awareness, understanding the meaning of the elements in play and how they may change and interact with you in the near future.

Granted, not every conspiracy theory is going to be relevant, and frankly the amount of background noise is pretty high. Sorting through all of the theories that are floating around out there for the handful of worthwhile gems is not a casual task. Think of it as mental weightlifting, focusing, honing your mind to zero in on the prize. For myself, I find that researching these



theories allows me to familiarize myself with the key players and their suspected goals. You can't play chess if you don't understand how each piece on the board is used. The same is pretty much true for running the shadows. Of course, the difficult part is that in the real world those pieces can alter their capabilities and goals. It is the most challenging aspect of running the shadows, the ability to deal with an incredibly dynamic situation that is changing second by second and where the stakes are nothing less than your life.

All of this should serve as considerable motivation to make sure that your mind is regularly engaged in the world around you. It doesn't matter whether you are a street sam or a mage; if you think that the sum total of your workout is limited to pumping weights or flexing your index finger, you are not long for this world. Relying on your hacker to feed you a breakdown of the current lay of the land is simply begging for a disaster. Every single member of the team should be fully versed in not only their specific area of expertise, but they should develop their situational awareness. This includes subjects that may be outside of your conventional comfort zone: corporate politics, current governmental policies, psychology, economics, history, and prediction markets.

- Prediction markets? What's next Ouija boards?
- Nephryne
- Not entirely certain which rock you've been living under for the last sixty years, but prediction markets have gained mainstream acceptance and their accuracy is exceedingly high. It's not so much a matter that you're going to be able to figure out which conspiracy theory is actually real through a prediction market, but you can use prediction markets to discern trends and to put events into context.
- Dr. Spin
- There was a reason why the United States resisted allowing monetized prediction markets to operate within it. Gambling is gambling. Betting based on public opinion is like betting against lousy sports teams—most of the time you'll cruise through without a problem, but those times when the underdog rises up and surprises you are going to hit you hard.
- Kay St. Irregular
- So when you invest in a stock market what do you think it is that you're doing? Hate to break it to you but your betting that your stock is going to go up in value. Unless you simply want to redistribute some of your wealth.
- Cosmo
- Making purchases on sound data and solid knowledge of the players involved is not the same as a game of chance.
- Mr. Bonds
- It is if you play poker the way I do.
- Kane

Prediction markets are important not only because they can give you insight into what experts believe is going to take place and specific events, but also what questions are being asked in the first place. Both are equally important—I find that a lot of context

can be gleaned from what questions are being asked and who is asking them. The questions that I'm talking about, of course, are not going to be asked on the public side of any of the major prediction markets. But all of them have closed market boards with restricted access, and that is where you need to look. This keeps the general public from panicking when they see the questions being asked. These questions span subjects such as the probability of individual world leaders being assassinated, market penetration for a particular product, comparative mercenary unit effectiveness, and odds of infrastructure failure (i.e., bridges collapsing, gas lines exploding, dams bursting) with projected body counts. These are not items that would be considered acceptable in your average conversation, let alone in a market where money is being traded on the outcomes of such things. Access to these markets is limited to acknowledged experts in the various fields, and to individuals who have bank accounts with at least eight zeros on the positive side. It would be fair to say that the security measures to access these markets are considerable but not beyond the realm of possibility for a hacker of exceptional skills. This is one of those places where, if you do make it in, it is far more to your benefit to quietly observe what is happening rather than attempt to mess around with what is happening. I mention this just because I know some of you are a little bit on the antisocial side of the spectrum and find enjoyment by throwing a wrench in the works.

Due to the exclusivity of these private prediction boards, they don't have the same level of accuracy as the public ones. There is an average accuracy of 73 percent for the private boards, compared to 89 percent for the public markets. Another obstacle is that it can be difficult to see the gross amount of nuyen that is moving on any specific topic on the private markets. While I can't prove this definitively, I am relatively certain that there are a fair percentage of diversionary topics that are posted on these markets. It costs one million nuyen to post a topic, and that topic is good for 365 days before it has to be renewed. In addition to the posting fee, each of these private markets takes two percent of the day's gross trades. While a million nuyen is a lot of money, many firms are willing to spend that much just to put an idea in the heads of the traders. After all, the traders are some of the richest and most powerful people in the world, and introducing concepts and ideas for them to think about is worth a fair sum.

- Those 89 and 73 percent figures sound high enough to provoke confidence, but they're scary. Being wrong one out of ten times leaves a lot of room for uncertainty; being wrong one out of four times is just plain dangerous. It's the time you bet a fortune on one of those wrong predictions that the danger makes itself clear.
- Baka Dabora
- I wonder if they rate shadowrunners?
- Picador
- Only those that are considered top shelf, but yes they do, and it is certainly the way to tell that you've arrived.
- Snopes

Predictive markets, especially the private ones, serve as a decent proving ground for a myriad of conspiracy theories that are about to be born. Somebody dreams up a plot. Before they

implement their plot they carefully take very limited elements of their plot and test them out in one of these private markets.

- You mean some corporate slot spends a million nuyen on this crap only to whine about an extra 10k in expenses with me? Yeah, next time Mr. Johnson and I have a talk, ain't no way I am going to settle for his table scraps.
- Stone
- Not every run gets this sort of lavish treatment, but the very high-end ops certainly do.
- Snopes

It may seem like an extravagance to spend that sort of money just to test out a theory. Considering though the far-reaching consequences of many conspiracies, it is actually a relatively inexpensive means to test the waters. When you look at the asset sheets of these corporations and the fact that they are worth hundreds of billions of nuyen, one million nuyen is often less than their catering budget for a month.

Now, with all this information on other people's mindsets and prediction markets, it may feel like I'm talking about a lot of abstract concepts here as opposed to more direct benefits that you gain from, say, going to the shooting range. There may be a tendency to believe that all I'm really talking about is the kind of stuff you learn during legwork. That is not the case, however. Legwork is traditionally all about figuring out what the target's routine, capabilities, and security measures are. Think of legwork as a very focused snapshot, whereas situational awareness is a much broader canvas. The secret to making situational awareness work for you is to acknowledge the presence of the various elements affecting you while remaining flexible enough to react to them without fixating on them. What I mean by that is, don't let yourself become distracted from the overall objective. As simple as that sounds, I've seen far too many accidents that happened because those involved lost their situational awareness.

So let us postulate that you have figured out that there is a conspiracy afoot. You know who the players are and you also know what role is envisioned for you, but what good does this do you? You get to ask yourself some hard questions and try to figure out the answers at that juncture. Can you guess the financial rewards that are at stake? Anything that is going to add three percent gross or more to the plus side of the balance sheet are huge stakes and should serve as a warning that serious powers may be involved (keep in mind that the largest megacorps only have a net profit margin of seven percent). Are the stakes big enough that they are going to try to tie up the loose ends at the end of the op? If I am committed to this run and the probability is high that they are going to double-cross me, how can I protect myself? Who do they want me to believe is behind this run (that is, who is Mr. Johnson trying to pin this on)? Answering these questions and others pertinent to your situation goes a long way to establishing your situational awareness.

It should be pretty obvious at this point that situational awareness is not something that you can learn from a book or a video. It is something that you have to develop over time. The downside of this is that during that learning period, individuals without a well-honed sense of situational awareness can fall prey to situations far beyond their skill set. Unlike a skillsoft that you can slot and suddenly be proficient at it, there is no chip for situational awareness. It encompasses more information and experience than can be quantified in a computational algorithm. This really goes to the heart of the problem. There are plenty of individuals within the runner community that have substantial skills, but they lack the experience to know when they've gotten themselves into a situation for which they simply are unprepared. We have to simply acknowledge that there are those instances when bad luck comes into play. The secret to succeeding is remaining flexible enough to deal with these unforeseen events without compromising your safety.

I have a friend who is a mercenary, and one of the stories that he told me from his time in the Desert Wars has always stuck with me. They had pulled an op and were in the process of making it back to their base when they came across an allied corporate squad that was under attack by a numerically superior force. The lieutenant in charge of this corp squad was attempting to use his combat manual chip to figure out which battle plan from the manual best fit his situation. Now, to hear my friend tell it, this lieutenant was top of his class, a crack shot, and an excellent soldier. He had all of the skills to be a top-notch soldier and, given time, a superb officer, but at that moment and that place he simply didn't have the experience/situational awareness necessary to deal with what they were facing. I have a feeling that the fact that my friend no longer works for that particular corp is a testament to how he dealt with the situation.

In the end, most of us ultimately have three goals in mind. First, we want to get out of whatever job we're doing alive. Second, we want to fulfill the mission we've been given. Third, we want to safeguard our reputation by upholding our end of the agreement. To accomplish these goals you need to develop your situational awareness, understand the existence of the normalcy bias and keep an open mind.

- Got it. Let's get to the juicy stuff! What conspiracies are out there? I want to hear theories, and I want to hear them now, the crazier the better.
- Ma'Fan
- Aren't there more important things you should be doing while you're rehabbing that leg?
- Mika





... SHADOWTOWN SHOWDOWN ...

"Dammit!" Pistons slid sideways, throwing the table over as a shield. Bullets thudded into the pock-marked Formica, sinking into the anti-ballistic material beneath the table's surface.

Hiding behind another table, Netcat grimaced. "Well, this is Shadowtown. We should have expected a warm welcome."

Pistons hacked into the Archipelago's maintenance system while unloading a clip full of stun rounds over the table's edge. The troll rocked back on his heels, soaking a lot of damage with his armor. The dwarf, though, went down instantly, blocking the restaurant's front door. A moment later, the troll's eyes rolled back and he toppled over onto the dwarf.

Which only left two humans, an elf, and three rigged drones facing Netcat and her. None of the opposition appeared to be mages, a minor miracle Pistons was grateful for as she sent the floor-cleaning bot into a water-n-shampoo-spraying frenzy.

"Godammit!" one of them yelled, his Welsh accent so thick Pistons barely understood the curse.

The bastard better be worth this grief, Pistons sent Netcat over their private link.

Believe it or not, came the reply, *Puck is a friend.*

That sentiment was hard to swallow, but Pistons didn't argue. She was one of the rare few Netcat trusted with details about her personal life. Apparently, Puck rated among those few also.

So Pistons unleashed her arsenal of attack programs and agents on the enemies' smartgun systems and PANs. She was a good shooter but a better hacker, and while the half-pint runners tried to get control of their personal networks back, Netcat took care of the gun-drones. The three exploded in spectacular fireworks after turning on each other.

One of the humans yelped. "Blimey, mates, I'm not gettin' paid enough for this."

"Shut up and take the technomancer!"

They were after Netcat. Pistons snarled. Playtime was over. The pistol's stun clip dropped to the floor and she shoved in one full of real bullets.

"Got it," Netcat cried out. Before Pistons could ask what "it" was, a prehistoric van charged through the restaurant's front windows with a victory roar composed of squealing tires and revving engines. The three remaining runners were knocked across the room, sliding to a half-conscious halt right in front of the overturned tables.

"Amateurs," Pistons sighed.

"Just tell me who sent you and you can go home."

Netcat smiled at the trussed up runners, her tone reasonable and calm. They were all so young, middle to late teens. Brits who'd grown up in the slums of West End Overtown—Shadowtown—and looked like they'd never been outside the district. A pang of sympathy hit her. Rookies deserved a chance to learn from their mistakes.

Pistons apparently disagreed. The hacker still had her pistols out. "Screw that. I can tap them quick and the comms will still be intact. We'll hack the data and go."

The elf started shaking. "No, wait. We'll talk."

"Edmund, you tosser, real runners don't sell out their employers." The dwarf kicked the elf's foot.

Pistons checked her gun's line of sight. "They do if they value their lives."

The elf blanched. "You gotta believe me, we was just extendin' an invitation. We weren't to harm you."

"Hell of an invite," Pistons grouched. "You walked in, weapons ready, safeties off."

"Someone sent you after me?" Netcat frowned. She and Pistons had just arrived in England. None of her friends, or her contacts, knew she would be here.

The elf boy shook his head, his long hair slapping the faces of his comrades. "No. Yes. Sorta. Mr. Johnson wants us collectin' technos, takin' 'em to the British Lighthouse Brigade. You ain't got no cyber, and DeeJ saw you talkin' to thin air like those wank technos, so he got the team together."

The dwarf growled, throwing the other boy a look filled with promises of pain and retribution. The elf fell silent.

"Continue." Pistons waved her pistol at the kids.

"Nothin' more to tell."

Netcat frowned. "Why does Mr. Johnson want technomancers?"

The elf shrugged. "He never said."

"Do you know Mr. Johnson's name?"

"We're professionals, ya Yank git," one of the humans spat. "We did our homework."

Pistons stalked over to the boy and put her face in his, using her gun to lift his chin. "And?"

The human boy swallowed, his face turning the same sallow color of the fifty-year-old wallpaper. "He's some big hotshot techo from the Americas. Calls himself Puck."

Netcat's extremities tingled. The smile fell from her face. The Resonance pounded against her skull, replacing, for one brief moment, her own heartbeat. Her vision tunneled as shock stopped her breath.

A message from Pistons knocked gently against her awareness. Netcat swallowed and nodded. She regarded the rookie runners with the cold detachment of a seasoned professional. She didn't trust her nice voice. "Where were you taking me?"







Shadowtown wore early morning like a weary child in bulky, oversized pajamas, waiting to shed the heavy encumbrance for something lighter and more comfortable. This area of London showed the strain of government neglect. Building-sized concrete anchors loomed over the skeletal remains of the once-prosperous neighborhood. Ribs of steel, which had once served as support for the protective inner city dome that no longer existed, shed flakes of iron blood on the smog-stricken streets. The hunched buildings seemed frozen in mid-collapse, as if they'd lost the energy or the will to even fall down.

AR flyers littered the streets, denouncing Prime Minister Darch and his government. A few scrawls of AR paint declared "Pendragon for Prime Minister." Embedded on, over, and around the political ranting for new Parliamentary elections, graffiti and advertisements covered every available surface.

Bobbies patrolled the major thoroughfares—Piccadilly Circus, Charing Cross Road, The Strand, and what remained of Kingsway—with military precision to instill the illusory sensation of security in the tourists. Avoiding the side streets and back alleys, the bobbies kept to their routine, clockwork men on a circular, unchanging path.

Entrances along Regent Street led to the posh West End Underground, London's premiere luxury shopping centre. Entrance signage covered half a block, flashing sales announcements and shop banners with appropriate theme music. Half-naked AR models stepped out of the signs, beckoning those who came within ten meters of the entrance.

Pistons snorted, glancing at her silent companion as they walked toward the Oxford Circus tube station. "Are you going to tell me what's wrong?"

"The rigger wasn't with them."

"I noticed. A bit more professional than the people she was working with."

"He."

Pistons blinked. "Excuse me?"

"Their rigger is a he, not a she. Male hobgoblin."

"How the hell do you know?"

Netcat rubbed the back of her neck. "Because Clockwork and I have had crossed swords before."

Pistons let loose a torrent of curses that could sandblast the scales off a dragon. There was no love lost between Clockwork and Netcat. A fellow member of JackPoint, the bastard had tried to sell Netcat to Mitsuhamu when she outed herself as a technomancer. She'd survived the encounter, thanks to the help of some mysterious friends, but she retained a certain level of paranoia where the hobgoblin rigger was concerned.

"Clockwork hates Puck," Netcat added. "And Puck ... I'm certain he's the one who helped me during the Incident, even though I never got him to admit it. Why the hell would Puck hire him?"

The mental jig-saw puzzle snapped into place. Pistons pulled her friend close. "That's why this is such a crusade for you."

She nodded. "Past misdeeds aside, Puck saved my life. I owe him."

"And if he's recruiting technomancers for a repeat of the whole Renraku archology fiasco? Or worse, to build a new Winternight?"

Netcat fingered the point of her ear. "Then we stop him."

Pistons nodded in satisfaction. "Damn straight, girl. Nobody gets away with that crap on my watch."



St. James Square, one of the few garden parks left in Shadowtown, rose up in spectacular glory, trees reaching for the sky. A carpet of lush greenery, grass as pretty and neat as you please, stretched out across the space of the square in one unbroken pattern. Though sidewalks led to the wrought-iron entry arches, not a single piece of concrete, nor a solitary bench, could be seen. Nothing artificial stood in St. James Square save the cyberware attached to those people who sat or frolicked in the block-sized garden.

Netcat inhaled. Roses, jasmine, and honeysuckle overpowered the persistent smog miasma. Tension drained from her muscles. Despite the greenery, the Resonance felt strong here.

"A druid's wet dream," Pistons commented.

"Open your PAN, Pistons. Listen. There's a node buried in this park. Sprites are all over the place." She could see them, wild little sparks of energy darting to and fro in playful glee. Netcat stepped onto the grass and called out to them.

Over a dozen sprites flocked to her.

"I need information. Have you seen this man?" Netcat offered a low-res image of Puck, the only one she had. The sprites touched it, examined it, and responded all at once, their words colliding with each other.

Maybe.

Yes.

The broken man?

I know him.

Play with us.

Netcat frowned, focusing her attention on a bright blue sprite with green sparkles. "What do you mean, 'the broken man'?"

The sprite bobbed. *He claims to be People, but doesn't like us. The Resonance hurts him.*

"I was told he meets other People here and takes them somewhere. When does he come?"

He doesn't come anymore. The black vans do. The People who go with the vans don't come back.

Dread uncoiled in her stomach. "Can you help me find those vans?"

The sprite bobbed. *Follow.*

Netcat dropped down on the grass. "Pistons, can you watch my back? I need to do a little scouting."

"Go. I'll keep you covered."

Submerging here, in the square, was a smooth, gentle experience. Netcat didn't go very deep; she didn't need to. The sprite handed her an account key and opened the square's node. The spoofed account altered her icon, flowing into the dark robes and halo of a system administrator. Netcat stepped into a virtualization of Parliament. The stone-lion entrance guardians sniffed at her, then stepped aside as the door opened. The sprite, invisible to node security, floated ahead.

This way.

She followed along, passing the icons of other users. Most of them were real life representations of people, with only a few wearing the shapes of armored knights, dragons, lions, and warhorses.

"When serving, secrecy is key," an elven lady explained to a group. "Fake commlinks will be given to all ..."

Netcat wanted to eavesdrop, but the icons swirled into a mist that shifted away. She grimaced and continued after the sprite. It led her to large oak doors labeled "House of Lords Library."

They keep the data here, the sprite said.

A touch from her hand opened the library doors. Shelves of data stretched everywhere she looked. In the center, sat an old-fashioned card catalog branded with the ten-pointed star of NeoNET.



Soytea, Pistons decided, wins the award for worst invention ever. Not only did it not have enough caffeine, only half that of soycaf or real coffee, but it left the aftertaste of diluted paint thinner without the kick. She tossed the vendcup into a nearby rubbish bin as she and Netcat made their way to Soho.

"NeoNET trains them," Netcat was saying, as if she hadn't noticed Pistons' distraction, "and gets them jobs as Parliament staff."

"You are not telling me that a mega is doing this out of the goodness of their own heart."

"No. Definitely not. The technomancers sign a contract, allowing the Erika subsidiary to run experiments during their year-long training. Stop grimacing, Pistons. As far as I can tell, the experiments are less invasive than the bizarre surgeries Mitsuhamma did in Hong Kong a few years back. For one thing, it's consensual. I found one contract that actually listed out every single experiment Erika wanted to do."

Pistons shook her head. "I still don't trust it. Besides, I thought technomancers were Cele dyr's pet project, and he's not in charge of Erika."

Netcat shrugged. "I agree Erika's up to something, but it appears politically motivated. They're funding some of Darch's opposition."

Matching strides, the women walked through the crumbling Soho streets, avoiding the shattered sidewalks with potholes larger than dogs and puddles of unidentifiable goo. This section of Shadowtown, off the shoppers' beaten path, whispered of despair buried by the sharp-edged knife of fear. As they approached the closed and beaten-down movie theatre, Pistons frowned.

"Too many questions, not enough answers."

Netcat nodded, but changed the subject. "There are about thirty technomancers in that theatre. I hear the nodes of several vans out front. Megacorp. Heavy IC on those vehicles."

"Back entrance?"

"Sounds like a plan."



Netcat hacked the lock on the emergency exit, allowing her and Pistons to slide into a side hall. The dilapidated building had been half-heartedly restored a few years back. Paint splotches and peeling wallpaper on several walls attested to attempts to renovate. Cigar smoke lingered in the air, along with a rancid butter smell that always seemed to go hand-in-hand with the ancient non-trid places.

Security was a joke. The node had been taken offline long ago, the cameras and other electronics ripped from their mounts. Some enterprising individuals even ripped the walls open, no doubt in search of copper wires or other resalable commodities. This theatre was no superplex; it contained only three auditoriums, one lobby, and one shredded section of former concession stand.

Letting the Resonance guide her, Netcat moved along the hall to the stage-side exit for auditorium number two. She could hear other signals, private text discussions flying through the air. She picked up several PANs, non-biological nodes in the room. Perhaps a few hackers pretending to be technomancers in order to get jobs?

Pistons pulled out her sidearm, pointed safely away from Netcat, and nodded. Netcat cracked the door, and peered through.

The audience leaned on chair stubs, the seats having been torn out long ago, and listened to an electric figure standing on the stage's apron. The man glittered in a bright pink power suit, his silver hair gelled into spikes sharp enough to cut.

Puck.

Netcat sucked in a deep breath. She hadn't wanted to believe it, but there he was, smiling and shilling like he enjoyed it. The Resonance surged in his wake as he stalked the stage, waves of information breaking against him like tide on a rock.

Since the day he disappeared, he'd never answered a single one of her emails. She'd thought he was in trouble.

"... ighthouse Brigade is committed to protecting and improving the lot of technomancers in the UK and all over the world," Puck proclaimed in a thick Irish rumble, his gait faltering as a sprite zoomed



up to the stage and bounced around him. Puck's face contorted, a brief spasm of pain that disappeared as he found his footing again. "This is why you want to take advantage of this special offer, now. My associates are in the lobby with the contracts."

Puck gave a short bow to his audience and walked stage left, toward Netcat and Pistons, as scattered applause filled the auditorium. The Resonance hummed with an uptick in Matrix activity, but all Netcat could see was the pain written across her friend's face. Puck had once been an otaku, but his hacking skills were so beyond her own, that Netcat had been convinced he was a technomancer-in-hiding. Apparently, she'd been wrong. Had fading done this to him?

She reached out to him across the Matrix, stopping when a black-suited elf walked up to the stage. Behind them, the audience filed out, heading to the lobby.

"Well done, Callum," the elf said. "How're you holding up?"

Pistons poked Netcat, sending a message on their private comm channel. *I thought Puck was British.*

"I'm ... okay, George," Puck replied. "Honest."

He is.

Then why does he have an Irish accent?

Netcat started, then stared at Callum, opening her senses. There, below elven ears—Puck was human, not an elf—she spotted the tell-tale signs of cyberware surgery. His node was fractured, half-biological and half-mechanical. A fake.

She snarled in rage, launching herself into the room as she pulled out a knife. "Bastard! How dare you impersonate him!"

Callum screamed. George reached inside his jacket. A bullet slammed into George's skull, from the side, and the elf went down. More bullets sprayed into the room, not from behind Netcat but from the back of the auditorium. It wasn't Pistons, and whoever it was wasn't aiming at Callum or her. This was cover fire.

Netcat slid into Callum, wrapping her arms around him and dragging him behind the proscenium arch. It was a small, tight space, but it got them both out of the immediate hail of bullets.

Netcat put her knife against his throat. "What have you done with the real Puck?"

"It wasn't my idea!" Callum protested, pale and sweating. "They promised they could turn me into a technomancer. All I had to do was a little acting, use his name to bring in more recruits."

"Clockwork, you bastard," Pistons yelled. Netcat heard a thud, then silence.

No more bullets. Netcat released Callum, spinning around, but the drone caught her by surprise. Electric rounds thudded into her, dragging her deep into darkness.

When Netcat and Pistons woke, Callum, George's body, and all the technomancers were gone. Why Clockwork hadn't tried to take Netcat again, neither of them knew. They both agreed, though, that getting out of Shadowtown was their first order of business. Then they'd discuss what the hell Clockwork had to do with Erika, what Erika had to do with the British Lighthouse Brigade, and whether or not NeoNET had sanctioned any of this.

The women found a posh, and secure, hostel in the West End Underground. While Pistons showered, Netcat checked her messages. An odd header caught her attention as she deleted spam. She scanned the message for surprises, then opened it. As she read, cold leeches into her fingers and the blood drained from her face.

"Pistons," she called. "You need to see this."

"See what, girl?"

"I've received mail from someone called Brett Tanaka."

"Never heard of him."

"Remember the Jackpoint discussion about Mitsuhama's Rose Garden?"

The shower shut off with a click. When Pistons replied, her voice was tight. "I'll be right there."

The favor still had to be repaid.



... THE POWERS THAT BE ...

July 23, 2073. 0825 hours.

A handful of shamans gathered around an old 2060s trid sitting in the communal room for the Mount Shasta lodge to view the live broadcast of a speech that their patron and protector, Hestaby, was giving to the United Nations in Geneva. For the past twenty-five minutes, the demure, auburn-haired woman stood undaunted behind the dais bearing the UN emblem, giving a grave speech.

"... It is in everyone's best interests to maintain the momentum of building relationships between our kinds, and establishing trust amongst us. Sirrurg threatens that stability, and threatens our mutual futures. Let us take action now before it becomes too late."

"That speech of the Lady—it changes everything," whispered one of the Mount Shasta Lodge's talismongers, a middle-aged female shaman by the name of Rhiamon. "So many of her kind are going to be outraged by it. I hope no ill comes to the Lady because of her actions."

"We are living in a new era now," agreed a male shaman known as Calm Waters.

"As she said, she anticipates some backlash. But because of what is at stake for all of us, both metahuman and dragon alike, she still went forward with this speech. That's courage right there—courage you don't often see in today's world. I find that very admirable."

An elderly and well-respected member of the lodge, an old tribal shaman by the name of Wings-of-Fire, spoke up. His speech was slow, its rhythms almost hypnotic. "For a month, I've been having dreams sent to me by Eagle. These dreams have been filled with bad omens. Up to now, I have had no context for those omens. But based on Lady Hestaby's speech, I now know what Eagle has been trying to warn me about. Times are indeed changing; they are changing for the worse. Conflicts will rage, blood will be shed, anger and hatred will burn. These will be times of sorrow."

"Let's not become panicked, my fellow lodge members," said the leader of the Mount Shasta shamans, Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm.

"Our well-known association with Lady Hestaby will make us a high-profile target for the Lady's enemies. We need to start taking practical precautions now to protect ourselves. First, I suggest we lock down the public areas of our lodge; no more public access for the foreseeable future. Second, we should pass the word to the rest of the lodge. We need to increase the number of watcher spirits and patrolling spirits. We will need to have someone let the gypsies know to keep a close eye out for intruders. We may also want to invest ... hold on, I've got an incoming call." Tapping an AR button on his commlink display, the lodge leader answered a call from Lodge Security.

"Elliot, this is Yoska. I've discovered one of our family members has been beaten and rendered unconscious. It looks like the lodge property has been breached by an intruder. I have put the rest of the gypsies on heightened alert, and they are currently sweeping the area for any intruders now."

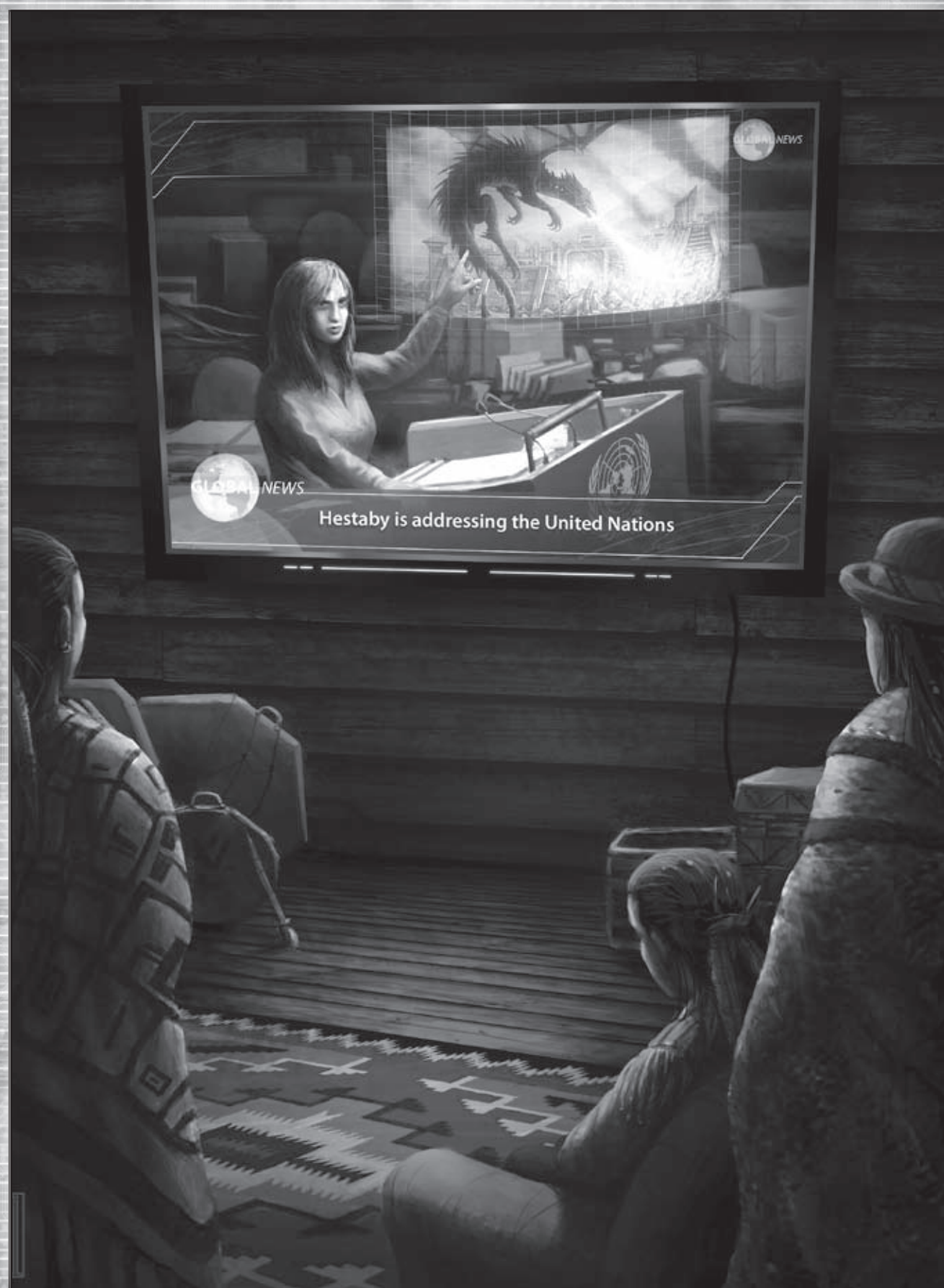
"Dammit. Where are you? Who was hurt? And how badly?"

"It was Nicu. He is spitting up blood. His biomonitor suggests internal injuries. We're currently two hundred meters to the south-west of the main house."

"I'll be right there, Yoska. Put the rest of the lodge on lockdown. Have our security shamans call up additional spirits, and have a few members of your family keep an eye on the main house. I want that intruder found now and detained."

Turning to the assembled shamans, Eyes-of-Wyrm spoke in a calm voice. "Everyone, please return to your rooms. Wait for me to give you an all-clear signal." Elliot watched as his shamans broke up and went to their rooms. He made sure his charges were safe before walking out the front door and locking it. He took only a few more steps before a loud rifle shot was heard. Eyes-of-Wyrm fell where he stood, landing in a pool of his own blood. His abruptly lifeless eyes stared out at the redwood forest that protected and sheltered his lodge.

Conflict will rage, blood will be shed ...



Posted by: Snopes

For nearly fifteen years, I have been diligently pursuing the truth behind conspiracy theories around the globe, seeking out the individuals and the groups that are behind these rumors, and gathering as much information as I can about them and their motivations. I know I sometimes seem like a skeptic or a debunker—and those elements are a part of me—but I don't believe that all conspiracy theories should be summarily dismissed. Even when they appear to be so outlandish that they seem to lack any credibility on their face value, or even when there appears to be a gross lack of supporting evidence for these “non-traditional” theories, I can't always say that a particular theory is definitively not true. I can only fall back on the alternative Scottish juries used to have—“not proven.”

It's not easy work. Many of these conspiracy theories are complicated and require a dedicated mind to get past the bullshit and do the research necessary to properly interpret them and put them into context. You also have to be able to make the necessary connections between pieces of truth gathered from disparate places so that you can construct the larger picture from mere scraps of information and hearsay. Finding the truth buried in conspiracy theories can be hard work, especially when you have groups working against you to make sure that you cannot succeed in seeing their true agenda. In many ways, researching conspiracy theories is comparable to putting together a jigsaw puzzle in an open, public place, where others are constantly walking by, trying to hide or steal your pieces, or planting false pieces that look like they may fit in the puzzle but really don't. Their goal is to keep the search for truth frustrating enough that you eventually give up.

If people are working to get you to ignore something, though, that's often a sign that you really need to be paying attention. There are ideas that may threaten your otherwise comfortable lifestyles, challenge your preconceptions of the reality around you, and make you reluctant to engage them. Many people in mainstream culture want to promote this ignorant bliss, insisting that all of these conspiracy theories out there are the work of deluded chipheads and raving madmen, instead of potential, cautionary warnings for the rest of society.

- All right, what's going on? Did Plan 9 hijack Snopes' account or something?
- Pistons
- No, it's really me. Don't get me wrong—I haven't abandoned skepticism. There are plenty of conspiracy theories out there that are nonsense, complete wastes of time, and I'll lower the hammer on them when they deserve it. But if we pretend there aren't people out there plotting things behind closed doors, then we really do not understand the world we live in.
- Snopes

My work has put me in contact with enough of these theories that I know about the monsters that lurk outside of normal society. I know about the real threats that are beginning to take shape. I wasn't around to warn people about the bombing of the Sears Tower that turned Chicago neighborhoods into shattergraves. I wasn't significant enough at the time to warn people about the Universal Brotherhood. The warnings that I tried to give about

Winternight prior to the second Matrix crash almost went unheeded. But I am here now, and I intend to make sure that I am heard by as many people as possible to help prevent the next Chicago and to help anyone who is willing to listen to identify and survive the next calamity that may be coming.

This piece represents many years of chasing down leads, making contacts, and pursuing stories that no mainstream news net would dare touch, in fear of being labeled a “fringe tabloid,” if not worse. Given what is happening with these conspiratorial groups today, I believe that I could no longer wait to reveal the findings of my research. So, here it is. The culmination of all my hard work over the last fifteen years. I hope that revealing all this to you now will enable us to protect our future from these fringe groups, to deny them the power to shape events the way that Winternight tried to do in 2064, that Alamos 20,000 and the bug spirits succeeded in doing to Chicago, and that the great dragons threaten to do today.

A GREAT DRAGON CIVIL WAR?

I must preface this section by saying that discussing every potential conspiracy theory out there involving the great dragons would be unfeasible and would require tremendous amounts of time and commlink memory. Great dragons are walking conspiracy theories in and of themselves, and I am not so full of myself to believe that I am capable of understanding them, or that I am fully aware of the subtle maneuvers and posturing that they engage in on a daily basis for the sake of their draconic politics (though I intend to unlock all their secrets one day). For the sake of simplifying matters, I will limit the scope of this article to what is happening with the great dragons in the current state of global affairs: the dramatic escalation of tensions between great dragons and metahumans, and the growing possibility of a great dragon civil war. Yes, you read that right.

- A great dragon civil war? Are you fragging with us, Snopes? Why would the wyrms risk losing everything they have accomplished over several millennia to confront each other directly in a civil war? There's a reason they have armies of minions who can do the fighting for them. I honestly think the only thing we have to worry about from the wyrms is a shadow war, and the large sums of nuyen that they may start throwing at us. I just think you're getting us worked up over nothing on this one.
- Glitch
- Any civil war between the dragons would likely stay a shadow war, which doesn't mean it won't be destructive and world-altering. It also means we really need to pay attention to this, because the work coming into the shadows will start as a trickle and grow to a torrent.

Anyway, what I'm experiencing with my sources seems to back up Snopes' basic premise. Lately, my sources inside the dragons' inner circles have all been drying up, which not only seems out of the ordinary, but also seems to coincide with growing tensions. On top of that, some of the voices of the great dragons are being kept at a distance on this issue, and they are being kept in the dark about certain aspects of the great dragons'



most recent activities. It's like some of the great dragons don't believe that their own translators can be trusted. There seems to have been a significant change in the status quo with the great dragons, and it is something that we need to monitor very closely.

- Frosty

In at least one regard, great dragons are similar to metahumanity: There are an infinite number of things that motivate and anger them. One of the main causes for the current tensions between great dragons and metahumans can be traced back to 2064, when Aztlan executed the feathered serpent named Dzitbalchén. Dzitbalchén was accused of being involved in bombing the peace talks between the Azzies and the Yucatan rebels, a bombing that took the life of Aztechnology CEO Juan Atzcapotzalco. It would later be revealed that many of the great dragons deeply resented that execution; they were outraged by the fact that metahumans would dare to execute one of their kind. They weren't made any happier by the fact that Aztlan chose to publicly broadcast the execution to the world. To make matters even worse, Aztlan and Aztechnology later had Dzitbalchén's remains autopsied, and they had a trid recording of the autopsy posted to the Matrix. Millions of copies of the autopsy were distributed across the world. Because of all these factors, many of the people that I personally know who spend their time investigating the affairs of dragons are convinced that a time of reckoning is coming. There has been a balance of power between the great dragons for many years that, aside from minor shifts here and there, have kept things between them stable. That stability is now threatened.

Another cause for the current tensions with the great dragons lies with SIRRURG. SIRRURG has always been a very volatile dragon who has shown very little concern for the welfare of metahumans. When Hualpa was working to assemble Amazonia in 2034, SIRRURG was all too happy to aid his fellow great dragon. During those military campaigns, SIRRURG razed dozens of Brazilian military positions, including spots inside highly populated villages and neighborhoods. Thousands of Brazilians, many of whom were civilians and not involved in the fighting, lost their lives as collateral damage. SIRRURG would later be accused of other terrorist attacks, including the infamous destruction of EuroAir Flight 329, where he is alleged to have attacked one person on a flight filled by hundreds. The great dragon left no survivors. Due to those acts, SIRRURG gained the sobriquet of "the Destroyer." Although SIRRURG went through a period of relative inactivity and calm, he returned to his old ways with a vengeance when the war between Aztlan and Amazonia broke out.

- Here's a question: Dunkelzahn, in his will, identifies SIRRURG as "The Destroyer." If Dunkelzahn was so metahuman-friendly, why didn't he put a stop to SIRRURG's actions? SIRRURG was clearly hurting metahumanity, and Dunkelzahn prided himself on his affection for metahumans. To me, it doesn't make any sense.
- Plan 9
- He was a politician, first and foremost. And no matter who they are, politicians are always kicking a major problem down the road for others in the future to solve.
- Cosmo

SIRRURG attacked the Aztlan city of Cali on January 18, 2073, and laid waste to an entire Aztlan military base. Five thousand Aztlan soldiers were killed in a matter of hours during that hopeless battle, including those who were trying to surrender. In the final moments of his slaughter in Cali, SIRRURG flew over the business district, where he launched one last magical attack against the city. Anyone caught in the radius of the spell died from whatever genetic or physical ailments they were predisposed to. This attack killed close to ten thousand more people, all civilians, including infants and children. SIRRURG later attacked Managua, killing hundreds more Aztlan civilians, mostly laborers and farmers. All those civilian deaths, especially the infants and children, were played up by Aztlan and by the international media, causing anti-dragon sentiment around the world to soar. Policlubbs like Humanis were happy to portray these incidents not as attacks against Aztlan, but as attacks against humanity. Ironically, metahuman rights groups, such as Sons of Sauron and ORC, have also been outraged by the wholesale slaughter of the members of their respective races in SIRRURG's assaults and have ratcheted up their own anti-dragon rhetoric. The more these casualties start to rise, the louder these cries become.

- Humanis and the Sons of Sauron actually sharing similar viewpoints on something? What is this world coming to?
- Baka Dabora

You may be saying to yourself, "I can see why great dragons and metahumans are at each others' throats, but what is it that's dividing the dragons against each other?" This once unfathomable split seems to have been started by Hestaby when she broke with her kind's most deeply held traditions about not revealing the feuds she has with her fellow great dragons to metahuman society. In their eyes, great dragon affairs and relations with each other are none of our business. But on July 23, 2073, Hestaby violated those cultural norms and voiced her strongly held disagreements with SIRRURG before the United Nations General Assembly. Not only did she speak out publicly against another great dragon for all the world to see, but Hestaby was also seen by her fellow great dragons as condemning one of their own and supporting the United Nations' efforts to bring war crimes charges against SIRRURG (which they finally did, in a historic vote that took place on August 10, 2073, in Geneva—SIRRURG is now officially an indicted war criminal wanted by the UN). Many conspiracy theorists I know feel that the great dragons, especially the more volatile and the more anti-metahuman among them, have been enraged by Hestaby's speech. To them, another one of their kind has been sentenced to death, no matter what Hestaby may have said or tried to do in her speech to try and save SIRRURG. And one of them may have already taken action in a way that will increase the tension between the dragons: the assassination of Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm, the head of Hestaby's Mount Shasta Lodge.

- UN resolutions are rarely worth the electronic paper that they are printed on. The UN long has been, and continues to be, fairly spineless. Even if that were not the case, they are beholden to the Corporate Court. With the Court pulling their strings, and with Saeder-Krupp being as influential as it is, I don't see the UN putting a whole lot of effort in pursuing SIRRURG. It's nothing but

lip service to the metahuman citizens of these countries, and I think everyone knows it.

- Kay St. Irregular
- It's true that the United Nations won't be sending any type of military or mercenary forces to capture SIRRURG, but the order essentially gives Aztlan the green light to do whatever it wants to SIRRURG. I would not be surprised if Aztlan doesn't start recruiting large numbers of mercenaries to bolster their military's efforts to bring down SIRRURG. I am afraid, however, if they succeed in killing SIRRURG, that it will kill any efforts Hestaby is trying to do to maintain peaceful relations between the dragons and metahumanity.
- Frosty

Eyes-of-Wyrm was assassinated by a sniper shortly after Hestaby concluded her speech (shortly as in precisely one minute later). An immediate search of the area turned up the German-made sniper rifle used in the assassination. The Matrix chatter over this assassination and the meaning of the rifle that was deliberately left behind has exploded into a feeding frenzy in many datahavens. Was this a very blunt message sent to Hestaby from Lofwyr telling her to shut the fuck up? Would Lofwyr be so bold as to assassinate such a close ally of Hestaby's, realizing that there would be fallout for him? Or was someone else setting Lofwyr up, to stir the tensions between the great dragons? At this juncture, from all the research I have done on this assassination, I don't have any solid answers for these questions. If I had to put my money somewhere, I'd say Lofwyr had

Urgent Message.....

IN MEMORY OF ELLIOT EYES-OF-WYRM

Posted by: Sunshine

For the past eighteen years, Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm was the head of the Shasta Shamans, the magical lodge that he founded in 2055. Members of the Shasta Shamans remember Eyes-of-Wyrm as a gentle soul who cared deeply for his patron, Hestaby, and who sought to serve her faithfully. Eyes-of-Wyrm was also devoted to environmental causes. He guided the Shasta Shamans to work with the Astral Preservation Society. He wrote several articles for the American Association for the Advancement of Thaumaturgy from a shaman's perspective, helping to debunk several stereotypes of rural shamans and garner acceptance of shamans into modern society. In his later years, Eyes-of-Wyrm worked closely with Tamara Nimbus of the United Talismongers Association to lobby governments to establish "magical and natural preserves."

Not very much is known about Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm's life before the Shasta Shamans. He had no SIN, nor were there any records of his formal education and training. Elliot-Eyes-of-Wyrm was believed to have been seventy-four years old. He will be buried at an undisclosed location on Mount Shasta that was selected and approved by Hestaby herself.

nothing to do with Eyes-of-Wyrm's death. It's too clumsy, too direct for him. I also don't think the rifle was intended as a frame-up of him. Yes, Saeder-Krupp and Germany have significant overlap, but acting as if any German product is tied to S-K activities is the kind of stretch that gives conspiracy theorists a bad name. I believe the gun was definitely left as a message, but I think so far no one has interpreted the message correctly.

- So how about sharing the correct interpretation?
- Sunshine
- In time. I don't have all the pieces together yet.
- Snopes

Lofwyr, for his part, has chosen to remain silent on the assassination, adding even more fuel to these conspiracy theories. The whole truth behind this assassination will probably not come out until the actual assassin is captured. So far the assassin has proved elusive and is still at large.

No matter who may have ultimately been responsible for the assassination of Eyes-of-Wyrm, there already have been ramifications from this murder. A mere week after the assassination of the head of the Shasta Shamans, six of Saeder-Krupp's largest assets in the Middle East were targeted and were destroyed. Explosions occurred in factories and offices belonging to Saeder-Krupp subsidiaries, including Heavy Metal, Fatima Petrochemicals, Iraq Oil, Maser Industrial Electronics, and Krupp Munitions. In the final attack against Saeder-Krupp in these series of assaults, Hestaby herself made an appearance in Dubai, in a gesture that was obviously meant to make a statement of her own, perhaps to Lofwyr directly to let him know in no uncertain terms that she is quite capable of fighting her own battles, and perhaps as a reminder to us all that she is still a very dangerous force to be reckoned with. Hestaby was seen and recorded flying over Dubai, attacking the S-K Middle East division headquarters. The attack lasted close to an hour. In that time, the forty-seven-story arcology was reduced to a pile of twisted and melted durasteel, shattered armored glass, and a fifteen-meter-deep crater. To emphasize the metahumanism that lies at the core of Hestaby's philosophy, in each of the attacks on Saeder-Krupp, advanced warning was given to allow the facilities to be evacuated. Due to the recent assassination of Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm, the threats against the Saeder-Krupp properties were taken seriously, and the properties were evacuated just prior to the attacks going off. As such, there were only a handful of casualties in the six attacks made by Hestaby and her forces.

- If you ask me, this is the start of a classic long con. Like Snopes, I don't think the rifle was really a message from Lofwyr. But the fact that many people took it as such gave Hestaby and Lofwyr an opening. Hestaby's warnings were heeded because Lofwyr made sure they would be, because it was in his interests to have the attacks go off as they did. Hestaby and Lofwyr are building the appearance of hostility between them. I'm interested to see what kind of endgame they're moving to so I can understand why they want to appear to be fighting.

I should add that the fact that they are subtle, long-term thinkers means that all of my assumptions could be quite wrong.

- Plan 9

THE POWERS THAT BE

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND PRIME SUSPECTS**Posted by: DangerSensei**

I have obtained the final report on Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm's assassination. The lodge not only utilized their own shamans to conduct the magical investigation, but also hired the top forensic investigators from Lone Star to consult on the case. Here is the final information that the lodge and Lone Star have on the assassination (note that it's rather skimpy—I imagine there is information that the Star has that didn't make it into any official documents):

- The sniper rifle is confirmed to be an HK PSG Enforcer. No prints or DNA were recovered from the rifle. There were also no serial numbers or RFID tags on the sniper rifle itself. Either the rifle's components, complete with original serial numbers, was swapped out for "clean" parts, or the rifle was manufactured without the serial numbers. The rifle were found nine hundred meters east of the Mount Shasta Lodge.
- One of the lodge's resident Northern Crescent gypsies was found unconscious, gagged and bound to a redwood tree, when a sweep of the property was conducted after the assassination. His commlink had been stolen. The gypsy had been dosed with laés. His commlink had been used by the assassin to call Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm out of the lodge to the spot where he was gunned down. The shamans who were around Eyes-of-Wyrm at the time heard the conversation between Eyes-of-Wyrm and the other party, and testified that it sounded exactly like the gypsy (Yoska) who had been subdued. The assassin or an accomplice used mundane or magical means to disguise his or her voice to sound like the subdued gypsy. The gypsy was found three hundred and fifty meters west of the Mount Shasta Lodge. The gypsy named Nicu was not harmed and was not involved in the ruse.
- Yoska's commlink was eventually recovered three kilometers away from the Mount Shasta Lodge. It was clean of any fingerprints or DNA traces from the assassin. The commlink appeared to have been hacked with certain files accessed, suggesting the assassin has at least a modicum of computer skills.
- Yoska's involvement in the assassination has been ruled out. It is believed that the assassin used magical means to examine the gypsy's mind and to obtain the current passcodes and security protocols that allowed him to get so close to the lodge. No lingering astral signature from the spell was found.
- Almost immediately following the assassination, the area was flooded with spirits hunting for the assassin. Several spirits reported an encounter with an individual that had Yoska's astral signature. Because they were familiar with the gypsy in question, the spirits did not pay the individual any attention. It is likely the assassin has the ability to use the flexible signature metamagic, suggesting the assassin is an initiate.

- A stolen Indian Pathfinder racing bike was found ditched approximately six kilometers away from the Mount Shasta Lodge. The racing bike had been modified with signature masking and off-road suspension. The bike lacked any usable forensic evidence. It appears the assassin then boarded a LAV. There is no evidence to indicate the direction or the destination of the LAV. Based on the burn patterns and indentations in the ground from the takeoff, it is believed the LAV was a MiG-67 t-bird.

As a result of this investigation, Lone Star has narrowed the field down to three primary suspects, as follows:

- Ilari "Scopes" Gurevich, thirty-six years old, troll. Former member of the Russian Spetsnaz. Current member of the Chimera freelance assassin group, currently operating in the Pacific Northwest. Ranked among the top five snipers in the world. Has become an expert in magical countermeasures. Interpol has confirmed that Gurevich is Awakened, and he is believed to be a high-level initiate. Is believed to have been responsible for sixty-five hits around the world, though lack of evidence has prevented Gurevich from being charged in connection to any of them. Was believed to be in North America around the time of the assassination of Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm. The use of a MiG-67 t-bird lends credibility to the belief that Gurevich was the assassin. Others would argue that the use of the MiG-67 is too sloppy for such a professional, and that the t-bird is actually a misdirection.
- Felicitas "Frost" Nacht, thirty-four years old, dwarf. Freelance assassin from the Allied German States. Worked for twelve years as a mercenary with MET2000. During those twelve years, Nacht received training as a sniper, combat mage, and as a combat hacker. Confiscated records from MET2000 confirm Nacht is at least a sixth-level initiate. Nacht left MET2000 in 2070 to go solo as a freelance assassin. Interpol believes Nacht has been responsible for approximately thirty-six hits spread across eight nations, including the UCAS. Allegedly, Nacht was seen in the Rhine-Ruhr megasprawl at the time of the assassination by at least eight witnesses. Lone Stone strongly believes that this alibi is bogus and that the eye-witnesses have been paid off.
- Jack "The End" Daemon, thirty years old, human. Freelance assassin. Former CAS marine sniper. During his six-year tour of duty in the CAS marines, Daemon won several commendations for excelling as a sniper. Daemon was sentenced to a military prison in CAS due to a bar fight that resulted in a soldier's death. Was given an early release in 2065. Daemon relocated to the disputed Northern California territory, where he took jobs for radical policlubs fighting to take back the territory from Tír Tairngire. Daemon is believed to have intimate knowledge of the terrain surrounding the Mount Shasta Lodge. It is unknown if Daemon is Awakened. He has a history of confronting Tír Peace Force troops and neutralizing and evading magic-based tactics.



INCOMING FEED.....



Since Hestaby's attacks, Masaru has been seen on at least three occasions near Mount Shasta and is believed to have met personally with Hestaby. It is believed Rhonabwy has also sent a message of support to Hestaby, though no one knows for sure how far that support would go should relations with the other great dragons deteriorate. Likewise, Lofwyr, in a move that most people would have thought to be impossible, seems to have reached out to Ghostwalker and Lung to "consult" on this situation. Ghostwalker and Lung are considered Lofwyr's most likely allies in the current tensions.

- I've heard there's been an immediate change of policy when it comes to these types of threats. From the data I've obtained, Lofwyr has issued an edict forbidding any of his corporate workforce from carrying out any evacuations of Saeder-Krupp properties that come under these types of threats. It would seem Lofwyr has turned his entire corporate workforce into metahuman shields, and is determined to force Hestaby to kill metahumans if she wants to send him any future "messages." From what I'm told, anyone caught evacuating a facility based on a threat without prior authorization from headquarters will be fired or even worse.
- Glitch
- All that means is that Hestaby's attacks have served their purpose, and the dragons can move on with the next stage of their plan.
- Plan 9
- Right. Hestaby's whole case is built on seizing the moral high ground, which goes away if she's responsible for high levels of metahuman deaths.
- Dr. Spin
- Have you seen the commlink and drone recordings of how Hestaby took down that arcology? I've gotta say, Hestaby's attack was carried out with a level of astounding surgical precision. It was masterful from an engineering point of view. If you compare what Hestaby did in Dubai to what Ghostwalker did in Denver over a decade ago or even to Sirurg's actions in Cali and Managua earlier this year, there is an obvious distinction between how their attacks were carried out. Ghostwalker and Sirurg both exerted sheer, brute force to accomplish their objectives. They slammed their talons and their tails into various buildings, ripping structures apart with their vast strength. They breathed fire into buildings, firebombing their interiors. Sirurg went even further than Ghostwalker, using his massive jaws to tear apart a staggering numbers of Aztlan soldiers. Neither Ghostwalker nor Sirurg had any compunction about collateral damage. Dozens of people died from falling and/or burning debris during their attacks. When Hestaby attacked the Saeder-Krupp Middle East headquarters, she used her magic to carve up the building, much as a sculptor would carve up a slab of marble. She surgically removed chunks of the building at a time. She used her spirits to keep people away from the deteriorating building. She used other spirits to forcefully remove security personnel who were trying in vain to defend the building from her attacks. When the

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building eventually collapsed under its own weight, it was as if charges had been placed strategically throughout the building to prevent damage to the city itself. If Hestaby continues to carry out her attacks with such surgical precision, she won't have to worry about her metahuman detractors, as they will be a very tiny and insignificant minority.

- Beaker
- That sort of attack is more humane, but also slower. It leaves more time for a response, yet no real response came. I'd say that backs up Plan 9's theory of collusion.
- Winterhawk
- A long time ago, there were conspiracy theories that came out suggesting that Hestaby was looking to use public relations as a means to build universal support so that she could eventually take over everything. I think we have to approach what Hestaby is doing now with a healthy dose of skepticism. No matter the charm, no matter the feeling of "oh wow, she's on our side," we have to remember that she is a great dragon. And ultimately, whatever she is doing, she's still got an agenda. And an agenda, I might add, that none of us have access to. So, as a friendly reminder, let's keep in mind that Hestaby's apparent reasons for doing this could very well be too good to be true.
- Sunshine
- My question is, if Hestaby is going to attack S-K, why do it in the Middle East and risk stepping on Aden's toes?
- Goat Foot
- I'm not sure, but a few months ago, it seemed that Hestaby and Aden were working together to obtain an artifact; I think it could have been the Shroud of Shadows. It raises the question of why Hestaby would even be working with Aden in the first place, since Aden demonstrated a strong disdain for metahumanity when he leveled Tehran. Could it be some agreement Hestaby made with Aden to try to keep him neutral in an upcoming conflict with the other great dragons? Could it be that Hestaby agreed to help Aden harm Saeder-Krupp in exchange for sharing the Shroud of Shadows? I guess anything is possible at this point.
- Frosty
- Or this is another aspect of Lofwyr and Hestaby's plan.
- Plan 9

As Hestaby and Lofwyr clash with each other, threatening to drag other great dragons into this deepening conflict, the relations between dragons and metahumans have been steadily deteriorating as well. Several metahuman organizations that have been known to possess or use enchanting materials and other exotic reagents derived from dragons, such as talon clippings, dragon bones, dragon blood, and dragon scales, or organizations that have been rumored to have access to those materials, have all been targeted by break-ins over the last three months. Any draconic materials they had on hand were either stolen or destroyed. Attacks have been carried out against the Draco Foundation, the Atlantean Foundation, the Children of the Dragon, MIT&T, the Church of the Dragon Reborn, the

Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research, the head houngan for the Caribbean League, the Sisterhood of Ariadne magic group, and even the Shasta Shamans. In each case, there were metahuman guards who ended up being killed in a gruesome manner. All of these deaths have been covered up by various security corporations, from Knight Errant to Lone Star, in an effort to prevent panic and hysteria from running rampant in the metahuman population.

Highly classified security reports (which I have managed to obtain) from these security corporations indicate that many of the metahuman guards were treated in a way that showed a "complete disregard" for metahuman life. Several of the bodies were left in a manner that could only be described as being "partially eaten." Tooth and claw marks confirm the presence of dracoforms in the attacks. Several bodies that weren't partially eaten were left on public display; Y-incisions made across their chests are similar to those typically associated with metahuman autopsies. From many of those bodies, several bones, organs, teeth, and hair were removed, almost like how a talismonger would remove organs and other reagents from bodies of dragons. In total, sixty-five metahuman bodies have been left behind—mutilated, partially eaten, or dissected—at these organizations. This information has yet to reach the general public, and I am certain that there will be tremendous resistance and consequences to anyone who should attempt to go public with this highly provocative information.

In addition to these well-known metahuman organizations being hit by apparent death squads, individuals who have traded in or used dragon reagents on the black market are also being targeted. In recent weeks, six high-end fences and at least five talisleggers have disappeared. It is believed that those numbers could actually be higher, since those involved in the black market tend to value their privacy.

- Snopes does not exaggerate here. Over the last two weeks, I've had trouble contacting four of my closest business associates. These individuals are scattered around the world, from the Allied German States to the Republic of China, and they all dealt in dragon reagents. I've heard disturbing reports that their shops have been burned to the ground, though I haven't been able to personally verify those reports. I'm still hoping that they weren't in their shops when they burned down. I also can't contact my friend Peter Blacksnake in the PCC. I've never been unable to contact him in the past. And on top of that, I have heard the footsteps, so to speak, of these predators behind me as well. I've had to ditch at least three tails over the past two weeks. This is some scary stuff.
- Lyran
- If there's anything you need from us, Lyran, let us know. And stay safe!
- Ma'Fan
- If anyone can find out for me what has happened to Peter Blacksnake, I would owe you one. If something bad has happened to him, then it's become real personal for me. For me, he is pack. He is family.
- Lyran

- Lyran is not the only one here who has been targeted by these death squads. A few days ago, I was accosted by three very surly drakes. I don't know which dragon they worked for (most likely Surrurg), but they obviously didn't care whether they had accurate facts about me or not. For the record, I have never been involved with the sale of or the use of dragon reagents in my magic. I personally find the practice offensive. But it makes me wonder just how many innocent magicians and talismongers out there are being targeted by these groups.
- Ethernaut

The great dragons may not be the only group engaging in this type of violence. A few days ago, I heard from a few contacts I have in Ares Military Intelligence. They had reports of a training exercise being carried out by the Renraku Navy off the Horn of Africa. In this particular exercise, a carrier task force was testing an experimental cruise missile. Three of the test missiles veered off-course toward the west coast of Madagascar. It took the Renraku Navy several attempts before they were able to access and activate the missiles' auto destruct systems. According to my friends in Ares, those missiles were locked onto coordinates for a cave system called Anjohibe along Madagascar's West Coast. After some digging, I found an old rumor on the Matrix about a significant dragon egg repository inside those caverns. To my knowledge, this was never confirmed. Some individuals, however, apparently felt it was worth the risk of reprogramming those cruise missiles to try to blow them up. No matter whether or not there was an actual egg repository there, should news of the attempt get out to the public, relations between metahumans and the great dragons could deteriorate even further.

- Three Renraku naval officers were charged in that incident with Conspiracy, Sabotage of Corporate Property, and Willful Destruction of Corporate Property. At first, Renraku interrogators could not get anything out of the three naval officers, until they started to use more "coercive" techniques. The three finally broke days later and revealed that they all belonged to a single terrorist group: the Human Nation.
- Mihoshi Oni

BUG SPIRITS: THE NEXT GENERATION?

Insect spirits are truly formidable and terrifying predators. They possess great numbers, they possess frightening abilities, and they have proven themselves capable of infiltrating our society with minimal detection. Most of their species are linked to hive minds, giving them an extraordinary advantage over metahumans. As individual spirits, they are both cunning and ruthless, driven to reach a single, fanatical goal: consuming metahumanity. Have any doubts about them? Take a look at the horrors left behind in Chicago from nearly two decades ago to see what the future holds for the rest of us should these creatures ever be allowed to spread out of control.

Not only are these insect spirits among the world's deadliest predators, but they are also among the world's ultimate survivors. Not even a tactical nuke, mana warps, or FAB III have been able

Urgent Message.....



THE SHASTA SHAMANS

Purpose: The Shasta Shamans are tied closely with their patron, Hestaby, and her agenda. Much of Hestaby's agenda is still unknown to the rest of the world, making the Shasta Shamans equally mysterious. The Shasta Shamans have been involved in environmental programs to help rejuvenate and restore the wild places of North America to their natural, pristine state. The Shasta Shamans have been active with other organizations with which Hestaby herself is involved, such as the Astral Preservation Society. The Shasta Shamans are extremely loyal to Hestaby.

Members: 300

Strictures: Limited Membership (shamans only). There are such things as associate members, but they are limited to what they have access to on the lodge grounds (for example, associate members do not have access to the actual lodge building, but they have access to certain locations around Mount Shasta, such as nature trails, talisman shops, and gypsy camps). Members are required to make an oath of loyalty to both the lodge and the great dragon, Hestaby. They are also expected to obey the bylaws of the organization and the requests of Hestaby.

Resources/Dues: High/None. The Shasta Shamans are self-sustaining, able to harvest telesma from Mount Shasta's redwood forests. The telesma from Mount Shasta are very potent and sell extremely well on the open market, bringing in enough nuyen to sustain the lodge and making it unnecessary for the shamans to rely on Hestaby for financial support.

Patron: Hestaby

Description and Customs: The main building for the Mount Shasta Lodge is the old Mount Shasta ski resort, which has been converted into a magical lodge by its members. There is enough room at the Mount Shasta Lodge and surrounding buildings to allow up to fifty individuals to reside there at any one time. A large conclave of gypsies is permitted to live in the woods and enjoy the natural surroundings of Mount Shasta, and they often serve as eyes and ears for Hestaby and the Shasta Shamans. The Northern Crescent gypsies act as a ranger service and border patrol for the Shasta Shamans. In addition to the gypsies, the redwood forest surrounding the lodge also possesses magical defenses. The redwood forest feels both imposing and unwelcome to those with hostile intent or a callous disregard for the forest, and that feeling becomes even stronger when in proximity to the lodge. There are also many paranormal critters that roam the forest near Mount Shasta, including the rumored Shasta Deer.

THE POWERS THAT BE
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to completely eliminate all of the bug spirits from Chicago. It goes without saying, I hope, that bug spirits must be continually monitored and pursued, even when it appears that they have been defeated. The build-up of the massive hives in Chicago took years of careful planning and execution, and while that infestation was developing like a malignant cancer, bug spirits were also operating unchallenged around the globe, under the front organization known as the Universal Brotherhood. All of the Universal Brotherhood chapterhouses have since been shuttered and left to rot or burned to the ground, but since constant surveillance of their activities has not been maintained, there is nothing to stop the bug spirits from trying again with another front organization in another vulnerable segment of society.

Unfortunately, most governments, corporations, and media watchdogs have all but dropped the ball over the years since Chicago, as they have had their attention diverted by other cataclysmic events that have struck our world since the mid-2050's, including SURGE, the Renraku Arcology shutdown, Winternight, the Matrix Crash, and the Amazonia-Aztlan war. These institutions' surveillance of bug spirits have proven sporadic at best and have allowed bug spirits to recede into the shadows once more. Where they have failed, however, my fellow conspiracy theorists and I have remained vigilant in following up on any rumors that we have heard about bug spirits over the years and their active plots. Since the events in Chicago, my fellow researchers and I have been dedicated to discovering who these spirits have merged with and who they are currently using to spy on us. And more importantly, we are relentless in maintaining up-to-date information on tracking their movements and learning the locations of new hives or colonies and knowing about the rate of growth for those new colonies. I am not bragging when I say that we, as an underground movement, know more about the bug spirits than what most of the megacorporations and the national governments think they know about them today. And unfortunately, in recent months, we have discovered evidence leading us to a disturbing conclusion: that the Bug Spirits are growing even more dangerous over the passage of time and are now in the process of evolving themselves and their tactics, perhaps into a new generation of bug spirit, the likes of which this world has not yet seen.

So, what is prompting this alarming trend with bug spirits? Over the years, I have developed a very simple explanation for this evolution. It comes down to need. From what I can tell, this need started with the events that took place in Chicago. Taking their vast intelligence and cunning into consideration, it has to be assumed that when the nuke went off in what is now called the Cermak Blast Zone that the surviving bug spirits saw how vulnerable they were to our technology. That awareness of their own vulnerabilities was reinforced when Ares indiscriminately released FAB III into the city, killing thousands more bug spirits and forcing many of the survivors to flee from both the deadly fluorescing bacteria as well as from the mana warps that developed in the ravaged environment. The battle for Chicago shifted dramatically in our favor in the months and years that followed because of the strength of our technology. Such a shift undoubtedly impressed upon bug spirits the urgency to either adapt to our world and to our technology that dominates it or to become irrelevant and, ultimately, extinct. In other words, it was the concept of natural selection at work on the bug spirits.

From all of my own research, my own personal observations, and my many lengthy conversations with my fellow conspiracy theorists, this adaptation gap struck the bug spirit population hard when megacorps such as Ares began to round up their kind and experiment on them, looking for ways to exploit them. Evidence of the existence of these black ops projects began to come out in July 2062, but it is possible that these projects started shortly after the situation in Chicago had been "stabilized" around 2058. In 2062, a runner named Shooter detailed his experiences on Shadowland at a previously unknown Ares facility (Complex 68G) in the Algonkian-Manitou Council. In that secret research facility, Shooter reported how Ares was forcing insect shamans and queens to invest their bug spirits into mundane animals such as German shepherds and Dobermans, as well as paranormal critters like hellhounds, creating vastly superior (and very creepy) hybrids of these guard animals that Ares, in theory, could control. These hybrid animals were believed to have been endowed with the inspect spirits' intellect and several of their spirit powers, making them (again, in theory) the ideal guard animals. One of Ares' preliminary reports from this project proclaimed these hybrids as being the next generation of guard animals. Sadly, these experiments may have decreased the overall security of the world instead of increasing it, as they may have paved the way for the next generation bug spirits.

Complex 68G was not the only research facility carrying out this scandalous research. Two other secret facilities belonging to Ares were also participating in these controversial experiments: Complex 93E (in the Asian nation of Shaanxi) and Complex 211B (in the Indian Union). At the height of these experiments, this project involved up to five hundred bug spirits, twelve insect shamans, and nine bug queens. Sadly, this covert research may never have posed a problem for the rest of us had it not been for Crash 2.0, which took place a little over two years after Shooter's initial report.

- This has to make you wonder. If Ares was performing all of those twisted experiments on those bug spirits, what other megacorporations were doing the same things to keep up with Ares? And which ones have yet to be found out?
- Beaker
- And which of those megacorps may have had bug spirits escape on them as well?
- Sunshine

According to my reliable and very trustworthy sources inside of Ares, when communication systems were failing all over the world during Crash 2.0, Ares executives feared that this global event would allow their "pet" bug spirits the opportunity to escape. Determined to avoid that worst-case scenario and the PR nightmare that would be certain to follow, Ares issued orders to sanitize all three facilities and destroy all bug spirits they contained before they could become a problem. At first, Ares personnel managed to successfully sanitize Complex 68G with very few complications. But as plans progressed to sanitize the other two facilities, communications with those facilities were severed. Not wanting to delay in dealing with this potentially explosive situation, Ares began putting together Firewatch teams to storm



KNOWN ACTIVE HIVES IN THE WORLD AS OF 2073

Posted by: Snopes

To be able to effectively battle the bug spirits, the locations of their hives, nests, or colonies must be exposed. For convenience, I have broken down the hives/colonies that we know about into their relative sizes: Small (not a significant threat yet, but could easily develop into a bigger threat given time), Medium (hives or colonies that are an immediate menace but are not yet quite at the scale of Chicago, and there is time to deal with them before they wipe out a sprawl), and Large (you don't want to deal with these hives on your own—it would probably be better to leave that up to the professionals, or at the least, invest in lots and lots of KE IV and, say, a tank).

Small Colonies (1-250 Bug Spirits)

Every sprawl on the planet has at least a few small colonies of bug spirits scattered throughout their populations. Bug spirits tend to be as invasive as mundane insects in every city and sprawl of the world. But it is important to keep in mind that taking out even a small colony or hive can help control the overall population of these predators. So these small colonies, no matter how insignificant they may seem, should *never* be ignored.

Medium Colonies (251-2,500 bug spirits)

The following sprawls and megasprawls need to do some serious housecleaning with the bug spirits that reside in their areas:

- Atlanta
- Chicago
- DeeCee (these hives may actually be vanishing; with the Children of the Dragon cult actively hunting bug spirits, as well as having conflicts with the local shedim, DeeCee may soon fall into the “small colony” category)
- Hong Kong
- Los Angeles
- London
- Manaus
- Manhattan (these hives may actually fit into the “Large” category; there is someone actively fighting us and

shielding their hives from us and preventing us from knowing how big their hives actually are)

- Miami
- Paris
- Phoenix
- San Angelo
- Santa Fe
- Seattle
- The entire Sioux Nation (the entire Sioux Nation still has problems with its ghost towns, abandoned mines, and large, open spaces in which bug spirits can thrive; the Sioux Nation, to our knowledge, has multiple, medium-sized colonies and hives of a variety of bug spirit types)
- Sydney
- Tenochtitlan

Large colonies (2,501+ Bug spirits)

It should go without saying that these sprawls would be well served to have these nests cleaned up, but it should also go without saying that no one should attempt to address these situations without an army at their back. Negotiation, rather than aggression, might be the best way to deal with these hives, since direct assaults could have cataclysmic effects.

- Cairo
- El Paso
- Kuala Lumpur
- Moscow
- Neo-Tokyo
- New Orleans
- Rome
- Tucson

the facilities and to eliminate anything that moved. Unfortunately, from what I have been told, as the events surrounding the Crash worsened and as the various plots of Winternight to bring about Ragnarok became known to the rest of the world, whatever resources Ares had assigned to raid those secret facilities had to be rapidly rerouted and deployed to other parts of the world to prevent the detonations of the remainder of Winternight's arsenal. This allowed these secret facilities to be left essentially unattended for a significant amount of time. Due to the magnitude of the crisis, Ares did not have the resources available to investigate these facilities for up to forty-eight hours after they had initially lost communication with them. By that time, when Ares' Firewatch teams finally set foot in the secret facilities, it was already too

late. Sealed intelligence reports (that I obtained because that's the sort of thing I'm supposed to do) noted that all of the Ares personnel inside those two research facilities had either been brutally murdered or had gone missing, along with the bug spirits themselves. The reports said that nearly one hundred and fifty of Ares' most trusted and capable black ops operatives and analysts had disappeared from both of those facilities, left to the tender mercies of the bug spirits.

- Ares allegedly shuttered all these programs around the time of the Crash. But there's nothing here to say they didn't restart these projects after the smoke cleared. They might have even convinced themselves that new technology developed since that



time might have made working with the Bugs easier and safer. They'll be cured of that delusion soon.

- The Smiling Bandit
- There was a scandal last year when the UCAS CIA was caught experimenting on bug spirits. It turned out that Ares was working with the CIA to try to get the UCAS government back in control of Manhattan. Ares would, of course, keep a nice piece of power for themselves. Once the news broke, the CIA paid a price for its involvement with bug spirits by having analysts and senior leaders forcefully retired or fired. Ares, though, came out scot-free, since they managed to convince people that they had no involvement with the program. Not sure how people didn't see through their act—where did they think the CIA got all the toys that were mentioned in the story?
- Slamm-O!
- If you want to learn just how deep Ares is involved in all things bug, take a look at UnlimiTech. Roger Soaring Owl saw what they were doing in Chicago, and he left Knight Errant because of it.
- Plan 9

The dangers posed by the escaped bug spirits went far beyond the fact that they now possessed individuals with intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the black ops side of a megacorporation (and quite possibly the black ops projects of other megacorporations as well). For the first time ever, there were bug spirits on the loose that knew what it is like to be enslaved by metahumans. These bug spirits know what it felt like to shift from predator to prey by their bitter enemies. Given the time, nuyen, and effort Ares put into hunting those particular hives of bug spirits over the years, it is clear that Ares understood how fanatical those spirits might eventually become, and they wanted to be sure they were kept in check. And up to the present day, from what I have been told, those particular bug spirits have been able to successfully elude and evade Ares' best black ops forces every time they were sent after them, as well as any other mercenary and shadowrunner teams that were hired to eliminate them and the threat that they posed for the megacorp. Currently, Ares has bounties on several bug hives in Asia, and it is believed that the highest bounties are reserved for bug spirits that escaped from their secret research facilities back in '64 (ten million nuyen on each hive; proof that the queens for each hive have been killed is required). Unfortunately, these particular bug spirits have learned to cover their tracks all too well, and by this time they may have integrated themselves into other hives or colonies, spreading word about what metahumans attempted to do them nearly a decade ago.

- Who the hell cares? Does anyone think bug spirits will be any more motivated to destroy us just because some metahumans were mean to them? They were evil bastards from the get-go, and a desire for revenge won't make them any more evil.
- Sticks

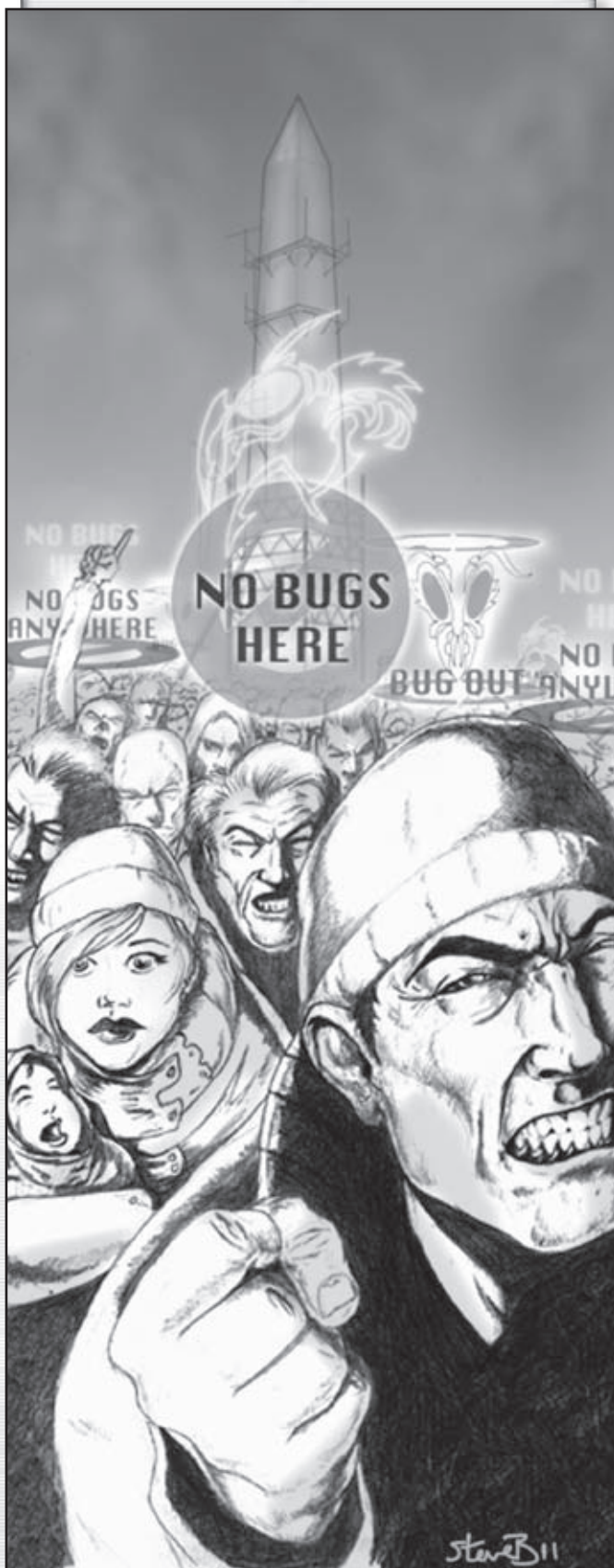
There has also been a steady stream of technological advances that have given metahumans an increased edge over the bug spirits: the development of KE IV and wyrd mantis essence. If you believe

in my theory about the needs fueling the decisions and actions of bug spirits, these incredible breakthroughs have also given them a greater (and more desperate) need to evolve themselves at a pace that could be considered unnatural and dangerous. When these breakthroughs made it onto the market (and their effectiveness out in the field was proved by shadowrunners), there was a dramatic increase in the number of lucrative bounties being collected for the heads of bug spirits from around the world. From 2067 through 2072, multiple government and corporate intelligence agencies began to report a significant drop in the global population of bug spirits, anywhere from a two percent decrease (in regions where the SOTA technology was fairly scarce) to a nine percent decrease (in regions where the SOTA technology was more abundant).

For the first time ever, politicians have begun making campaign boasts to make the world "bug-spirit free" in ten years' time. The belief that insect spirits are finally losing their foothold in our world is being openly promoted by various bug spirit experts. Now, I'm a little worried that the governments and corporations are buying into this absurd notion and are working under the false assumption that the bug spirit problem has already been solved. I fear corporations and national governments will begin to make budgetary cuts in their programs to deal with bug spirits to save a little nuyen and will settle for their current supply of weapons, believing them to be sufficient. And I fear that the insect spirits have become aware of this arrogant assumption of ours that we have already won and are working behind the scenes to manipulate the most gullible of our society into a false sense of security.

If I wanted to back up this assertion, I'd take a look at Manhattan, circa 2072. There was a UCAS news report exposing a secret project being carried out by the CIA in an abandoned part of the island called the Terminal Z-Zone. That particular news story, which quickly attracted international and corporate attention and created a political firestorm in DecCee, showed CIA analysts vivisectioning bug spirits, experimenting on them, and in some cases, torturing them. That story also revealed the fact that the CIA had made an unholy alliance with mantid spirits. That particular aspect of the story was plastered on news nets for weeks, especially the news that the CIA had a mantid spirit working inside the Pentagon. Because of the inflammatory nature of the news story, public outrage against the UCAS government reached heights not seen since its incompetent handling of the Chicago disaster. Protests were staged at the National Mall, and they lasted for weeks on end and grew unruly. On a couple of occasions, full-out riots almost broke out. As a result of the public outrage, the CIA director and his top advisors were fired by President Colloton, the project itself shut down, and the two mantid spirits with which the CIA had been working closely were both destroyed. And while many just saw scandal and reacted in a knee-jerk fashion to this particular news story, I saw something more sinister behind the surface gloss and vitriol.

After thoroughly researching the story, getting the perspectives of multiple news nets and matrix bloggers, and contacting the shadowrunners involved in that particular job, I have discovered that the story as reported was deliberately slanted and left out significant details that would have made a huge difference in public opinion. First, it failed to mention that the CIA tightly controlled the actions and movements of their mantid spirits. Second, the



story failed to mention the success that this particular program has had over the course of a year in hunting down bug spirits. Based on the intelligence provided by the CIA and these two mantid spirits, the UCAS military located and shut down at least half a dozen hives and nests scattered throughout the nation. And they did so in a way that was discreet and did not incite any panic in the nearby populations (proving at least that the CIA had learned *something* from Chicago). Not only that, but the CIA noted that a few of those bug hives were in the process of conducting research of their own, attempting to improve their merge process. This in itself should worry all of us. Should bug spirits be able to decrease the time it takes for them to invest their spirits into metahuman hosts and possess more control over the outcomes of the merge process (i.e., control which type of inhabitation merge—true, hybrid, or flesh form—results from the process), we could see a dramatic rise in bug spirits infiltrating our society and our institutions, which in turn will allow them to grow stronger as they once again sow seeds of distrust among our vast population.

On top of the other omissions, the news story failed to specify the reason why the bug spirits were being housed in that run-down building in the Terminal Z-Zone: the CIA was attempting to test next-generation weapons on live specimens to develop new, SOTA weapons to help fight bug spirits. Now that this project has been shut down, advancement of the technology needed to effectively battle bug spirits (without completely annihilating the surrounding environment) has been put on the back burner, perhaps indefinitely. The public may have, inadvertently, done bug spirits everywhere a tremendous favor by demanding this project be abandoned.

But perhaps the most damaging aspect of that story were the graphic and horrific images of the bug spirits that were shown, portraying them as being helpless, weak, imprisoned, and victimized by metahumans. In my opinion, the images shown on national trideo were tantamount to a psych ops mission that many national militaries and corporate security forces would engage in to make native populations believe what they want them to believe. In my opinion, the way the images were shown was designed deliberately to feed people's natural tendencies for complacency and to convince the general public on a subconscious level that the bug spirit problem is well under control. Combined with the fact that most of the horrific events of Chicago happened seventeen years ago, and that many recent insect spirit incidents have gone unreported, and you get a natural forgetting by people. They start to believe that any lingering bug spirit problems are safely isolated in Chicago. That is most certainly not the case.

- So even the bugs have a PR strategy now?
- Kia
- Why not? If they really are behind the manipulations Snopes is talking about, it seems to be working for them. We all know that reputation is important, especially in a world where information is the second-most important currency there is. Behind, you know, currency.
- Dr. Spin
- Bullets are near the top of that list, too.
- Hard Exit



SUSPECTED BUG SPIRIT INFILTRATORS

Posted by: Snopes

To keep ahead of bug spirits and their deadly plots for metahumans, we need to know who they are using to spy on us; people who are covertly gathering intelligence on us, and who even now may be plotting new ways to manipulate us into believing that bugs no longer pose a serious threat to our world. The following individuals are my top five suspected bug spirit infiltrators. They're people who are especially dangerous due to their key positions in society.

Roger Willis

One of my top suspects for a bug spirit infiltrator is a man from Manhattan named Roger Willis. Willis (or the entity that may be portraying him now) is a middle-aged assignment editor for the NBCNN network. He was a career man who has worked with the network for nearly sixteen years. Willis was the assignment editor that put together the hit piece on the CIA project on the bug spirits a year ago that got that valuable black ops project shut down. He was also the individual responsible for hiring the runners who investigated the project. The shadowrunners who took that job mentioned that every transaction with Mr. Willis was done either through trid-conferencing or through his assistants. They never were given the opportunity to meet him in person or to assense him. Up to approximately two years ago, there seemed to be nothing too unusual with the types of stories he was passing out to his reporters—corruption inside the Manhattan Development Consortium, abuse within the NYPD Inc., wasteful spending by the UCAS government, that sort of thing. Two of his reporters earned Peabody Awards for their coverage of Crash 2.0. Then, two years ago, after he took a vacation to the Bahamas, the assignments he began to issue changed. He had people covering disappearances that ended up being linked to the shedim and to the infected, and stories on how the major security organizations and their specialized units deal with magical threats. With all this information, I feel confident that Willis is a spy for the bug spirits and is the one protecting the colonies that are developing under the streets and in the abandoned buildings of Manhattan.

Soren Johannson

Soren Johannson is the vice president of Ares Europe, which obviously puts him in an interesting position. A merge with Johannson could be the start of the bug spirits' retribution against Ares for its operations in Chicago, as well as its secret projects. There are many reasons why Johannson might have become a prime target for the bugs. Johannson is a charismatic individual with connections that span all of Europe, and he has been personally involved in numerous deals with the New European Economic Community (NEEC). Johannson is rumored to have enough working knowledge of the NEEC through all his negotiations that, if he so desired, he could throw the NEEC into tumult and wreak havoc on the economic stability of Europe. Johannson was also awarded responsibilities in the Middle East, offering him even more opportunities

for furthering bug spirit agendas. He also has connections on the Grand Tour, giving him (and any bug spirits he may work for) access to the most prominent socialites and debutants of Europe. He also has established a strong reputation for himself with shadowrunners in Europe, making him a sought-after contact. Perhaps the scariest fact about Johannson is that he currently is highly trusted by Damien Knight himself. Yep, through him the bugs might have access to the Ares CEO. That's enough to make Johannson perhaps the most dangerous bug infiltrator in all of Europe. To support the allegations that he has been turned into one of them, there is a week (February 9–February 16) where Johannson's location does not match with his schedule. Although he claims to have attended two operas and a gala while also working at an undisclosed facility for that week, no one I checked with could confirm Johannson's whereabouts during, not even Ares Security. In addition, I have heard that Johannson has been making discreet inquiries into the locations of stockpiles of KE IV and wyrd mantis essence after that trip. I know this is pretty much just speculation, but I intend to prove, one way or another, whether Johannson is a bug spirit or not.

- I hope you plan on doing more, because this is pretty weak. I could come up with half a dozen alternate explanations for Johannson's behavior besides insect possession. Establishing that he would be a good target for the bugs is not the same as proving that they have done so.
- Cosmo

Célestine Renard

Célestine Renard is a renowned bug spirit expert from Paris, France. She has published numerous books and academic papers on this subject, including *Bug Spirits: The End of Metahumanity?* and *Demystifying the Bug Spirit Threat*. Renard graduated from the École Normale Supérieure in Paris with a degree in Parazology in 2042. When the bug spirit threat manifested itself in Chicago, Renard chose to focus her research on the creatures. Renard has led the most numerous as well as the most dangerous research expeditions into Chicago since 2058, including going so far as tracking down and studying bug spirit colonies as they were in a dormant state. Renard, at one time, was a leading advocate of hunting down all bug spirits, no matter the financial cost to governments or corporations. Renard often led protests when she felt governments and the corporations were starting to turn a blind eye to the insect infestation. That activism disappeared around 2068, when Renard dropped off the grid completely. She reappeared in the media in late 2070, praising the development of KE IV and wyrd mantis essence. Since 2070, Renard has made an extreme about-face. She's actively trying to convince people that the bug spirit menace has waned, and that the billions of nuyen being spent by corporations and governments could be allocated elsewhere. Because of her credentials and her expertise in the field, people are starting to listen, and even those most frightened of the bug spirits are now saying "we've got them licked."

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Renard, because of her background, can be a very dangerous ally for the bug spirits. If she has been turned into one of them, they have access to a tremendous body of knowledge that could help them counter the most recent technological developments being used against them. She needs to be neutralized before she can do any more damage.

Smuggler—"Guardian Angel"

Guardian Angel is one of the new smugglers that have recently cropped up, offering superior smuggling services for a suspiciously low price. Guardian Angel is a troll around the age of twenty who currently works out of Denver, and his real name is Bryan Andrews. Andrews, according to his Lone Star rap sheet, was born and lived in the city of Austin for most of his life. His record includes multiple counts of assault, including some with a deadly weapon, and numerous armed robbery charges. Nothing in his background, though, suggested that he has the background or the know-how to become an expert smuggler. So far, no smuggled items or customers seem to have disappeared as a result of working with Guardian Angel. If Guardian Angel is indeed a bug spirit, his objective does not seem to be helping his kind merge indiscriminately with people; instead, he's in the fund-raising business. I couldn't find any data indicating that Guardian Angel is supporting any type of lifestyle, suggesting that he's getting some outside support. I would caution anyone working with Guardian Angel that the chances that he is a bug spirit are pretty high.

Street Contact—"Eight Ball"

Like Guardian Angel, Eight Ball is a person who seems to have appeared on the shadow scene almost overnight. Eight Ball is a female dryad elf, working the streets of Miami in the Caribbean League. Eight Ball's background—at least, what little we know about it—is sketchy. Eight Ball appears to be SINless, with no known arrest record. She does not seem to have any type of formal education, and it appears as though she has spent most of her life on the streets of Miami in a go-gang. Rumors have surfaced in the last six months that she's been providing reliable intel to shadowrunners about several locations, including Evo's corporate headquarters in Vladivostok and a factory belonging to Krupp Robotics in Hannover, as well as information on the whereabouts of the Sextant of the Worlds. To say that there is a disconnect between Eight Ball's known background and her sudden insight into facility layouts and security designs for these locations thousands of kilometers from Miami (not to mention knowing the location of a powerful artifact that has stymied some of the most powerful organizations in the world) would be an understatement. And like Guardian Angel, it would seem that no one who has purchased information from Eight Ball has disappeared or has otherwise been harmed.

- Bug spirit or not, if she's got good information and isn't screwing her customers, I'm buying.
- Hannibelle

My investigation has shown that this manipulation may run even deeper than one explosive national news story. We have monitored and tracked law enforcement reports of the disappearances of metahumans back to the early '40s and have kept track of which groups those disappearances may have been linked to over time. Prior to the Universal Brotherhood being revealed as a front for bug spirits, most disappearances (especially those of people without SINs) were never fully explored and were left to become cold cases. When word got out about the Universal Brotherhood, hundreds of thousands of missing metahumans were suddenly linked to bug spirits, no matter if it was actually true, or whether bug spirits simply made for a plausible scapegoat for lazy police officers. During the 2050s and all the way into the early 2070s, bug spirits were often suspected as the reason people disappeared without a trace. They were more feared than paranormal critter attacks, shedim activities, cults, organleggers or even attacks from the HMMVV-infected. Now, starting in 2072, that fear—and the disappearances that spurred that fear—has dropped dramatically. According to most law-enforcement records that I've accessed, the number of disappearances is still dropping. I've got some questions, though, about the legitimacy of the numbers. They're not universally tracked, for one thing. Another problem is law enforcement organizations are not big on putting speculation into their statistics, and there's no good way to know which missing persons were taken by bugs or by other means. Their stats reflect three things: what people are telling them, the officers' own biases, and any tinkering with stats people above them might be doing.

A distinct possibility is that someone not only wants us to think that bug spirits are no longer as big of a threat as say, vampires and ghouls, but they are also making a serious effort to keep the insects out of the headlines and out of our collective consciousness. If whoever is behind this drive succeeds and we let our vigilance slide, then I predict another Chicago-level disaster will happen in the next ten years or so as people become unprepared.

- This sounds like this could be a fairly simple hacking job. Law enforcement agencies don't guard their accumulated stats as closely as they guard their case information, so it probably wouldn't be too hard to make whatever tweaks you want to make. You could even set up a little program that regularly does your tweaking for you.
- Netcat

So beyond the insidious forms of manipulation and misinformation that the bug spirits seem to be deploying against us, what else are they up to? Like any good conspiracy hobbyist, I keep a close eye on the megacorps to see what they're up to. Over the last eight months, I've learned that there have been thefts from many major cybernetics and medical corporations and subsidiaries. They're not big hits—none of them, by themselves, have raised any red flags with the megacorps. Most of them can be explained away as simple shadowruns targeting new tech to sell on the black market. They're made even more innocuous by the fact that the thefts haven't been limited to one city, but rather have been spread across the globe. Seattle. London. Atlanta. Paris. Neo-Tokyo. Moscow. Hong-Kong. The limited



MEDICAL ITEMS STOLEN FROM THE CORPORATIONS

The following list includes a selected list of items that were stolen from megacorporations or their subsidiaries over the past eight months. These items, in theory, will be used to assemble a delta clinic that the bug spirits will use to vastly improve their hosts, making them more difficult to kill. If, in the course of your jobs, you should come across any of these items, please investigate further to find out where they are being taken so we can trace where the clinic might eventually be built, or find a way of passing the information to me so that I can make sure it gets into the right hands.

Date	Megacorporation	Serial Number(s)/ Batch Number	Location	Description
02/28/2073	Aztechnology	9-2345-B-D / 100541	Seattle	3 x specialized diagnostic profile equipment
03/01/2073	Biogene	#-3300V-Z /	Neo-Tokyo	5 x nodes of genotype data
03/28/2073	Designer Genes	111394-PO / 990473 F-K	Jakarta	5 x nutrient tanks
04/01/2073	Genetique	S24419 / L41117	San Diego	15 x samples of Genetique Resistance
04/28/2073	Evo	X-21177-Z / 233-C	Moscow	18 x cyberware implant surgical kits
05/01/2073	Genesis Consortium	7908-76-910-K / 345R	Cali	2 x mobile medical facilities
05/28/2073	Genesis Consortium	7937-88-321-M / 677T	Metropole	50 x transgenic pharmaceuticals
06/01/2073	Mitsuhamma	243-68FM / 12964B	Hong Kong	5 x specialized plasma torches
06/28/2073	NeoNET	4330KLM / 2998MPW	Boston	3 specialized surgical drones
07/01/2073	Pensodyne	S-34489-B / 966-F	Manhattan	10 vats of genetic material used to create bioware
07/28/2073	Proteus AG	5R1128X / 5660K	Atlanta	1 mobile medical facility
08/01/2073	Renraku	PV85B-19L / AB458	London	10 x cyberware customization kits
08/28/2073	Shiawase Biotech	823B456 / U2430-1	Frankfurt	50 x implant medic nanohives
09/01/2073	Universal Omnitech	J-25600 / GER5678	LA	10 x samples of retroviruses
09/28/2073	Universal Omnitech	J-31449 / BLR2276	Paris	50 x nanosymbiotes
10/01/1073	Yakashima	I-87746 / Y4589M	Kansai	3 x biotech growth vats

quantities that were stolen in any one break-in, along with the fact that they happened in different parts of the globe, have prevented corporate investigators from finding any connections. My investigations, however, showed a very distinct pattern: these items, when combined, could conceivably be used to construct a delta clinic. The only thing that seems to be missing at the moment to complete this clinic are the items actually needed to stock it on a long-term basis.

That single omission alone could have derailed my entire theory if I had not continued to dig deeper. Around the same time these thefts began, there appeared to be a significant increase in the number of new smugglers entering the shadows. These smugglers promise the usual services at extremely cheap rates (to make up for the fact that they have absolutely no street cred). From what I have been told by those who have been brave enough to use their services, these new smugglers have proven quite efficient in getting the goods delivered, safely and on time. In fact, from what I have been told, they have yet to be busted by border patrols from nearly sixteen different countries, including the Sioux Nation, which still has the feared Wildcats guarding its borders. As you might guess, established smugglers are outraged at having their clients and their jobs poached by people who are undercutting their normal rates by nearly thirty percent. But I think what's going on is more serious than a price war. Certain bug spirits, such as roaches,

beetles, and ant spirits, could become formidable smugglers, being able to burrow and establish intricate underground tunnels allowing them to safely navigate between two countries and to establish routes that no one else in the world knows about. Their routes would be both secure and unknown to any potential rivals. Or the bugs could go another route—other flying spirits such as wasps, hornets, and flies could simply fly the illegal goods over the borders quietly and without much detection. The new smugglers could be a new front for bug spirits as they look to build revenue streams. The goal is to acquire enough untraceable nuyen so that they can just go out and buy the supplies they need for their clinic legally. Bug spirits have learned over the years that the anonymity of cash-based transactions can be very useful, allowing them to go for much longer periods of time without their operations becoming compromised.

I am not, however, just going on speculation here. Ghostwalker, as we all know, is about as vigilant against smugglers as anyone in the world, and some memos have been circulating around the Zone Defense Force discussing some odd auras they've noticed on some smugglers. After their experience in the recent Roger Soaring Owl incident, they've been quite sensitive about bug spirit presence in their city, and there are a number of high-ranking officials who are convinced that the weird auras they've seen are insect spirits. They'd be sure, except these smugglers have

been very elusive, usually providing only quick glimpses. There was one, though, who was breaking into the DocWagon Medical Complex in the PCC sector who was briefly apprehended. At least two shamans on the scene swear that the smuggler was reading as a bug spirit through and through—though the fact that the subject self-immolated rather than face apprehension kept them from getting a good, long look at him.

- I noticed that a lot of the items Snopes listed as missing deal with genetic therapy. It would seem to me that the bugs—if they're behind this—might also be trying to alter their hosts on a genetic level before the merge process takes place. And I'm not just talking about implanting delta-grade cyberware, I'm talking about possibly altering the host's genetic structure in ways that I'm sure would be very alien to us. They may be trying to introduce desirable characteristics into their hosts that they hope will express themselves after the merge process.
- Beaker
- I hate to ask, but what kind of traits do you think those would be?
- Bull
- Logically, they would want hosts to have some type of resistance against insecticides, which they would hope would carry over after the merge. Also, they may try to improve their natural weapons—their mandibles, armor, claws, venom, etc. You name it, I'm sure they probably want to make it stronger for their hybrids.
- Beaker
- Oh, joy.
- Bull

If that's not bad enough, there could be another monetary front for the bug spirits working in the shadows. Right around the time these mysterious smugglers began popping up, there was also an increase in the number of street contacts WHO were selling very detailed and accurate knowledge of building and security layouts, layouts that even seasoned shadowrunners have had difficulty acquiring. Some of these layouts have been for the Towers, the Corporate Court headquarters in Manhattan, the Aztechnology pyramid in Seattle, the Great Temple of Quetzalcoatl in Tenochtitlan, and Aztlan's military base in Ensenada. These individuals could not provide any details on how they obtained the information, and like the mysterious smugglers, they have been willing to provide it cheap on the condition of "no questions asked."

So how could bug spirits (if they are indeed the ones behind this) be gaining access to this type of classified information? The easiest (and perhaps the most plausible) explanation is that they have members of their own kind on the inside walking the hallways as security guards or as wageslaves. Alternately, they could be tapping into another resource that many of us generally dismiss: they could be using mundane bugs as their eyes and ears inside these restricted facilities. Even in 2073, we still have not found a way to keep a building entirely bug free. You can always find ants, flies, or cockroaches crawling and flying around in the crevices, unrestricted. Bugs in general tend to have a natural ability to find even the smallest of cracks and weaknesses in structures,

allowing them to move freely through buildings. It would not surprise me if bug spirits are starting to use their ability to control these mundane bugs as a means to infiltrate and spy on heavily guarded facilities. They then turn around and sell this information in the shadows, in order to further their agenda (and their plans for a delta clinic).

- I think this is where you lost me on this theory, Snopes. I can totally see them merging with key personnel in those buildings to gather all the information they would need to sell, but I can't see them using their powers to use their mundane counterparts to spy on a building. There are just too many wards and too many astral security measures in place in these facilities for bug spirits to be able to effectively use insects in that way. Even if they could, the distance between the spirits and their targets would make control over those insects for any length of time highly unfeasible at best.
- Ethernaut
- I agree it is unlikely, but I think Snopes has a point; it's best not to underestimate our enemy or take anything for granted. If they are truly evolving, there's no telling how their powers are changing as well. It's not like they're going to go on some trid talk show and tell us about any new abilities they might possess or the limits of those new powers. Perhaps they have devised ways around our wards and our astral security measures. And it's not like we have people to infiltrate their hives to gather that type of information for us.
- Sunshine
- There are rumors on the Matrix that all of the instances where post-traumatic stress disorder is being artificially induced into the Aztlan soldiers down in the Amazon rainforest is a result of bug spirits using those individuals as test subjects, trying to develop these new abilities and expand on those they already possess to make themselves even more potent threats.
- Picador

One event that may have caught the attention of the megacorps is that in the last two months, companies responsible for producing KE IV and wyrd mantis essence (including Zeta ImpChem, Universal Omnitech, AG Chemie Europa, and Volvox Industrial Chemicals) have reported multiple break-ins into facilities at all levels of the manufacturing process, including their chemical plants, their distribution centers, and their off-site storage facilities. Even the chemicals that were in-transit have been hijacked. It is believed that these dozens of surgical attacks have slowly dropped the global supply of these chemicals by approximately four percent. The odd thing here is not only the fact that the chemicals were stolen in such large quantities, but my contacts tell me that these chemicals have never made it onto the black market, where you would expect them to wind up. Nor has there been any evidence that these valuable chemicals were ever moved to another country where they could have been used in the poorer areas of the world to stop the growth of bug spirit colonies. Of course, there is no solid evidence to suggest that those chemicals were ever destroyed either (which you would expect bug spirits to do right away, to make sure they couldn't be



recovered). Right now, it looks like these valuable chemicals have just vanished without a trace. Without solid evidence to prove that the chemicals were actually destroyed, it is also just as likely that these corporations are starting to see how valuable these products are on the open market and are deliberately tampering with the global supply of their products to drive up prices. It's possible that they are just stashing their surplus of chemicals somewhere else, or that they are deliberately manufacturing less of their product and are manipulating their records to blame the decrease in the supply of these chemicals on the fake thefts. Until it can be proven otherwise, bug spirit involvement should still be suspected, as a world without these chemicals would be an ideal outcome for these devious and malignant spirits. They would have plenty to gain from seeing these chemicals disappear forever.

- There were a couple of those jobs that I personally set up my runner teams to do. So unless you are insinuating that they are bug spirits or that I am, I tend to believe the price-fixing angle on this one.
- Am-Mut
- If they're bringing in revenue by acting as smugglers and info brokers, who's to say that these bug spirits couldn't use some of that nuyen to hire shadowrunners to carry out these strikes for them? That would insulate them from being automatically suspected of being involved in these raids, while also protecting them in case there's an accident with those materials as they are in transit. Am-Mut, do you know what those Mr. Johnsons of yours did with those chemicals?
- Cosmo
- Not a clue. All my runners know is that their Johnsons were most pleased with their work and that they might hire them again for the same kind of work in the future. From what I am hearing, these raids on these chemical companies will be continuing for the foreseeable future.
- Am-Mut
- Some of the chemical shipments have been intercepted by these groups, but they (allegedly) were not taken. Drivers have reported that they were forced off of the road, and other items appeared to have been taken. The cases, though, seemed to be intact. I have heard that the cases may have been swapped out with counterfeits, and that the actual cases were taken and replaced with forgeries containing what amount to placebos. So I would strongly suggest testing out your supply of KE IV or wyrd mantis essence before charging head-on into a colony. A field test of your gear before getting involved with the bugs may just save your life.
- Beaker

THE CORPORATE COURT: STOLEN PROTOCOLS?

This conspiracy theory is one of my newer ones, and it might not affect us at the street-level just quite yet. But the ramifications it may have for the megacorporations may be so profound that it is worth mentioning here.

One of my confidential sources from Manhattan intercepted this text conversation between three Corporate Court lawyers yesterday whose commlinks he was mining for paydata. Their names have been removed so I don't compromise my source, or his revenue stream.

Now, like good lawyers, they kept their speech circumspect, but the reference to something "bigger" than procedures, along with some other information leaks I've gotten a hold of, tells me that someone made a grab for the Omega Protocols. For those of you who are not up to speed on Corporate Court lingo, the Omega Protocols are the arrangements the Corporate Court has established with its members that allow it to carry out an Omega Order in a timely manner (allegedly they are executable within twelve hours of an Omega Order being issued). Up to this point, almost no one outside of the Corporate Court has seen the actual Omega Protocols. There are literally thousands of fakes on the Matrix, right there next to all the thousands of "real" copies of Dunkelzahn's Will floating around out there.

It's rumored that the actual Omega protocols lay out the chain of command of the military forces that would be involved in such an operation (including the names of the top military commanders from each of the corporations). It is heavily speculated that there are ten separate contingency plans in place, in case the Omega Order is issued against one of their own members (like Aztechnology). It is also rumored that the Omega Protocols identify the spy satellites that would be used in such an operation and the encrypted frequencies the Corporate Court forces would use to coordinate the operation. The protocols are also believed to list all the infantry and armored cavalry units, drone units, satellite weapons, carrier and battleship fleets, and the intercontinental missile silos that would be dedicated to the effort.

Now we get into a bit of speculation. The real Omega Protocols would likely list the actual military bases from which the military assets would deploy. Although some of the material in an Omega Protocol can be changed quickly, such as launch codes, there are also details in the protocols that could not be changed without significant negotiations with each megacorp, such as assigning new military units and re-tasking satellites and satellite weapons. If the Omega Protocols have indeed been stolen, it could take months or even years for the Corporate Court to have new protocols in place. During that time, the Corporate Court could conceivably have trouble launching an effective military campaign to enforce an Omega Order, as an enemy might be able to anticipate where the sorties might be coming from. On top of that, if there are no agreed-upon protocols to reference, disagreements would inevitably arise between the megacorporations over who should be in charge and where and how certain units should be deployed. If the court cannot trust the existing Omega Protocols and their forces become disorganized, the chances of friendly fire and accidents could increase exponentially, leaving the Corporate

Corporate Lawyer 1: Hey! I'm letting you know that I just got out, rather abruptly, of the AR mediation session with my client and Justice Nishimura—

Corporate Lawyer 2: Wait—did you just say Nishimura? How did you draw that SOB?

Corporate Lawyer 1: Bad karma, I suppose. But I guess he was in a pretty good mood this morning for once. At least, a good mood for him. He only threatened me with contempt of court three times, and didn't follow through even once. And then he received some message and abruptly dropped out of AR. I've been told by his clerk that he has recessed the mediation session until late this afternoon. Nishimura calling a recess out of the blue like that is something that doesn't happen.

Corporate Lawyer 2: The same thing happened in my preliminary hearing with Justice Feng, except he rescheduled our hearing with a little bit more decorum. But from what I hear, I would expect that you'll be hearing from Nishimura's clerk in the next couple of hours, telling you that your mediation session will be rescheduled again. Something big is happening around here.

Corporate Lawyer 1: What do you mean?

Corporate Lawyer 2: Our Justices weren't the only ones to cancel their court sessions today. All of them did. A bailiff working for Justice Osborne said that he heard that all justices were being called into an emergency briefing.

Corporate Lawyer 1: A C5 meeting?

Corporate Lawyer 2: I don't know for certain. It's just speculation at this point, but it's quite possible. I've heard from another attorney that the top ten floors of the towers are being locked down, that the Zurich Orbital Habitat Ring is being locked down, that all outgoing ships are being prevented from departing, and that GOD is frantically combing the Court's nodes. I don't know what he was looking for. But there are rumors going around someone has successfully hacked the Corporate Court.

Corporate Lawyer 1: I don't believe it! This has to be some kind of drill. I mean, who would have the balls to hack the Corporate Court?

Corporate Lawyer 2: Attempts are made every day, my friend. But most of the time, they don't get in. The real question is, did they get away with it?

Corporate Lawyer 3: Hey [names redacted], did you guys hear the latest rumor on this lockdown? It sounds like an intrusion was confirmed, and from what I hear, they got away with something big.

Corporate Lawyer 1: Like?

Corporate Lawyer 3: Okay, look, I don't have confirmation on this, so don't pass it along. But I heard they were going after court protocols.

Corporate Lawyer 1: What, like procedures and shit? Who the hell cares?

Corporate Lawyer 3: No. Think bigger.

Corporate Lawyer 1: Think bigger? What the hell are you ... oh. Oh, really?

Corporate Lawyer 2: What? What did they get?

Corporate Lawyer 3: I guess we'll find out soon enough. I'm assuming they took it for a reason, not just because it was something to have. Someone's going to try to take advantage of that knowledge, and it won't be good.

Corporate Lawyer 1: Would you look at that—my session just got postponed. All right, let's take off for a little and leave people to their chaos here.

Court to potentially appear weak, fallible, and inept. And the big question becomes: would the Corporate Court risk its image of invulnerability during a period of time that the Omega Protocols have been compromised?

- Any credible theories as to who is behind this? Aztechnology perhaps? Maybe they fear that the recent bloodshed in their war with Amazonia will sour the Corporate Court against them, and they want some insurance that an Omega Order won't be heading their way for a while? Perhaps not until they have defeated Amazonia?
- Arete
- I don't think so. I think Aztechnology, with its new Corporate Justice, Necall Xólotl, is managing to effectively work the political scene and remain in the good graces of the court. In fact, Aztechnology recently filed a claim with the court to seek damages and reparations for what SIRRURG did against its interests in Cali and Managua from the nation of Amazonia. Basically, the case says if SIRRURG doesn't pay up for his terrorist acts, his closest ally, Amazonia, should. Now, the standing of the court to take action against Amazonia is rather shaky, and punishing the whole nation for SIRRURG's actions is also pretty questionable. We all know that the corps are not above doing what they want and then patching together sketchy motivations for that, but I can't see them trying to escalate anything involving Amazonia to an Omega Order. But Xólotl will push for it, at very least to serve as a distraction from anything his corp is doing.
- Kay St. Irregular
- If Snopes' theories, or even a few of his theories, about the bug spirits are correct, it could very well be them, looking to gain access to some of the world's most classified technology. Perhaps they are even looking into trying to merge with the personnel who would lead such a joint military operation, positioning themselves to sabotage the global operation at the most inopportune moment, and to greatly weaken their enemies' ability to effectively wage war against them.
- DangerSensei
- Before anyone asks, no I didn't have anything to do with this job. I'm getting too old for crazy operations like that. I'd much rather spend time with the kids and the grandkids. But I can tell you this: It would have taken at least two AIs, four technomancers, and at least five elite hackers to bypass those levels of security, and even then, I'm guessing very few of them, if any, walked away from their encounters with the CC's IC. Being able to get past the Grid Overwatch Division is truly a remarkable feat, one that most people could not pull off. If you did, it would definitely be worth bragging about, if it weren't for the fact that doing so would get you killed faster than a Thor shot landing on your head.
- FastJack





ARES: THE BEGINNING OF THE END?

Ares is a mega, yes, but they're not the worst of them. They've been helpful to me and my research in different ways over the years, and I have no desire to see them go away. I say that just to show that I have no particular desire to see them weakened. This isn't a personal vendetta or anything—this is just reporting.

Most people are too busy being taken in by Ares' PR division and their unique spin on things to be conscious of what is really happening behind the scenes at Ares. People are regularly bombarded with messages that remind them (almost to the point of conditioning) that Ares is the sixth largest corporation in the world and that they are continuing to see rapid growth in all divisions with each passing year. Three out of four people instantly recognize Ares' catchy little jingle in its trid ads about how they are "making the world a safer place." People are frequently reminded that for every fiscal year, Ares operates off of a roughly two-trillion-nuyen profit margin (which only includes figures from their legitimate revenue streams). This impressive number only helps to reassure the masses that Ares is a rock-solid and dependable corporation, one trustworthy enough to invest with their life savings.

But let's leave perception behind and look at reality. Corporate images are meticulously crafted to establish a world-class brand and to prevent any negative truths or realities about the corporation from taking hold in the public consciousness. Right now, Ares is comparable to a housing unit that you might find on the market. It might look very good on the outside, but when you start inspecting its interior, you might discover that the

house is infested by Awakened termites and plagued by rotting wood, bad wiring, and leaking pipes. Ares, as it stands now, has the equivalent of Awakened termites chewing at the foundation of the corporation, and they are threatening to eat away at its foundation and its prospects for long-term survivability.

I know most people do not want to hear bad news about a megacorporation that they feel like they can relate to. But ongoing, vitriol-filled power struggles at the top between Ares' top executives—Damien Knight, Arthur Vogel, and Nicholas Aurelius—have divided (and in many cases, eroded) loyalties throughout the corporation. Two of the executives in this power struggle have proposed very different visions for Ares and its future, while the third, functioning as a swing vote, sides with whichever executive offers him a sweeter deal, all while garnering greater support from the Ares wageslaves as he portrays himself as "the guy who truly has Ares' best interests at heart."

As a consequence of these conflicting visions, Ares has appeared somewhat schizophrenic in its business practices as of late. On the one hand, the corp has been very aggressive, spending tremendous amounts of capital to expand its interests into various markets around the globe by any means necessary, including engaging in hostile takeovers, running competition into the ground via shadow ops, and PR smear campaigns that have resulted in a handful of suicides. On the other hand, they're trying to build an image as a friendly, eco-conscious corporation, slowing growth in several divisions so that they can take the time to develop new technologies that are intended to reverse certain trends in environmental damage. In some cases, they've halted the development of projects altogether until Ares could perform

environmental impact surveys and hire on environmentalists as consultants to ensure the footprints from each new project have as little impact on the environment as possible.

- I can't speak to what might be happening in Ares right now, but I can say this; for all the projects that Ares (i.e., Arthur Vogel) has chosen to focus on to address environmental issues, the corporation has received a lot of good publicity and has seen a rise in its overall public image. It would seem Vogel is correct in his belief that no matter how many guns or bombs you sell, you still won't make people love you as much as if you are seen actually caring about the real problems facing the planet. Whatever is happening with Ares, I'm guessing it will be Vogel who wins out in the end.
- Ecotope
- Right. Because the ethical one is always the one who comes out on top in corporate struggles.
- Cosmo
- Has anyone checked to make sure that those "environmentalists" that Ares is hiring don't belong to the various eco-terrorist groups that Vogel has allegedly worked with in the past, like GreenWar and Terra First!? I'm not entirely certain that I want those extremists to have any more access to Ares' stockpile of weapons than what they already have with Vogel being in their pocket. At least someone like Vogel, who has a public reputation to maintain, has reasons to restrain himself and his activities. With a faceless eco-terrorist walking Ares' hallways, you never know when they might steal a new nanoweapon or biological weapon, or try and gain access to Ares' stockpile of satellite weapons.
- DangerSensei
- That's a straw man. Hiring environmentally friendly people is not necessarily equivalent to hiring eco-terrorists.
- Ecotope

This colossal power struggle has not stopped with its recent board votes or its public business transactions. It appears to transcend every division and every subsidiary, as Knight, Vogel, and Aurelius have been working hard to shore up their control of their own specific corners of Ares Macrotechnology. Damien Knight, for example, has all but galvanized Knight Errant, Fleche Armaments, Israel Military Industries, Wolverine Security, Hard Corps, and Executive Protection Services (pretty much anything that has to do with weapons, militaries, security contracts, or ammunitions) against the two other major shareholders. Attempts made by Vogel or Aurelius over the past ten months to place their own people into those divisions have been futile, as the people who work in them are fiercely loyal to Knight and will defend their territory from anyone who might threaten their vaunted programs with new environmental regulations and other "unnecessary" and "unwanted" mandates, and could cause them to lose prestige within the corporation to the pet divisions that Vogel and Aurelius favor (at least this is the fear that Damien Knight himself seems to be propagating within these subsidiaries to protect his ass).

While Damien Knight has been busy securing his piece of the pie, Vogel has been busy securing his position as treasurer

of Ares Global Holding and director of the AresSpace Division. This has allowed him to seed employees loyal to him in almost every other division and subsidiary in which Knight does not have overwhelming support. To make matters worse for Ares (and Knight), Vogel, with assistance from Aurelius, has taken legal control of many of Cross Applied Technologies' former assets that Ares acquired during Crash 2.0, including Cross Advanced Electronics, Cross Global Development, Cross Matrix Technologies, Institut Thaumaturgique du Québec, Reactive Meditech, Tesseract Communications, and Xerxes Positive Research. These are assets that never had any loyalty to Knight to begin with, and it doesn't look like they will ever develop that relationship to Ares' CEO now. Instead, they'll probably fall into Vogel's camp.

Nicholas Aurelius has been working behind the scenes to expand his influence with Ares Global Entertainment. And in an effort to firm up Aurelius' support, Arthur Vogel turned control of Tesseract Communications over to Aurelius as its executive director. It would seem, from all the evidence I have acquired, that Vogel and Aurelius are working together, making sure that Aurelius has enough clout in Ares so that, should Gavilan Ventures ever select another person to represent their interests on Ares' board of directors, Aurelius will have enough influence to remain on the board on his own merit. It is speculated that Nicholas Aurelius has been quietly picking up shares of his own, and that the shares he personally controls range between three and five percent (with those, and those of Gavilan Ventures, it is rumored that he now controls up to 17.2 percent of Ares' outstanding shares). It is also speculated by many in Ares that Aurelius has gained quite a bit of influence over former members of the Seraphim, the elite special-forces group that once belonged to Cross. This has done nothing but alienate many Knight Errant veterans and executives from Aurelius, and they still have memories of the vicious espionage and counterintelligence campaigns they ran against the Seraphim when they reported to Cross. What Ares did was almost like bringing together the former Russian KGB and the United States CIA under one roof. It's possible to make something like that work, but so far the process has been ugly. It won't be helped by the infusion of many former Lone Star assets from Seattle, who may have expressed loyalty to their new employer but still hold their own perspectives and ways of operating. To some degree, some of the Knight Errant-Lone Star rivalry has been moved in-house.

- With everything else going on in Ares, you have to wonder: Did Knight really attempt to assassinate Vogel in that LA Environmental Summit, or did Aurelius frame Knight to make Vogel more willing to accept him as an ally? Weirder things have happened, but if I were Vogel, I would be careful about Aurelius and his true intentions. Because between Knight and Aurelius, it seems that only Aurelius has gotten anything out of that assassination attempt.
- Sunshine
- The former Seraphim and Knight Errant want to pretend that they can play nicely with each other, but don't buy a single word of it. There's too much shared history for them to be anything but hostile. There are a lot of reprisals taking place that aren't



being reported to the board (if they are being reported, the board seems to want to turn a blind eye to it and pretend that they are still “one happy, corporate family”). Over the last year, three senior officers in Knight Errant were found dead in Seattle, Manhattan, and London. Although the scenes were set up to frame Saeder-Krupp, it was clearly the Seraphim getting payback for an op that those officers ran together over fifteen years ago in Québec. Shortly after that, three former Seraphim who had been integrated into Ares disappeared, and their bodies have yet to be found. Speculation is high that Knight Errant targeted those former Seraphim to avenge the deaths of their officers.

- Sticks

These power struggles at the top have done nothing but introduce dissent and mistrust amongst the subsidiaries and rival divisions of Ares. Communications between the different divisions have become much more fractured. Most subsidiaries and divisions will not provide full disclosure of their activities to another division if it is strongly supported by a rival major shareholder (especially if it appears that the other subsidiary or division will benefit greatly from the disclosure). These subsidiaries have also not been above giving a rival division false information to harm them and their reputation, bringing down their value to Ares. Many executives in one division will also not volunteer information to another division even when it could benefit the corporation as a whole, or help it to avoid a potential disaster (pinning blame for a failure on the appropriate spot is more important than avoiding failure these days). This infighting has led to gaps in information, which has resulted in orders not being filled correctly, contracts being breached by failures of a division or subsidiary to fulfill requirements of which they may not have been aware, and contracts being voided from not being approved and signed off on in a timely manner. There have even been major security breaches between the divisions and subsidiaries that shadowrunners have been all too happy to exploit. It's definitely good for our business, but not for theirs.

Many of the divisions and subsidiaries still resent the new structuring plan that Knight implemented, and they are upset about their loss of authority and autonomy. It has almost reached the point that Ares has ceased being one megacorporation and has devolved into three separate AA corporations, working under the same name but at cross-purposes and goals. It is true that other corporations have had problems with internal conflicts and power struggles between divisions and subsidiaries (Shiawase, for example). But instead of something happening to put an end to the rivalries and bring the corporation back in line, things seem to be getting worse for Ares. To support my case for Ares having dire internal problems that could be leading it to fray at the edges, I've got four news stories (which you may or may not have seen—once they occurred, Ares went on the PR offensive and got many of these stories buried between AR ads or got their coverage reduced to a very brief amount of time, meaning that many of these stories have already been forgotten by the memory-impaired public).

Headline #1: Maglev Train Disaster Raises Safety Issues

NBCNN News Net, April 18, 2073. *Manhattan, UCAS:* At 5:30 p.m. on March 13, 2073, Ares maglev commuter train #543 arriving into Manhattan from

Boston derailed thirteen kilometers away from Penn Station. Three hundred and eighty corporate and private commuters were onboard the train at the time of the accident. After sixteen hours of rescue operations by DocWagon and NYPD Inc., it was determined that two hundred and forty-six commuters were killed in the tragic derailment, and another one hundred and thirty-four commuters were either seriously or critically injured.

An initial on-site investigation at the time of the accident quickly ruled out potential sabotage or human error. Preliminary findings from the Corporate Court's investigation that were released today found negligence on the part of Ares Macrotechnology, specifically, Ares Manhattan, in both the construction and the maintenance of the track. The track suffered a catastrophic failure as the train passed over the compromised sections. According to the preliminary report issued by the Corporate Court, the track was constructed by Ares' Heavy Industry Division using improper and inferior materials that have been known to fail under pressure over time.

The investigation by the Corporate Court also revealed that maintenance logs submitted to the Corporate Court by Ares were found to have been deliberately altered to conceal the fact that Ares had not inspected the track or its sensors for over five years. Lawsuits are being filed from Renraku, Mitsuhama, and NeoNET, who lost personnel in that commuter train wreck. DocWagon and NYPD, Inc., are also petitioning the court to have their cases heard for repayment of the costs incurred for the rescue operations, which totals in the millions of nuyen.

Ares has assured the Corporate Court that a full internal investigation relating to this accident and the cover-up surrounding it is under way, and they will take proper, punitive actions against those responsible. Ares has also assured the public that full inspections of all of its track and tunnels is under way, and that if any deficiencies are found, they will be corrected.

The derailment of commuter train #543 is the worst train disaster in the UCAS since the Matrix Crash of 2064.

Headline #2: Spy Satellite Hacked

NewsNet, May 8, 2073. *Federal District of Colombia:*

A new UCAS spy satellite was allegedly hacked into by neo-anarchists, who have leaked classified imagery from that satellite of the front lines in the war between Aztlan and Amazonia onto the Matrix. The UCAS has condemned the attack by the neo-anarchists as being “irresponsible,” and has begun a Department of Justice investigation into finding the perpetrators. Both Aztlan and Amazonia have filed protests with the United Nations, citing that the stolen footage from the UCAS satellite has caused grave harm to their respective countries' war efforts.

Unnamed sources within the CIA have said that the leak was due to an exploitation of a security weakness in the programming of the Ares spy satellite. Due to this vulnerability, DeeCee insiders have informed NewsNet that President Colloton has directed the Department of

Defense to freeze any active defense contracts with Ares pending review and to re-evaluate any new contracts that may be in the process of being awarded to Ares.

Ares' Public Affairs office in Detroit told NewsNet that "it is corporate policy not to address any matter pertaining to classified business arrangements or operations with nation states such as the UCAS."

Headline #3: Ares Weapons Contract Lost Due to Infrastructure Failure in Europort

Sol Media, June 25, 2073. *Europort, United Netherlands:* A large Ares weapons shipment heading to Morocco was delayed when an Ares automated dock system failed and dumped crates filled with small arms and ammunition into the sea. This happened a week after an entire Ares shipment of armored vehicles was reported "stolen" by the automated dock system, only to be found misplaced in another Ares warehouse. Due to the ongoing difficulties that Ares has experienced in Europort, the government of Morocco has cancelled its contract with Ares and Knight Errant and has signed a three-year contract with Ares' long-time competitor, Saeder-Krupp. Ares personnel described the issues as being a consequence of "poor internal communication" and aging dock systems. Ares has pledged to retrain its personnel in maintaining appropriate communication with the dockworkers and has pledged to update its dock facilities with modern drones and computer nodes to prevent these delays from happening again.

Headline #4: New Ares Weapon Prototype Tests Poorly in Desert Wars

Pathfinder Media, July 14, 2073. *Desert Wars. Libyan Desert:* A new weapon prototype called the Ares Excalibur made its debut on the Desert Wars battlefield. Despite the early hype for this weapon, by all accounts the gun failed to live up to expectations.

"This weapon is utter crap," a female mercenary identified only as Black Mamba said to reporters. "I don't know what kind of lubricant Ares is putting into this gun, but it's definitely not meant for inhospitable climates. This [expletive deleted] gun jammed on me three times in two different battles. Also, there seems to be a problem with the smartgun system. It failed to eject the clip on command. I had to resort to ejecting the clip manually, which cost me several precious seconds that I could have been using to take out my opposition. That damn gun nearly got me killed!"

Other mercenary groups that have been allowed to test out the gun at Desert Wars have experienced similar difficulties with their weapons. In response to harsh criticisms that the Excalibur has been receiving during Desert Wars, a spokeswoman for Ares said, "We appreciate the feedback that we are hearing from our participants in Desert Wars. We will have our engineers and technicians examine the gun and the concerns that are being expressed about it. If there are any flaws in design or functionality, we will ensure they will be

resolved before the product is released to the public. In the end, the Ares Excalibur battle rifle will live up to the high expectations and standards that our customers have come to expect from all Ares products."

AZTLAN: A DEEPENING GLOBAL CRISIS?

Aztlan has seen its share of headlines over the past year since the start of the Aztlan-Amazonian war. From the brutality now playing itself out in and near Bogotá to the controversial remarks of the great dragon Hestaby before the United Nations' General Assembly three months ago, the Az-Am war keeps finding ways to get attention.

In the Aztechnology press release responding to Hestaby's speech, there was one line that continues to spawn conspiracy theories. That particular line read: "Even if there is some merit to Lady Hestaby's concerns about dragon discontent, Aztlan intends to, in the next few years, possess weapons and other capabilities to prevent incidents such as what happened in Cali from ever being able to happen again on Aztlan soil." Many were left to speculate what exactly those weapons and capabilities might be. There is also a question about how the lizards currently allied with Aztlan and Aztechnology are taking the news that their ostensible allies are actively plotting to undermine them. It would be quite natural for them to question whether they could trust Aztlan or Aztechnology in the long term. I've been forced to wonder how other nations are reacting to the news that a revolt from the great dragons could either be halted or discouraged completely by a technology that Aztlan is seeking to possess and control. And I've also wondered how the other megacorps are reacting to the news that one of their most reviled rivals might eventually come into possession of a significant technological edge against the dragons. Such an advantage could alter the balance of power between the various nations and megacorps as tension between the great dragons mounts and could ultimately determine who, in the future, develops into a new, world-defining superpower.

I'm afraid that this single line in this press release may signal the beginnings of a new global arms race of sorts, from nations and megacorps that will do anything in their power to avoid being left to the mercies of the dragons or Aztlan. These groups—national governments and megacorporations alike—would see this as a matter of national or corporate security and would frantically work to have strategies and weapons in place to deal with any future harm that might come from other weapons. The last thing they want is to be caught unprepared.

- That's assuming that nations and the corps don't already possess such technology (even if it is only in early stages of development). The dragons have been in the public consciousness since the first appearance of Ryumyo in 2011. Since that time, there have been several instances where a great dragon has ripped into a sprawl. For these groups not to be working on such technology would be ridiculous at best, negligent at worst. The only thing that could restrain the governments and megacorps from using such technology would be the fallout from the great dragons acting as a collective group seeking retribution against the nation or corp



that dared to harm one of their kind. Now that the great dragons are divided, perhaps we could start seeing the deployment of these weapons—if they in fact exist, and don't stand to backfire and kill those wielding them before any dragons are hurt.

On another note, I have to say that I'm really enjoying talking to you on this level.

- Plan 9
- That's not making me happy.
- Snopes

From what I have heard from my contacts in Aztlan, there has been a sizable increase in the number of runs being carried out against Aztlan and Aztechnology in the search for any solid paydata on these alleged “weapons and other capabilities.” Even as nations and megacorporations work to gather intelligence on what Aztlan may be building, nations such as the UCAS and CAS, along with most megacorporations (with the obvious exceptions of NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp), have begun their own secret programs to develop anti-dragon weapons to compete with Aztlan and Aztechnology. Should the great dragons learn of this (and there is no reason to believe they aren't already aware), it's possible that these programs will only encourage the dragons to find more efficient ways to kill us first.

- It's obvious that one of those capabilities that Aztlan was referring to was the Sextant of the Worlds. Rumor is that Aztlan obtained the sextant (after its adventure in DeeCee) and moved it down to Bogotá, where it could be researched by Pyramid Arcane Supplies. It is believed that Pyramid was in the process of developing a ritual, based on pre-Colombian artifacts, to fully activate the sextant. Unfortunately for Aztlan (and fortunately for the rest of us), the sextant was stolen. Again. The theory of how those artifacts don't like to stay in one place keeps receiving confirmation.
- Elijah
- Aztlan isn't the only one seeking the sextant. Sirrurg is also hunting for the artifact. He believes it will interact with his basic entropic abilities and allow him to create greater chaos, if you can believe. Some suggest that the sextant can amplify Sirrurg's natural abilities. The last time he put his natural ability to work, ten thousand people died. I can't even begin to imagine the horror that could come from Sirrurg combining his power with that of the sextant.
- Marcos
- Has anyone stopped to ask if this could be another ploy from Aztlan? I mean, this is from the same nation that leaked information to Amazonia that they were developing a secret project to alter the ecosystem around Bogotá with genetically engineered critters. They are the premier spin doctors on the planet, Horizon or no Horizon. This could be the same ploy, to lure the other megacorps to do something stupid.
- Dr. Spin
- This is no ploy. I sent a runner team to investigate a Genetique facility outside of Guadalajara a few weeks ago. I had heard the

clinic was working on some bleeding-edge tech, and I wanted to see what it was. And I found out their big project: manatech, designed to target draconic genetic structures. Now, from what my runners found, the proposed, contact-vector manatech is being designed to rapidly alter and damage a dragon's DNA, making it highly susceptible to mutations from exposure to sudden and violent bursts of mana (i.e., spells). So, if a dragon gets hit with this manatech, spells cast at it could cause tumors and harmful mutations to erupt throughout its body; if injured, it could prevent the dragon from successfully healing itself, and might make the injury worse from ruptured blood vessels and an inability for the blood to clot. From my reading of the research specs, this manatech is at least three years away from a workable prototype. And I'm not guaranteeing it will work at all. But once Aztlan has it, dragons might be less of a problem for them.

- Cosmo

This potential global arms race may just be the beginning for Aztlan. During Hestaby's speech, Hestaby warned the world about Sirrurg's next target: Teotihuacan. In the weeks and months that followed, there was no such attack from Sirrurg, as Aztlan and Aztechnology rapidly moved in their warrior classes and other magical assets to be at the ready for an appearance by the Destroyer. Although disaster seemed to have been averted by Hestaby's warning, my sources close to the eco-terrorist group GreenWar have informed me that the great dragon has moved further north, possibly into the city of Roswell. Those who are geographically impaired should know that Roswell is in easy striking distance of both the PCC and the CAS. With vast, open spaces in which Sirrurg and his supporters can hide, locating him and his group could prove problematic. More ominous still is what my contact told me that Sirrurg had told his followers a few days before he moved up north: that if the world were going to call him a “war criminal,” he was going to work very hard to truly earn that title. And the dragon known as the Destroyer knows a thing or two about earning titles.

Aztlan and Aztechnology have obviously been made aware of Sirrurg's movements, if only by rumor. They are currently in the process of sending a large number of their warrior classes along with their Jaguar and Leopard special forces units up to Roswell to hunt for the great dragon before he causes a major international incident and plunges Aztlan into a two-front war with Pueblo, the CAS, or both. From what I have been told, both Aztlan President Enrico Silva and Aztechnology CEO Flavia de la Rosa have held multiple conferences with the PCC Board of Directors and with CAS President Ramsay McMulkin to apprise them of the situation. Neither the Pueblo nor the CAS were happy to learn that large numbers of Aztlan and Aztechnology special forces were gathering in Roswell. Due to the Pueblo's unique situation—with the large population of former Ute nationals that are sympathetic to Aztlan, and the fact that these nationals are in the process of organizing a no-confidence vote in the board—the Pueblo government appears willing to cut Aztlan some slack on a matter that they realize is out of Aztlan's control. The CAS, meanwhile, has not been so understanding. My sources have reported that President McMulkin has taken a hardline stance with Aztlan and Aztechnology and has told them in no uncertain terms that if Sirrurg attacks them, the CAS will hold



INCOMING FEED.....



Aztlan responsible and there would be war. To further aggravate the situation, the CAS has moved additional military units into the area and has begun carrying out “training exercises” along the Texas border, exercises that can only be described as provocative. A few days ago, the CAS set up mock Aztlan tanks and armored carriers and demonstrated its capabilities and accuracy with its supply of Loki canisters. The CAS happily reported that from that exercise, they had a 98 percent kill rate with the mock armored vehicles and tanks that were in the kill radius, a rate significantly higher than the average kill rate for most Loki canister systems on the market today.

- Yeah, it's really not that hard to get a higher kill rate from blowing up stationary targets. And who knows what else the CAS did to manipulate its results? Other than the report being used as bluster to antagonize Aztlan, I'm not impressed. And I'm sure Aztlan isn't either.
- Kane
- I wonder if it's a coincidence that, in the same week that the CAS released those findings, Aztlan commissioned its first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the *Huey Tlatoani*, and announced that it, along with several Aztechnology naval vessels, would be sailing from San Diego toward the Gulf of Mexico. I'm sure that won't help to ease tensions any.
- Picador

Despite the increased number of special forces hunting Sirrurg in Roswell, Aztlan so far has not been publicly baited

to respond to the provocative gestures made by the CAS. My fellow researchers and I have heard that Aztlan is in the process of searching for alternative means to deal with the CAS' aggression instead of initiating full-out war, including making contact with extremist groups such as Warpath and allowing them to wage a proxy war for them.

When the Year of the Comet and the second Matrix Crash happened, many small-time extremist groups like Warpath receded from public view. For those of you here on JackPoint who are too young to remember Warpath (man, I feel old—now I know how FastJack and Bull feel), it was a mixed group of Native Americans from tribes that had claims on lands still inside the UCAS and the CAS. They were outraged that those governments never had to cede their sacred lands back to the NAN following the Ghost Dance (including Apache, Cherokee, and Chocktav, along many others). When members of these tribes demanded that the NAN and the Sovereign Tribal Council do something to help them reclaim their lands, the NAN ended up turning a deaf ear to their plight in favor of securing their own victories (and their own prized lands). Without getting the help they desperately wanted from their neighbors, extremist groups like Warpath begin to take matters into their own hands, starting with a ritual attack against a former Native American casino in Connecticut in 2040. Following the attack, the NAN and the Sovereign Tribal Council turned on Warpath, denying any involvement with them. Infuriating the movement even further, the NAN and the Sovereign Tribal Council appeared to actively cooperate with the UCAS government's investigation of the attack, resulting in a couple of arrests.

THE POWERS THAT BE



WARPATH LEADERS

Posted by: Kay St. Irregular

Snopes mentioned that Aztlan has made contact with the remnants of Warpath. Below are three current leaders of this extremist group who may prove to be important in its resurgence—or lead it to conflict, possible disaster, and subsequent collapse.

Wadiskay “Dark Fury” Smythe

Wadiskay “Dark Fury” Smythe is well known to the CAS. He is currently sixth on the Confederation of American States’ Top 10 Most Wanted list. Even after Warpath faded into obscurity, he and a few close allies continued waging a campaign of terror against the Anglos who occupied the former tribal lands of the Lipan Apache and the Plains Apache peoples. He is accused of killing as many as twenty-five CAS citizens and is believed to have killed four Lone Star cops who tried to pursue him. There is currently a one-million-nuyen bounty for the successful capture of Smythe. There are also active warrants for his arrest in the UCAS for the crimes he committed in the early 2050s when Warpath was still active. Smythe is believed to be fifty-three years old, and he has been active in the Texas region.

Jacali “Retribution” Young

After Aztlan approached Smythe to reconstitute Warpath, the first person he approached to be one of his lieutenants was Jacali “Retribution” Young. Young has continued to be a strong activist in the CAS for Native American issues, agitating for the return of Native American artifacts and remains as well as the complete excavation of former United States re-education centers inside the CAS territory. Because of Young, sixty deaths of Native Americans in the re-education centers were determined to be homicides. He managed to get the CAS to pursue the murders, and the remaining guards from the re-education centers were convicted and imprisoned.

Young is haunted by the fact that many guards who were responsible for so many more injustices during that period of American history have already died, thereby escaping justice for their brutality. Smythe allegedly promised Young that he would find justice for the survivors and the family members of those camps. Young is currently obsessed with finding surviving materials that may help Warpath put together another Ghost Dance. As such, raids in Denver and Cheyenne have become more frequent. There is a very good chance that Young’s activities have piqued the interest of Ghostwalker, but depending on how the white wyrm sides in the conflict with the other great dragons, he may allow Warpath’s activities to go uninterrupted, or he may try to strike a deal with them to ensure that Denver receives no fallout in the impending terrorist attacks.

Isi “Raging Waters” Black

Isi “Raging Waters” Black was another original member of Warpath. In 2056, when the extremist group became inactive, he had his records forged and moved to the Pueblo Corporate Council, where he lived in obscurity until Smythe contacted him a few months ago and recruited him back into Warpath. During his time in the PCC, Black is believed to have infiltrated the tribal police and hid from his past life by becoming a law enforcement officer for Pueblo. Black is believed to have stayed in the service of the PCC for fourteen years before leaving his job for unknown reasons. During his time in Pueblo, Black became a decorated officer under the assumed name of Ahote Bennett and reached the rank of Captain. It is believed Black’s experience in law enforcement will make Warpath that much harder to track. Isi “Raging Waters” Black is a known shaman and is believed to have contacts with several Native American shamans who could be sympathetic to Warpath’s agenda—shamans who might be powerful enough and willing to undertake another Ghost Dance.

Disillusioned by this perceived betrayal and hurting for financial and logistical support during a time when recruits and nuyen were being siphoned off by larger organizations such as the New Revolution and Winternight, Warpath had little choice but to fade into the background. Now, in 2073, Aztlan spies have been reaching out, looking for the remnants of this old group (and others) inside the CAS to see if they could rejuvenate this radical movement. It appears that Aztlan has managed to contact the remaining activists inside Warpath and has suggested an alliance. Lubricated by a steady flow of weapons and nuyen, the wheels of partnership have been set in motion toward the eventual goal of Warpath renewing its attacks against the CAS. My contacts inside the CAS have told me that there have already been at least five transfers of weapons, gear, and nuyen to Warpath from Aztlan, creating a small stockpile of weapons. Warpath has slowly started to rebuild and ramp up its recruiting efforts, targeting specific disillusioned Native American populations such as the Utes and former members of the Tsimshian. So far, the recruiting drive

has been disturbingly effective, allowing Warpath to build a new group of activists ten times as large as they had back in 2040, and from all accounts, this terrorist group has set its sights on Atlanta.

- Warpath is on Aztlan’s payroll for the express purpose of attacking the CAS, but they will not hesitate to attack targets of opportunity within the UCAS with their new weapons, gear, and recruits. There is still a lot of territory in the UCAS that Warpath feels should have been turned over to the tribes. This situation can easily escalate in Warpath members are caught inside of the UCAS. Though I’m not entirely sure Aztlan is aware of what they have awakened, or even if they care so long as it serves their interests.
- Kay St. Irregular

It would seem from the way things are trending with Aztlan that conflict between Aztlan and the CAS (at very least) is looking much more likely, especially if the CAS figures out that Aztlan is

funding Warpath. So, to sum up: Tension between the dragons is rising; bug spirits seem to be plotting some big news; and Aztlan is feeling backed into a corner and is looking for a way to lash out. Do you have a bunker? Because the way things are going, this would be a pretty good time to invest in one.

HUMAN NATION: END GAME SOLUTION FOR METAHUMANS?

I might shock some readers (I'm looking at you here, Sunshine) when I say that the human supremacist group Human Nation bears an eerie similarity to the Horizon corporation. The extremist group and the megacorporation both desire to be social engineers, looking to improve the quality of our society. Horizon frequently targets Matrix memes that they see as being dangerous (and oftentimes they're quite right, especially in the case of ideas seeping out from groups like the Cult of the Seventh Seal, Atlantis Rebirth, and Alamos 20K). Once a particularly dangerous meme is identified, Horizon works either to alter that meme to make it more palatable to mainstream culture (according to Horizon's definition of "mainstream") or to eliminate it altogether. In that sense, Horizon is playing god with our civilization by trying to control what it should and should not be, and what we can or cannot think. In essence, Horizon and its Horizon Project are working to become the world's thought police. (Don't even get me started on Horizon's corporate catchphrase: "We know what you think." How creepy is that?)

- You may have a valid point about Horizon taking social engineering to extreme proportions. When I worked for Horizon, everything inside the corporate structure had been completely engineered for the sake of efficiency, from their "internal personas" down to their business models, the structure of their internal promotion system, and the social prestige system they've set up for their employees. *Nothing* happens by accident in Horizon, and nothing happens that doesn't feel controlled. You can forget about anything happening *naturally* in that place. If it seems like something out of the ordinary is going on in Horizon, chances are that those particular circumstances were engineered weeks or months in advance to allow the supposedly random event to happen. But it's dangerous (and inaccurate) to say that Horizon and the Human Nation are so similar. Unlike Human Nation, Horizon is extremely metahuman-friendly. Some of their most highly ranked managers and executives are metahumans (and not just elves, either, as Human Nation would like for us to believe). CEO Gary Cline is an ork, for ghost's sake. Another ork, Victor Ngô, became vice president of Horizon Asia last year, and he's now one of the world's wealthiest and most prominent metahumans.
- Sunshine
- Or, to put it shorter, sometimes you can use certain tactics for ill, but that doesn't mean some of those same tactics can't be used for good. Or at least, for not as bad.
- Dr. Spin

The Human Nation's modus operandi is eerily similar to Horizon's, except that instead of working with ideas and thought as Horizon does, the Human Nation tries to work their social engineering on people directly. No one knows for certain how long the Human Nation has been around, but after Goblinization hit, certain groups of privileged humans began organizing and looking for ways to eliminate the "evolutionary dead-ends" (i.e., metahumans and the rest of society that they consider to be "impoverished").

In the 2050s, it is believed (though not definitively confirmed) that this extremist group began to open medical clinics around the globe, seeking to offer affordable medical services to impoverished communities (poverty and the poor have also never been high up on the list of desirable characteristics for this group of aristocratic megalomaniacs). These "clinics" also happened to reside in neighborhoods heavily populated by metahumans (go figure). The clinics (always set up under dummy corporations or shell companies) promised "extremely affordable planned parenthood services, prenatal healthcare, reproductive services, and affordable emergency healthcare." That, as it turns out, was code. At the clinics, you would find high levels of metahuman abortions, metahuman sterilizations, miscarriages and still births, and infant mortality. There was also a high incidence of serious medical problems with metahuman children born at those clinics, usually resulting in them dying before they reached puberty—which, of course, prevented them from procreating. The metahumans who came in to seek out the clinics' "emergency services" often had a much higher risk of dying than if they had gone to a regular, corporate hospital (or even a standard street clinic).

- Or just staying on the fraggin' street.
- Mihoshi Oni

By the late 2060s, most metahuman-rights groups started catching on to these practices and began petitioning local governments to have these clinics shut down. Some sprawls that were more metahuman-friendly shut down these clinics immediately, while others allowed them to remain open but placed them under tight supervision by the local Department of Health and (Meta)Human Services. Some sprawls (like Seattle) have turned a blind eye to these clinics, and have allowed them to continue operating openly (I mean, hey, they're not only solving the "metahuman problem," they're also taking care of the "SINless problem"—killing two birds with one stone, right?). In those sprawls that have done nothing, ORC and Sons of Sauron have taken steps to get these clinics shut down (such as firebombing them). There are currently four suspected Human Nation clinics believed to still be in operation in Seattle; all of them are located near well-known entrances to the Ork Underground in Downtown Seattle. The names of these suspected Human Nation clinics are the White Rose Medical Center, Compassion Healthcare Group, Hope International, and Families First Medical Group.

Although many of the Human Nation's medical clinics have gone the way of the Universal Brotherhood chapterhouses, the Human Nation has not ceased its relentless pursuit to rid the world of "genetic failures." From what I have discovered, the Human Nation may be attempting to get their supporters elected



or appointed into public offices, or placed in strategic positions around the globe. Many of us believe that Governor Brackhaven may have been among the first of a new batch of sympathetic figures to be elected to office in recent years. Other suspected Human Nation operatives include Atlanta Mayor Evelyn Granger, UCAS Representative (from Brooklyn) Anthony Powell, UCAS Representative (from Boston) Trevor Simms, CAS Senator David Stahlman, Board Member Cha'Risa Dove (Pueblo Corporate Council), Member of Parliament Joseph Carmichael IV (London), UCAS Supreme Court Chief Justice Sydney Shaw, and Member of Parliament Victoria Williams (London). Many fear these alleged plants by the Human Nation could be used to roll back certain legal protections and rights that groups like MOM and ORC have fought so hard to win over the years. Worse, these officials could also be used to reignite the same type of antagonism that brought about the Night of Rage in 2039.

Perhaps the most worrisome alleged operative in this new group of Human Nation racists is a scientist rather than a politician: Doctor Amanda Ashborne, director of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, CAS. Having such an operative in their pocket would open up the CDC's resources to the Human Nation and could make their eugenic attacks against metahumans that much more aggressive and dangerous.

- In Seattle, Metroplex Governor Brackhaven has been doing everything in his power to shut down the Ork Underground, even as their residents organize themselves into a movement to make the Underground an official district of the city. Brackhaven (with his cronies in Humanis, Alamos 20K, and Human Nation) has been doing everything in his power to intimidate and to break this movement, throwing up legal obstacles while also working in more underhanded ways. While the organizing effort continues to stand firm, Brackhaven has been doing everything in his power to stall a vote. I wouldn't expect any movement on this issue for at least another six months; even if the movement is able to get their issue to a council vote, Brackhaven has said he will veto the measure. The Underground organizers would have to work on the city council to get Brackhaven's veto overridden, which is no easy task. Should there ever come a day that the Ork Underground is made an official district, expect violence from groups like Alamos 20K and behind-the-scenes action from the Human Nation.
- Kay St. Irregular
- If the Human Nation truly wants to advance in the political realm, it'll have to deal with groups like the Black Lodge, the Illuminates of the New Dawn, and the New Druidic Movement first. Those groups don't like to share power, and the Human Nation resents the Awakened, so there's very little ground for cooperation between them. Which, in the long term, is probably good news for us. If they are so focused on hurting each other, it'll (hopefully) slow down whatever plots they intend to carry out against the rest of us.
- Man-of-Many-Names

These alleged Human Nation operatives and their allies may not be our only cause of concern. Friends of mine have noticed an alarming trend in the number of retired metahuman shadowrunners who tried to settle down and tried to start a family,

only to find out that they have been made sterile by some external source. These individuals (no names here—I've sworn to protect their identities) have told me that that they were never (knowingly) exposed to anything that would do that type of damage to them, though with the world being the way it is, it's difficult to know just what pollutants or radiation people may have encountered in their journeys. Blood tests on my metahuman friends showed that the cause was most likely something they had ingested over a long period of time. I have done some digging and found that the runners had spent a lot of time at Dante's Inferno, Matchsticks, and Club Penumbra in Seattle for various meets with their Mr. Johnsons. This was especially true in the last couple years of their careers, when they tried to stay local and restrict themselves to runs in and near the city.

Matching the times up to when these metahuman runners were at these clubs and who was employed there at the time, I have found a disturbing trend—the turnover of humans employed at these clubs is much higher than that of metahumans. What's more, some humans seemed to have hopped from employment at one club to employment at another (occasionally using an assumed name at their new job). None of these humans are employed at the clubs any more, and any trails they might have left behind them have run dry. The damage, though, seems to have already been done. Metahuman infertility in Seattle seems to be hitting rates higher than in other cities, though statistics on this sort of thing are inexact at best. I haven't been able to find any such pattern in human fertility.

There's one exception—Manhattan. Infertility among metahumans seems to be growing there, and the thriving club scene there might be playing a role in it. If Manhattan is following the same pattern that we have observed in Seattle, it appears that the Human Nation places operatives in specific clubs or bars for a year or two, and they spend their time dosing the food and drinks of metahuman customers with low levels of a chemical substance that eventually causes infertility. It's not the most exact method—it only works on repeat customers—but enough people visit their clubs time and time again that the strategy has some effect, especially if the operatives are consistent about dosing every metahuman they see. There is not much solid evidence connecting these people to the Human Nation, but the circumstantial evidence is pretty damning—the Human Nation is one of the few hate groups with the chemical know-how needed to pull this operation off.

- Forget the chemical knowledge—what this job requires is a baroque imagination. I mean, if you want metahumans gone, why not just take out metahumans? If you've got access to their food, poison 'em, instead of slowly making them infertile. Really—isn't this just overly complicated?
- Hard Exit
- Maybe, but you have to think like a Human Nation operative to understand this. Remember, in their minds they're the good guys. They're fighting for dignity of the human species, as contrasted to the savagery and baseness of metahumans (remember, I'm recreating their thoughts, not sharing mine). If they just go around offing metahumans, though, you get some cognitive dissonance—how can they be the standard-bearers of civilization



if they're randomly offing people? But sterilization takes no one's life—it just cuts off a genetic line that shouldn't have existed in the first place. So in your mind, you go from serial killing piece of shit to corrector of biological mistakes. It's a lot easier to get recruits for that second job.

- Sunshine
- Maybe, but if you run that serial killer of metahumans pennant up the flagpole, you'll find a disturbing number of people willing to salute.
- Mihoshi Oni
- They're not confining their activities to nightclubs. A couple of weeks ago, I was hired by a runner team that had lost a couple of people when they sought medical help from a clinic along the Aztlan/CFS border. They were suspicious of the medical personnel there; the biomonitor readings they had of their people suggested that their injuries were survivable just prior to them going into surgery, but they both died on the table. So, I managed to go undercover at that clinic, and I found two of the human street docs intentionally fucking up medical procedures on metahuman runners to make their deaths look like they were sustained from their injuries ("nicked aorta" my ass). After that, I made sure that they received a very special house call from Tamanous. Rest in pieces, fuckers.
- Butch
- Doping food and drinks of shadowrunners is a risky proposition, as you never know who might have improved senses, either through magical or technological means. Whatever chemical compound these people were using must incorporate some sophisticated masking agents. It would be interesting to run tests on those tainted foods to see what methods they are using. I'm guessing people might pay a lot for that information.
- Beaker

By this point, you must be thinking that between the great dragons, bug spirits, the Corporate Court and individual megacorporations, Aztlan, and now the Human Nation—surely we've gotten through the entire list of major threats to the safety and freedom of metahumans everywhere, right? My response to that would be: "But wait! There's more!" Even though the Human Nation is dabbling in politics, and Horizon wants to control the way we think, I still haven't really touched on the subject of shadow governments, a favorite conspiracy theory of most conspiracy theorists. (That and aliens, but I'm not touching that last one right now. I avoid them when I can, though as we'll see later, it's not always possible.) And in my opinion, there are no greater sources for conspiracy theories dealing with shadow governments in 2073 than the two shadowy groups known as the Black Lodge and the Illuminates of the New Dawn.

THE BLACK LODGE AND THE IOND: A NEW WORLD ORDER?

Only a few months ago, the DeeCee sprawl witnessed the unforgiving nature of a magical accident in all of its raw and uncontrolled fury. Buildings were leveled, roads and bridges were torn asunder, historical monuments were damaged, four hundred and eighty people were killed, and nearly six hundred more people went missing, believed to have been sucked into the destabilized Dunkelzahn Rift after it had come into astral contact with three very powerful artifacts that had been carelessly brought into the city by a couple of local magical groups. Many people on the Matrix since that time pegged the magical groups involved as being the Black Lodge and the Illuminates of the New Dawn (IOND).

- Let's not revise history here. The Draco Foundation also played a role in that disaster. If you blame the IOND and the Black Lodge for bringing the artifacts into the city and fighting over them, you also have to place some of the blame on the Draco Foundation as well for trying to intercept and remove these artifacts from the custody of these magical groups. In doing so, they placed the entire city at risk, and they're just as likely to have caused the disaster if any of their assets at the time caused an accident with those magical devices as they were in transit. We will never know what would have happened if the Draco Foundation didn't try to interfere.
- Axis Mundi

With so much death and destruction surrounding this single instance of misused magic, is there any wonder why I fear these magical groups that seek to accumulate too much magical power for themselves? Is there any wonder why we fear people who shroud their activities and their motives, and conceal their plots for bringing about a new world order under their own shadow regimes? Is there any wonder why we are concerned with exposing these groups that, without any sort of oversight from anyone, could possibly have the power to cause a disaster of proportions not seen since the Ghost Dance? What happened in DeeCee is evidence that our fears are indeed well founded. What happened in that incident proves that these conspiratorial groups and their agendas cannot be trusted, and the sooner that these plots are uncovered and unraveled and the individuals behind them are revealed to the rest of the world, the safer we will all be from these types of abuses of magic.

The Black Lodge is perhaps the more dangerous and sinister of these two magic groups. Black Lodge members disguise themselves as pillars of our society. They masquerade as corporate executives and managers, philanthropists, high-ranking government officials, military officers, clergy, law enforcement and security personnel, socialites, and celebrities. These individuals claim to have loyalty to the organizations that they have permeated, but their only true loyalty lies with the Black Lodge and manipulating circumstances to allow the Black Lodge to have unrivaled political control across the globe. Their infiltration of all levels of society seems to be as insidious as that of bug spirits, allowing them to remain anonymous within the sea of metahumanity.



To give you an idea of just how deeply entrenched in our institutions the Black Lodge is, we just have to look at the activities of a small cabal of members of Congress in DeeCee. Recently, it was revealed through a secret recording released on ShadowSea that seven members of the UCAS Congress are active members of the Black Lodge. These members were pursuing four world-famous artifacts for their secret society (shortly before DeeCee spiraled out of control when the Dunkelzahn Rift exploded in size and threatened to send the entire sprawl into a different metaplane). That information never made it past ShadowSea or JackPoint, due in large part to the Black Lodge exercising its vast political influence to kill the story and to make all public references to the recording disappear.

Even an investigation into those specific members of Congress by the UCAS Department of Justice was dropped weeks later (despite conclusive evidence that they perjured themselves when they entered office by declaring themselves not to be Awakened). Those involved in the conspiracy to move the Phaistos Disc and Shantaya's Compass through the Federal District of Columbia included: UCAS Speaker of the House Joseph Ellis, UCAS Senate Majority Leader Jennifer Henry, UCAS Senate President Pro Tem Nathaniel Sherman, soon-to-be-former UCAS House Majority Leader Samantha Payne, UCAS House Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Franklin, UCAS House Member Thomas Lincoln, and UCAS House Member Samuel Ruthledge. And a frightening fact about these individuals: Almost all of them have been working up on Capitol Hill for twenty years, if not longer. One has to wonder, with that much political power at their grasp, what exactly have they been doing within the UCAS government to benefit the Black Lodge?

- Let me spin this out a little, because I'm concerned Snopes' caution will keep him from exploring the full implications here. Questions we should be asking include: Do they have access to the federal prisons? Are they recruiting Awakened federal prisoners to do their dirty work? Has the Black Lodge appropriated witness protection efforts for themselves to strategically place their operatives throughout the UCAS? Are they siphoning off UCAS taxpayer money to enrich Black Lodge coffers? What magical reagents are they siphoning away from the UCAS government, including those that may have been confiscated by its law enforcement branches from magical threats? What mystical secrets are they able to gather from the wealth of artifacts contained in, say, the Smithsonian?

Further, if Black Lodge members have infiltrated UCAS Congress, where else might they be? There could be Black Lodge members sitting on the Corporate Court, sitting on the Council of Denver, sitting on the Board of Directors for the Pueblo Corporate Council, working in intelligence communities around the world, sitting in the United Kingdom's Parliament, etc. This could go as deep as you can imagine.

- Plan 9

There is no telling how much more influential and powerful the Black Lodge has become from the efforts of these seven members of Congress. It is rumored that the Black Lodge has close to ten thousand members in lodges scattered in nations and cities around the world. This means that complete defeat and

eradication of the Black Lodge (like what happened to the New Revolution) seems improbable at this point. But unless we want to see more incidents similar to what happened in DeeCee, we have no alternative: We must try to hunt these figures down before they do more harm.

- Get bent. They want power? They want to dominate the world? So does just about every other group that's ever employed me. I'm doing this for a living, not so I can be enlisted in whatever crazy save-the-world scheme people dream up.
- Hard Exit

In addition to the large number of members that the Black Lodge has at its disposal, it's rumored to have been around for generations, even prior to the Awakening, spending centuries building up vast reservoirs of knowledge and skill. Some believe that the Black Lodge itself could stretch back centuries, in various incarnations. There are even theories that suggest that the Black Lodge goes all the way back to the Fourth World (which would be most impressive, as the Black Lodge is believed not to have any elven members, let alone immortal elves, within its ranks). Many suspect that a significant portion of its members were born into the Black Lodge, and that many of its members come from families with a significant pedigree.

- Speaking of elves and the Black Lodge, interesting events occurred during the Night of Rage in 2039. While the streets were filled with metahuman blood, many aristocratic families that seemed to fit the Black Lodge profile, specifically those with elven heirs or elven offspring, reported them missing through North America, Europe, and Asia. It seemed odd that only privileged families with elven children saw this spike in the disappearances of their children. Companies like Lone Star eventually wrote them off as casualties of the Night of Rage, despite never finding any bodies. I'm thinking it was the Black Lodge's way of cleaning up their bloodlines and making sure those "disgraces" never had the opportunity to interfere with their plans. The Black Lodge has always feared the elven nations and their inhabitants, seeing them as competition to their plans for global domination. If records could be found of those aristocratic families who lost children, I would imagine that would give the shadows a good bead on some members of the Black Lodge.
- Fianchetto
- Crash 2.0 took care of many of those records, but who knows? You could get lucky. If the Black Lodge executed a purge of elven children belonging to its members during the Night of Rage, I'm guessing that if any of its members had elven relations (i.e., lovers or illegitimate children) since that time, they probably purged them during the chaos of the Year of the Comet or Crash 2.0. It might be worth checking whether there are any recent records of any suspicious disappearances during those two periods as well. Those two major incidents seem like ripe opportunities for the Black Lodge to try to erase some of its "mistakes."
- Sunshine

It is rumored that one of the qualities of the Black Lodge that has allowed it to thrive has been its highly successful efforts





at recruiting members from other secret societies and adapting the trappings and the traditions of those secret societies into its own practices. These groups include the Freemasons, the New Druidic Movement, the Knights Templar, and the Illuminati. The Black Lodge seems to be highly adaptable in more than one way; it is one of the few magic lodges that actively recruits hermetic mages, shamans, and adepts from different traditions, and it is capable of successfully integrating those differences into its magical paradigm. It has become stronger for it.

- If the Black Lodge has been around for so long, and it has all the power that Snopes is suggesting, then I don't see how the threat it poses could be increasing. If they're already running things, shouldn't they already have done something by now to reveal their nefarious intentions? If our world is as bad as it will ever get under their rule, then I say, "meh." I think we can deal with what we have now. It could always be worse.
- Slamm-O!
- Having people in positions of influence is not the same as controlling the world. When people spend time gathering large amounts of power, it is because their final goal requires it. The more power they get, the more frightening it is to contemplate how they will use it.
- Man-of-Many-Names

Some people might see the answer to the Black Lodge in the form of the Illuminates of the New Dawn (IOND), a rival magic group that has a significant power base of its own and has on many occasions clashed with the Black Lodge over recruits, resources, artifacts, and even magic sites. One thing that makes the Illuminates more palatable than the Black Lodge is that their group is more open about their philosophies and transparent about their membership. The IOND has even supported a legitimate political party (the New Century party) that ran Dr. Rozlyn Hernandez as their candidate for the UCAS presidency in 2057. During her run for president, Hernandez released a book called *Legacy of the American Dream*. In that book, Hernandez (who ended up becoming the High Magus for the IOND) laid out many of the basic philosophies of the Illuminates. Included in these philosophies is the group's core belief that magic and technology must be brought together and made to work in harmony to push metahuman society forward and to help metahumans reach the "pinnacle of evolution," which would ultimately open our world up to a new "Age of Reason and Enlightenment." Many people see this as a laudable goal, but the devil is in the details. Combined with the fact that many of the members of the Illuminates are distinguished professors or researchers involved in academic circles around North America and the world (such as Georgetown University), and that their ideas and their theories can be found in highly respected academic journals, it is easy to see how most people (mistakenly) see this magical group as being innocuous. But appearing innocuous by no means makes this a harmless magic group.



THE BLACK LODGE

Purpose: The Black Lodge is fanatically devoted to global domination. It believes that its guidance and wisdom is the proper way to govern, and it has been attempting to do so from behind the scenes for years. The Black Lodge has existed in various incarnations for centuries. When the Awakening happened in 2011, the Black Lodge was among the first organizations prepared to deal with the return of magic. There are public lodges, but unless someone is recruited into their ranks, outsiders do not learn about its true goals. The Black Lodge has countless chantries scattered all over the world, including a chantryhouse near the Georgetown University campus.

Members: 9,331 initiates, broken down into 1,333 lodges worldwide

Strictures: Attendance, Exclusive Membership, Oath, Obedience, Secrecy

Resources/Dues: Luxury/None

Patron: The Black Council

Description and Customs: The Black Lodge is organized into five tiers, with lodges of seven Awakened members assigned to each tier. The fifth (and highest) tier is the Lodge of Merlin (also called the Black Council). It consists of one lodge and is run by the leader of the Black Lodge, who is known as the Penultimate Master (the identity and purpose of the "Ultimate Master" suggested by this title is as yet unknown). The other six members of the Lodge of Merlin are in charge of subordinate lodges, which are called the Lodges of Morgana (the fourth tier). Each Lodge of Morgana coordinates Black Lodge activity on a different continent. A Lodge of Mordred (the third tier) coordinates Black Lodge activities in each country. A Lodge of Rasputin (the second tier) is assigned to every major city. And the Lodges of Nostradamus (the first tier) are the foot soldiers of the organization, consisting of the youngest and least experienced initiates. Lodges can be governed by either mages or shamans. Mages are referred to as "Judges," while shamans are referred to as "Guides."

- The Black Lodge and the Illuminates have so far limited themselves to skirmishes in their shadow war with each other, especially in locations such as DeeCee, which is filled with artifacts and sites that neither side wants to lose as collateral damage. For example, the Black Lodge fervently defends the pentagram that was built into the DeeCee streets around the White House by the Freemasons. The Illuminates fervently defend the Washington Monument as their power site. But should there ever come a time when the Black Lodge and the Illuminates abandon restraint in their fight with one another, the magical fallout would be devastating to the native population, and it would utterly wipe out the Illuminates. The IOND is rumored to have only 700 members in its inner circles, as opposed to the Black Lodge's ten

thousand members. So, if people are counting on the IOND to stand up and eliminate the Black Lodge all by themselves, they should reconsider that idea.

- Jimmy No

The first hint of danger I picked up about the IOND is their research itself. A vast majority of Illuminate researchers have no concept of restraint in their research. They tend to push the boundaries of science and thaumaturgy beyond normal (and reasonable) limitations for the sake of achieving progress. For example, three Illuminate professors were fired from the Massachusetts Institute for Technology and Thaumaturgy when it was discovered that they were attempting to use magic to imprint clones with "mystical copies" of a person's essence, thereby theoretically creating completely functional clones of an individual (as opposed to simple wimp clones). Two months ago, three professors from the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research were fired when their experiments to push cybermancy past their limits resulted in the creation of truly insane and dangerous abominations in their laboratory. The creatures ended up killing eighteen people before a Knight Errant SWAT team tracked them down and destroyed them. I obtained information from a source at CalTech that a research proposal was denied to an Illuminate professor who wanted to explore newly discovered metaplanes that the school had deemed too dangerous for any metahuman to enter, let alone explore. Sources I know who have access to the IOND's grand lodge in Foggy Bottom in DeeCee have informed me that the lodge has approved efforts to attempt to summon several spirits of man that could "give insight and a historical perspective" into events that have occurred in the course of metahuman history. Spirits that could include such tyrants and dictators as the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II, Genghis Kahn, and even Vlad Dracul.

Obviously, these are not cautious people; they are magicians and researchers who are reckless in their scientific and thaumaturgical methods. There is another issue of concern with the Illuminates of the New Dawn: Due to their integration into academic circles, they have access to state-of-the-art resources and equipment at many research universities. Additionally, their influence on university campuses around the world, such as MIT&T, the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research, Georgetown University, Vanderbilt University, Oxford, and Duke University, will have a lasting impact on the up-and-coming elite of the world, influence that may lead them to become Illuminates themselves, or at the very least, train them to carry out lines of research that are as risky and as dangerous as those of the IOND. Their deep integration into academia may prove just as dangerous for us in the long run as the Black Lodge and its infiltration of other institutions around the world.

- I agree with Snopes. I've seen some classified designs from a few of their engineers for ways they want to push the metahuman body past its current limitations. I can't help but think that a metahuman body, if exposed to this magic/technology hybrid, would start falling apart within six months—and that's with constant, genetic restorative techniques and magical healing being applied to the body just to keep it going. The maximum time someone could use this technology would be about a year.

Then their hearts would explode. There are lines in research that should not be crossed. And it would appear that these fanatics do not know where those lines are. And even if the Illuminates were to come out with some revolutionary technology, this group would not give society the time it would need to adapt safely to those revolutionary changes. This is indeed a dangerous and irresponsible group.

- The Smiling Bandit

Another warning flag about the IOND is that, on several occasions, contacts of mine have reported that members of the IOND have made offhand remarks about the “mundane” segments of society. These “enlightened” members of academia have been heard telling off-color anecdotes and making derogatory remarks about those of us who are “incomplete.” These “distinguished” professors in academia believe that non-Awakened members of society are “handicapped” and unable to fully comprehend the world around us. As such, they feel the world would be better off being run as a “magocracy.” From what my sources tell me, these individuals were not merely making idle conversation. These members of the Illuminates sounded committed to bringing about this type of regime on a global scale (ironically, making them sound almost identical to their Black Lodge counterparts).

To muddy the waters even further, members of the IOND have been seen meeting and consulting with former Tír Tairngire High Prince Lugh Surehand. Many in the Illuminates may see Surehand and his prowess in politics to be a potential asset, especially since the Black Lodge chooses to have nothing to do with the elven people or the elven nations. Some in the Illuminates might even see using Surehand against the Black Lodge as a sort of poetic justice. But Surehand only cares about power, not the people he governs. The Tír Tairngire people lived in destitution for years, stripped of their individual freedoms so that he could live a life of luxury. Surehand is ruthless—he has the personality and the cunning to bring about a magocracy. Those of us who don’t want to live under that rule cannot trust the IOND to deal with the threat of the Black Lodge. It’s also not a group that should be getting much more power—if the New Century Party wins too much ground in next year’s elections, I don’t think it would be good for anyone.

- It’s also worth noting that it’s unclear what Surehand’s current condition is. Rumor has it that he was in DeeCee when everything went down, and that he didn’t come out of it quite right. We’ll see what he becomes once the dust settles.
- Kay St. Irregular

- I’m not so much concerned with who gets power or not as I am with how I can use this knowledge for myself. Political campaigns present good opportunities for runs, and if you know how these different groups interconnect, you can use that to your advantage. If you were lucky enough to somehow run across proof of the connections between members of Congress and the Black Lodge, don’t bother taking it to the media—they’ve already shown that they can’t be trusted to get the story out. Instead, take it to the New Century Party. They’ll be interested, and they’ll probably have some interesting things they can do with the info.

What I’m saying is, stopping people from getting power is not my concern. Getting paid because conflicting groups want power is.

- Stone

There was a little more I wanted to add to this piece, including juicy information about the Salem Witches and developments in the tempo fiasco. I have to run for the moment, though—it appears that someone has tripped a silent alarm in my current residence. My work seems to have touched a nerve. They won’t find me there—I’m in the process of relocating. Those here on JackPoint who knew where I lived should stay away from the old place for a bit. There may be a period of time when I am out of communication, as I travel under the radar. I’ll be in touch to let you know once it is safe for me to resurface.

- Be safe!
- Netcat
- Ah, he’s just playing games. It’s the classic conspiracy theory ending—“can’t talk, they’re on to me.” He’s trying to build a buzz.
- Haze
- If so, he’s paying attention to details. His silent alarm really went off. And Snopes seems to have gone deep—out of my sight, at least.
- FastJack





Posted by: Snopes

All right, we've been serious for long enough. It's time to get nuts.

For the next little bit we're not going to talk about academic-ish theories about the value of conspiracy theories. We're not going to run down theories that could make some of us rich and others of us dead. We're going to talk about the kind of theories that make everyone's eyes light up, whether they're a conspiracy theorist or not, because they're so big, so weird, that you can't help put pay attention.

The conspiracies we're going to talk about here come from the many large gaps and questions in the Sixth World's history, things nobody knows the full truth about. What caused the Awakening? Who killed President Dunkelzahn? Why do they keep making Neil the Ork Barbarian stories? When we tackle the big questions on JackPoint, we often approach it logically, trying to put together the puzzle pieces from everything we do and maybe, just maybe, get a glimpse of the big picture. But there are those out there, out on the Matrix, hanging around the Stuffer Shacks, who want to know the truth and they do the next best thing.

They make it up.

Conspiracy theories are popular because they make sense of the universe. But then again, so does physics, and that's not nearly as popular a subject. It's not just that conspiracy theories provide an explanation, it's that they do so with a glint in their figurative eyes. They dare you to believe them, if only because believing them would make the world wondrous and strange. You get to see the secret cause behind every event, the twisted motive behind seemingly random forces. That hurricane that swept up the coast? That was an Aztechnology spell gone awry! The earthquake that flattened several Japanese villages? It's a Shiawase experiment involving tectonic plates! That really bad flu sweeping the nation? It's tied to some nanotech that prematurely got out of an Ares lab! It used to be once upon a time, the gods were blamed for these accidents, but now we pick our favorite (or least favorite) megacorporation and pin the blame on them.

- That's usually because it's true.
- Plan 9

Around here, we like to think that we're smarter than the average wageslave. We're the ones doing the dirt, keeping our eyes open and our mouths shut. But there are plenty of other folks out there trying to put the pieces together. Smaller pieces. Bigger ideas. Are they real? Who knows? But, at the very least, they should be quite entertaining for those of us "in the know". We're going to be looking at some of the larger rumors on the Matrix. But first, we need to understand the basic building blocks of a good conspiracy theory, just so we can understand a little bit about how they spread.

Urban legends are unconfirmed stories passed by word-of-mouth or word of Matrix or however people share stories. Everyone has heard a lot of these, unless they live in a cave (and even then, they know the vanishing hitchhiker story, because that one is the subject of some of the earliest cave paintings). There is the one about the beautiful elf that seduces you for the best one-night-stand ever, but afterward you wake up in a bathtub full of ice with a missing kidney. Then there's the old story about the cyberpsycho who stalks a pair of young lovers. They speed away but later discover his cyberarm on the door, and then it animates and tries to kill them. And of course, there's the rumor that mixing Diet SoyJoy and MagBlasters in your stomach can kill you by eating through your intestines.

Most of these stories have been around in some form or another since before the Awakening. They share a lot of elements. Fear of the unknown is a big one. You can't trust strangers since they are just waiting to kill you or cut you open. There is a morality component as well. Most of the victims are doing something they shouldn't, whether it's sneaking off to hook up or indulging in junk food. In this way, urban legends are a lot like the fairy tales of old, telling you that you shouldn't go off into the woods or the wolf will eat you.

Death rumors are another way for stories to spread like wildfire. Celebrities die all the time. Some celebrities die more than once, thanks to death rumors that wash across the Matrix. It's one of the fastest ways to see social media in action. Drop a simple sentence expressing sadness about a well-known figure passing away and watch the ripples roll out from the stone. It doesn't matter if they have just released a number one album or if they haven't been heard from in ten years—eventually, the

celebrity in question will emerge, screaming to let fans know they are not dead so that they, the fans, can look forward to giving the celebrity more nuyen in the future. Smart runners can use this to their advantage by starting a whisper campaign against someone important to an upcoming run.

Death rumors come in two major flavors. *Flash rumors* are when a celebrity supposedly dies and people offer commentary within moments. These rumors can even get picked up by reputable news sources and lend legitimacy until the dead celebrity comes out and talks to the press. There's a natural desire to want to be the first one reporting a big news story, and flash rumors take advantage of that desire. Want to drop Horizon stock by a few points? Send out tearful condolences on the death of Victor Ortiz in a t-bird crash. The flux will be momentary, but someone expecting it can make a killing. It can also distract someone that needs to be distracted. If the CFO needs to toss off a video saying he's alive and well, he won't be looking as closely at his transactions that day.

The other celebrity death rumors stem from the *strange deaths of faded fame*. It's one thing to get people energized because they think someone who is currently in the public eye has passed away in an untimely fashion; it's another to get them interested in the passing of someone who used to be famous but has passed from the public eye. It's not easy to get people interested in the passing of someone from that second group—for many people, the first reaction on hearing that some less-famous person died is "Huh. They were still alive?" If you want to get attention to this type of story, you need a story with a bizarre hook. A compelling conspiracy hook makes it even more interesting. For example, urban brawler Ryu Hansen didn't actually die of an allergic reaction to medication. He was killed during a botched extraction from the Hotel Moderne in Frankfurt two weeks before his reported death. The story about the allergic reaction received a small amount of coverage in the international media. But though it was never reported by any major media organization, the extraction tale spread like wildfire once it came out, and you'll now find many more hits about that side of the story than you will about any anaphylactic shock.

- Sounds like a runner team was not being appropriately covert if they left enough evidence to seed rumors.
- Fianchetto
- Unless seeding those rumors was the goal. They did enough to make it look like they sloppily covered their tracks—erasing most of their images from security camera footage, but "accidentally" leaving a stray foot here, a blurred image there. The interesting thing is, if you look at what they did, they performed extra work just to leave these traces. It would have been easier to wipe footage entirely, or replace it with looped footage, but they did what it took to leave enticing hints behind. Whoever messed around with this footage wanted people to talk about the extraction.
- Plan 9
- You think the extraction is real? From my point of view, those rumors were just old fans trying to console themselves that their hero died a boring death.
- Slamm-O!

- Am I the only one that heard Hansen wasn't being extracted but was part of the extraction team? Is that what they were trying to cover up?
- Traveler Jones
- Hansen was not a runner. Not every urban brawler has a connection to shadowrunning.
- Glitch
- Man, you must have bet on the Wolves in the SuperBrawl to hate Hansen so much. How much did you lose on that upset? Five figures?
- Riser

Sometimes the most compelling strange death stories mix in a bit of urban legend. People still think the original actor who played Neil the Ork Barbarian died from the SoyJoy/MagBlasters mix. They are also often a commentary on fears of the time. The rumors express a fear that corporations don't care about their consumers. If celebrities can be replaced, so can the workers that are the smallest cogs of the machine. The stories also occasionally have a whiff of technophobia about them. If supposedly innocent things like MagBlasters can kill you, what about datajacks, bioware, and all the other everyday conveniences that are far more intrusive?

Which brings us to another class of stories—*product nightmares*. These are stories about a new product that isn't working as well as it's supposed to, or prototype products that have gotten out of control or gotten out of the lab. PR firms and corporate communications spend billions of nuyen making sure viral rumors about their products get stamped down quickly. They know they never get a second chance to make a first impression. Smart runners can take advantage of viral rumors easily. It's a lot easier to screw up a company's new launch by spreading rumors in the right places than by busting into a secure facility and escaping with the prototype.

- It's also a great way to cover your hoop if a run goes south. If you can prove you still fragged the target even if you didn't bring back the primary asset, some Johnsons are still willing to pay.
- Bull

Conspiracy theories try to bring order to the chaos of the Sixth World. Why did something terrible happen? It was all part of an insidious plan. Some secret band of powerful people was responsible. It advances their agenda in ways the general public will never understand. Anyone that stands in their way will be eliminated. Of course, once people see one conspiracy in place, it is easy to see a slippery slope where everything is a conspiracy.

With that said, it's about time to get to the goodies. I have scoured the Matrix looking for the best fringe theories, ranging from laugh-out-loud ridiculous to so-crazy-it-might-just-be-true. We need every advantage we can get out there, even if we're just using it to manipulate believers—or debunkers. One of our occupational hazards is associating with fringe elements of society. That's where these theories live. They are the fringe of the fringe. Every member could point to someone's pet theories about something and point out the insanity. I went looking for the stuff that would put everyone on a united front.





Not everyone that believes in these ideas is some squatter shouting at the GridDrive post. Faces looking for a way to connect with someone in an unexpected way would be wise to pay attention to these legends and look for terms that can identify someone as a true believer. Any information a team has that nobody thinks it possesses is an edge better than a van full of guns. Nothing like squeezing a few thousand extra nuyen out of a Johnson because he believes you are against the same “Them” he’s worried about. If a team knows that a target believes Dunkelzahn is still alive, an engineered “sighting” can make the target vulnerable, and can lead to them making big mistakes.

- You would be surprised—and saddened—to know how many people there are holding positions of power within AAA megacorps that believe Dunkelzahn is still alive.
- Mr. Bonds

When dealing with true believers, remember the phenomenon known as The Big Lie. The crazier and more ridiculous the idea, the more likely it is someone will believe it. It’s a matter of perspective. Something that is small enough for a person to process and compare to parts of their own lives is likely to break down under scrutiny. A big lie, properly told, will force a person to readjust their life to the lie and get them to do what they need to for a successful run. Consider walking into an Ares facility and saying that you are Damien Knight’s son. Do it at Ares headquarters in Detroit and maybe you’ll get laughed at, maybe you’ll get bounced around by security, maybe both. But do it at some subsidiary in Asia and you might get farther inside than you think possible.

Many of these theories have some kernel of truth buried deep underneath the crazy. Just because Dunkelzahn is well and truly dead doesn’t mean something can’t be learned by studying these theories. A few featured in this section are the newest versions of conspiracy theories that have been around for hundreds of years. They are classics for a reason.

- Hey Snopes, how come you’re not bringing back the “bugfrag crazy” ratings for these stories?
- Bull
- Most of them break the scale.
- Snopes

DUNKELZAHN LIVES

One of the more widespread conspiracies is the belief touted by the so-called “lifers.” Lifers believe that Dunkelzahn did not die on his inauguration night more than a decade ago. They say that his death was faked, and everything that happened after it was put into place to draw attention away from his new life. The dragon lives a simple nomadic life wandering from town to town unfettered by wealth or intrigue. With such strange and unusual things surrounding his death, surely nobody would get beyond those trappings and start wondering if the Big D was alive?

Lifers think Dunkelzahn lives off the grid. Some tales have even grown into Robin Hood-hero style folk hero stuff. Most of

the tales over at The People’s Dragon [\[Link\]](#) read like fanfic where Dunkelzahn strikes back at everything from Aztechnology to the local corrupt sheriff. There are also plenty of tales of the dragon doing mundane heroic things like offering rides to town and delivering babies. A popular idea at this site is that Dunkelzahn is assembling an organization to strike back at the evils he witnessed in the halls of power.

- How do they explain the rift?
- Bull
- Magic, duh.
- Slamm-O!
- A dragon leading an army of do-gooders to cast down the corporate overlords? Sounds like a poorly written Neo-A fantasy trid.
- OrkCEO
- At the end of the game, the king and the pawn go back into the same box.
- Aufheben

The largest group that backs this theory is DZLives.org [\[Link\]](#). They claim to have the largest collection of proof that Dunkelzahn is alive. The site is filled with fuzzy images, voice recordings, eyewitness accounts and other evidence submitted by visitors. Most of the evidence points to a low-key existence for the ex-dragon-in-chief. He works menial jobs and lays low, away from any sort of media scrutiny. He primarily stays in his human form so that he can blend in to his surrounding, but sometimes people know what he is, or he lets something slip that only the dragon would know. Here’s a sample of some of the sightings documented by the DZLives crowd:

/upload/user/Snopes/DZLives.text

Dunkelzahn sold me a bit of tempo in the bathroom at Underworld 93.

I saw Dunkelzahn at Stuffer Shack. He was holding a Samoa Shave Ice and a Chorizokraut. I saw his true reflection in the heat table and he smiled at me.

... there he was shaking hands with everyone that entered the casino. I knew it was him because when I shook his hand it was cool and scaly.

Dunkelzahn and Nadja Davenport (sic) rented a boat from me this morning. They headed toward Mt. Rainier and came back after my shift was up. Davis got a big tip and said he saw what they brought back. [Note that there is no information from this “Davis” posted on the site.]

Mr. President is under my care at Shiawase RestCare in Renton, WA. He shares a room with the real Damien Knight.

end DZLives.text

- Those poor, lonely people. There is no way any of those are real.
- Ethernaut



- Of course not. But the folks over on DZLives would be the first to tell you that. They know the Big D went underground for a reason, so all the fake sightings are there to obscure the real ones. That's the slippery slope of conspiracies. Once you believe in one, you keep shaping reality to fit it.
- Plan 9

Dunkelzahn did not get to where he was without making enemies and realizing how to deal with those enemies. Those who believe he still lives believe he knew that someone would take a legitimate shot at him sooner or later. Most lifers think Dunkelzahn knew he would constantly be under fire as President. There were too many groups that didn't want to see him in power, too many lone nutjobs wanting to kill him, too many enemies ready to bend him to their will. Looking around, he knew he couldn't back down, but he also knew he would do no good hiding from the office that the people had selected. He had to find a way out that did not let down his loyal supporters.

A big divide in the Dunkelzahn lifer camp exists between those who believe he retired out of the public life on the one side, and those who believe he and Ghostwalker are the same being on the other. The two dragons are of similar size, facial and head structure, and overall physical measurements to at least suggest a familial connection. Ghostwalker appeared out of the DeeCee Rift before declaring himself protector of Denver. He has denied these claims, but people still believe that even if he is not Dunkelzahn he must have some connection to him. Perhaps he is a sibling or some other family member? With so little known about dragon biology it is hard to do anything beyond the most baseless speculation.

- Nice pre-emptive shot.
- Netcat

One major issue with this theory is plain. If Dunkelzahn knew he wouldn't be able to govern successfully, why did he run in the first place? If it was some sort of social experiment, it was an exceptionally cruel one. To explain this, the lifers (as is their custom) fall back on a web of ever-deeper conspiracies. They theorize that Dunkelzahn ran because he was forced to, pushed by the same powers that he eventually fled from. Those powers pushed a reluctant candidate to run, and then they rigged an election to make sure he won. The "assassination" was Dunkelzahn finally taking control of his own life.

The connection between Dunkelzahn and Ghostwalker also weighs heavily on these theories. As powerful as the Big D was, it's hard to believe he had a twin brother waiting around for him in the astral plane. Dragons are not known for getting along with each other. What would Dunkelzahn had to have given Ghostwalker to make him do his bidding? With Dunkelzahn in hiding, how can he keep Ghostwalker under control? If things get too far out of control, will Dunkelzahn finally have to reveal himself?

- This section illustrates one of the dangers of delving into conspiracy. The conspiracy here is so global and powerful that it finds a way to win either way. Except governments are made of people. People make mistakes, get greedy and act selfishly. When people act for themselves instead of the group, things fall apart.
- Kay St. Irregular

- I'm surprised you didn't talk about the various theories about who or what Ghostwalker is. Some people say the rift showed Dunkelzahn the future, and he came back a changed dragon. Or that Ghostwalker is somehow related to Dunkelzahn like a brother or father or something. A few people even say he was the one dragon that the other dragons didn't want to come back, and until the rift opened he was in some kind of astral prison. Whatever the case, I'm sure he wasn't just checking his messages on his commlink waiting for the chance to enter our plane.
- Bull
- People change, why can't dragons?
- Netcat
- A lot of that was covered when Ghostwalker first appeared in the rift. Yes, this means you might have to scroll past the first page of search hits.
- Frosty
- Ancient history, man. Some of us were still in Lil' Johnson's Corporate Academy when that happened.
- /dev/grll
- But Dunkelzahn really is dead. Really really really. Just to be clear.
- Fastjack
- Why should I believe you over some other guy on the Matrix?
- Glitch

DUNKELZAHN'S REAL WILL

Another fun theory surrounding the Big D's demise is that the will that changed the world sixteen years ago wasn't his actual will, or that parts of it were deleted and changed. What the public saw was a false document and therefore not legally binding. Someone with a lot of power would be needed to intercept the will, not to mention change it to their own end. The will is a powerful tool. Who would dare edit the word of a dragon to suit their own ends? Luckily, the Matrix is full of people with theories on who might do such a thing.

The True Draco Foundation [[Link](#)] claims that before the actual document was released, it was sent to the justices of the Corporate Court, who edited it to remove anything that was too damaging to anyone mentioned in the will. The will was then essentially rewritten by the power players in the megacorporations to set their new agenda for the next few decades. Very few people would try to counter the words of a dragon, much less a dragon's last will and testament.

- The Corporate Court justices have no power. Why not send it to the CEOs of the AAAs?
- Aufheben





INCOMING FEED.....

- Because that wouldn't be realistic. Can you imagine Damien Knight, Richard Villiers, Lofwyr, and the rest of the top dogs sitting around a big table reading together? Especially a document from someone they have all probably butted heads with multiple times?
- Bull
- I think what's less realistic than that is the idea that corporations have decades-long agenda to set in stone. The bottom line calls every quarter, and if you don't toe it, your head will roll.
- Mr. Bonds.

According to the theory, the will that was released is a mixture of the real will and the one edited by the corporate junta. The parts that upset the corporations were compromises struck by the CEOs. The things that would have gotten out in the real will would have been far more damaging to the status quo. Even the things that had long-lasting effects were put in place. Evo and Wuxing's rise were all part of the plan. As was the stock exchange between Knight and Aurelius. The second Crash, SURGE, technomancers and everything else that's happened since? All part of the plan.

One faction believes the world suffered at the hands of the corporations when Dunkelzahn died. They kept the best toys for themselves and the scraps everyone else got added up to a fraction of the good stuff. Most members of the True Draco Foundation fall in this camp. Their site has discussion areas several pages long for *every item* in Dunkelzahn's will, so if you go digging make sure

to eat first. Unsurprisingly, many of the members of this site have the same user IDs over on DZLives.

Another faction thinks the world is better off for the rewrite. Don't Look Back [\[Link\]](#) hosts the most active community of this theory. They claim the will originally called for everything from ork- and troll-fuelled riots in every major city to bequeathing the Tir government nuclear weapons recovered from multiple unstable governments through the years. The True Will also holds some clues to resurrecting Dunkelzahn through magical means, which some of the more reactionary religious members believe will cause Armageddon if it happens. A lot of these folks come from conservative and anti-goblinization backgrounds.

- Anyone want to help me melt their servers? Humanis spends most of its money on bribing officials and laundry money for hoods. They tend to skimp on IC and spiders.
- /dev/grrl
- So anyone that holds a contrary opinion to your own is somehow racist? Fascinating.
- OrkCEO

Yet another faction believes that the true will has yet to see the light of day. According to them, the one released to the public is a complete fabrication. Many of them believe that Dunkelzahn's true wealth has yet to be discovered. The will was a cover story to explain how various factions had discovered chunks of the dragon's stash all over the world and kept it for themselves. To this group of treasure hunters, the best parts of Dunkelzahn's treasures

BUBBLING TO THE SURFACE

lay yet unclaimed. The main clearinghouse for these believers is Warehouse 32 [\[Link\]](#) It's actually not a bad starting place if you want to delve deeper into the other theories mentioned in this section. Many of the members there believe all of these theories to be true. Even the ones that don't agree with each other.

The origin of this theory can be traced back to a man named J.J. Tyson. Tyson was a stringer for a variety of low-level screamsheets at the time of Dunkelzahn's election. One week after the will was announced, he began a series of stories in *The Hairy Eyeball* that cast himself as the crusading journalist getting to the bottom of a great deception perpetrated by the AAA corporations and their "lapdogs in the media." The stories culminated with a partial printing of the real will of the dragon. The Draco Foundation sued the screamsheet for libel, won, and drove the paper out of business.

Tyson claims he was at the press conference when Dunkelzahn's will was read, and he immediately called items into question. A check of UCAS press corps records don't turn anything up. In fact, his press credentials were rescinded shortly after Dunkelzahn entered the race. A few stories showed up using his name in the byline, but most of them were clearly not written by the same person. An analysis program showed less than a twenty-five percent similarity between the stories written before and after the press conference.

- Tyson wrote for some stellar papers, too. The "Two-Headed Baby Marries Bat Boy and Queen Euphoria in Secret Satanic Ceremony at White House" kind.
- Sunshine

Tyson never got to reveal his big story. His car was found in the Potomac River two days before he was set to publish. None of his editors had any clue what the next story was going to be about. Those who believed he broke the story on the Real Will say that one of the factions got to him and staged a suicide. It is just as likely that Tyson could not come up with a story that would top the one that brought him the fame he desired, and he took the only way out he could see.

- This is an echo of the situation with Howard Hughes' will back in the twentieth century, only magnified. Wills are seen as a kind of magic document, something that is written without you necessarily knowing about it and can change your life. The bigger the will, the more magic it's capable of—and they don't get any bigger than Big D's.
- FastJack

THE TRUTH ABOUT LÉONIZATION

Who wants to live forever? The rich and famous do most definitely. Why just look younger when you can actually be younger? Léonization is more than just a life extender—though that's the most important part of it—it's also a status symbol, an expensive process that's famous because famous people use it. Trid stars and celebrities who make their living via their image are obvious candidates for léonization. But other names familiar in the shadows are being doused in the fountain of youth. Names like Knight, Mitsuhama, and Villiers have been connected with

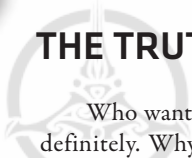
this process. The press releases say it's a simple scientific process, but a quick Matrix search drums up all kinds of spectacular sites that claim to know the truth.

One element of classic conspiracy theories is switching out people in power with duplicates. The Clone Arrangers [\[Link\]](#) believe that anyone that has gone through the process is not the original version of the person. They have been fully replaced with a clone, and the original is either dead or locked away in some sort of captivity. Most of these people have cloned organs tucked away in case the original one fails. Why not have a whole body waiting for more disastrous occurrences? In this case, the people getting léonization treatment are controlled by whatever shadowy conspiracy pulls the strings of the world, and those hidden masters have replaced their old puppets with new ones. As clones become less useful, they are replaced by younger ones. That is the real reason for the de-aging process.

The Dragon Cuckoos [\[Link\]](#) has a name that makes mocking it almost too easy. There are dozens of organizations that claim that the dragons are all secretly in league with one another. Their rivalries are just a sham for their own amusement, erected to hide their world-domination agenda. The Cuckoos take it a step further and claim that the powerful individuals doing the dragon's direct bidding are the ones who have been given immortality. Léonization is not a medical process, according to them. It is a powerful ritual spell that only dragons have the skill to perform. They only reward their most loyal servants, so anyone that has gone through the process is a pawn of the dragons.

- I know this one is false. The kind of ritual that would make someone effectively immortal would screw up someone's aura something fierce. Having seen Damien Knight in the flesh, he has a normal aura.
- SEATAC Sweetie
- Not necessarily. The spells could be reapplied. Léonization is a process, after all, so the spell could be cast repeatedly to retain its potency.
- Axis Mundi
- That also makes it a great motivator. Want to keep that wrinkle-free skin and party all night with the joygirls? Do what the puppet master tells you or we cut the strings.
- Stone

Undying Weekly [\[Link\]](#) is a page that started out as a site for fans of all things vampire. Their forums have an interesting section on léonization. Many of the users believe that it is in fact what they call "True Vampirism." According to them, True Vampires existed before the Awakening, hiding themselves from the world, afraid their discovery would lead to their destruction. But with the Awakening, they found a way to improve their PR while still staying hidden. According to this story, HMMHV is a cover for their activities. They can infect loyal humans with the virus, making allies from humans who want to be vampires. True Vampires are not created this way—they are born, and the only way a new one is created is if two vampires mate like any other animal.



- That's one of the most nonsensical bits of faux-vampire lore I've ever heard.
- Haze
- Really? Then be grateful you haven't become acquainted with some of the vampire stuff from the early part of the century ...
- FastJack

Other strains of the virus are mutations that were started to throw those too close to the True Vampires off the trail. One of the most prolific posters, MeatHeadBeat, claims to be a reporter who was turned into a ghoul because he broke a story that exposed a big chunk of one of the True Vampire's plans. When pressed, he never reveals what the story was or what it involved, but from things he's said and references he's made, MeatHeadBeat is probably somewhere in France.

- Is this the site where there are articles on how to properly infect yourself with HMHVV? That's insane.
- Butch
- Not as insane as thinking that a small, unknown group of people are also the most gifted virus designers in the world.
- Nephrine

The True Vampires have access to the halls of power, hidden for centuries, yet their domain is a place everyone knows by name. The story is that the Vampires live on Zurich-Orbital in a specially calculated orbit that puts the Earth between the satellite and the sun at all times. It also requires little oxygen since True Vampires don't breathe. The footage and alleged location of the satellite known to the public are fakes. Only True Vampires can survive in orbit for so long.

- ORBITS DO NOT WORK THAT WAY!
- Clockwork
- With all the gnomes, vampires, immortals and dragons on Zurich-Orbital in these stories, where's the room for the real monsters?
- Pistons
- So why don't the vampires have their own Super Secret Undead Space Clubhouse and leave Z-O to the corporations rather than go through all the trouble of faking it for the masses?
- Hannibelle
- Are you seriously trying to apply logic to a vampire superconspiracy?
- SEATAC Sweetie

So, we've got vampires, we've got clones, why not mix two great tastes that go great together? Coffin Hotel Ice Machine [\[Link\]](#) sounds like it should be on your new music playlist, but it is home to a theory that links Tamanous with léonization. The site is a clearinghouse for stories on the organleggers, including an AR overlay of suspected hotspots. The subforum on léonization houses an ongoing discussion about the various imperfections of the process. Many posters there claim that the process taints all



the victim's genetic material. Any clone-grown organ replacements are rendered incompatible by the process. When one of the beneficiaries of the process needs a new liver or kidney, they take one from an employee that won't be missed. This is how Tamanous stays in business. They get top dollar for the organs that will be compatible with the léonized client, and any leftovers are sold off. One of the most vocal proponents of the theory is an ex-DocWagon driver who claims he would often stop off at a rich client's house first to drop off an organ before proceeding to the morgue.

Léonization is a process that runners find easy to hate, because it means rich enemies live longer. Whether it's mystic or scientific matters little in the long run. Death is one of the few universal truths, and even that is being overcome—as long as you are one of the select few who can afford it. Until léonization is available at the Stuffer Shack next to the GlopMaker, it will be something that is feared and misunderstood.

BUGS ARE EVERYWHERE

Everyone who was alive at the time remembers where they were and what they were doing when they heard about Chicago. Even in a world where crazy shit happens on a yearly basis, the decimation of Chicago by bug spirits gave everyone pause. Everybody knows somebody that was directly affected, and Chicago remains mostly abandoned to this day. Sure, Ares says everything's clean, but who wants to risk their lives on the word of a corporation?

- Isn't that what we do every time the fixer calls?
- Traveler Jones

In the late '50s, bug paranoia reached its peak. News feeds ran stories about how to tell if your child was possessed by a bug spirit. Lone Star reported increases in assaults and accusations of possession. Pesticide sales hit record highs. Any time a new organization made headlines, the media wondered if it was the next Universal Brotherhood. Those with the properly trained senses smelled opportunity, knowing that wherever there is fear, there is money to be made.

The fear that the Chicago Hive brought to the surface has never quite boiled away. While major public outbreaks are not as common as they once were, it does not take much to get people to start looking over their shoulders and hearing buzzing noises. This especially happens when there are questions about the full truth behind a well-known news story.

The Renraku Arcology shutdown is right up this alley. To this day the general public doesn't have the full truth about what happened, and some of them are quite willing to fill in the gaps with bugs. Some of those that never heard about Deus think the arcology was shutdown because it was a bug hive, and some of those that heard about the AI believe it was just a cover story for something far more sinister. One of the most popular users on the insect spirit vigilance site Bugwatch [\[Link\]](#) calls himself ArcoInsider. He goes all out in his videos with shadowy lighting and digital distortion to hide his face and voice. He claims to be a former member of the MFID who was tasked with finding

employees within the arcology who could disappear into the merging program without anyone missing them.

The distortion and identity protection software he used is fairly decent, though I'm sure anyone here that wanted to unscramble him would be able to do so. He releases videos on a weekly basis. [\[Link\]](#) ArcoInsider has been around since 2070, and most of his footage dates from then forward. He doesn't discuss what happened during the actual shutdown. Most of his evidence comes from pieces he's found since he's been on-line.

- That voice distortion is giving me a nosebleed. Anyone want to give me the tl;dr version?
- Sticks
- Twenty minutes of my life I'll never get back.
- The Smiling Bandit
- It's looped video of what the ArcoInsider calls a flying bug sentry and him speaking over top of it declaring it as definitive proof.
- Hannibelle
- I'm pretty sure that "bug" is just a blurry picture of one of the security drones Renraku has flying patrols against squatters.
- Turbo Bunny

Another rumored hive exists in the ruins of Los Angeles. Bugwatch has some heavy discussion surrounding the Shangri-La Hotel, which partially collapsed during the flooding. The currents made cleaning out the surrounding area difficult, so the building is still surrounded by wreckage. The local squatter community steers clear of the place, and there is some fuzzy footage of things flying into the top of the ruined building.

Another story tells about a hive located in and around Great Britain that has gone mobile. Bugwatch has pages of reports featuring a large ship, possibly an oil tanker, encountered by other ships. The ship has no RFID tags and does not respond to communication attempts. A few of the reports are harrowing tales of survivors of vessels that came too close.

- That freighter wasn't by any chance black, was it? That story goes back hundreds of years. Minus the bugs.
- Winterhawk
- Is there anyplace Bugwatch doesn't have a suspected hive?
- Netcat
- As I showed earlier, there are plenty of reasons for them to be suspicious.
- Snopes

Some of the Bugwatch posters go beyond pointing out hives on a map. Many remember the Universal Brotherhood and the way that it placed hives in major cities across the world. Bugwatch also keeps an eye on people and organizations that were connected to the Universal Brotherhood. Anytime a new company or organization makes a splash, Bugwatch erupts into pitched battles over whether or not it is the next Universal Brotherhood. The current organization underneath scrutiny is a company called ECI,



which is planning to go public after a test run of a corporate resort called Synergy. Bugwatch is organizing a protest of the Synergy resort as soon as its location is known.

- So Snopes, what's the difference between these guys and your own theorizing?
- Haze
- First, I'm not just guessing. I'm using evidence. Second, I'm not settling grudges. Take a look at the politicians Bugwatch thinks are bugs, and then take a look at where the posters live. You'll find a strong overlap. A lot of their "theories" are people just spouting off about politicians they don't like.

None of this is to say, though, that they're entirely wrong. Bugs are out there, and sometimes people encounter them, and then they spread the word. Bugwatch's net is broad, but it occasionally catches the right kind of fish.
- Snopes

GNOMES OF ZURICH VS. THE IMMORTAL ELVES

To get to the heart of this rather entertaining theory, we have to look at the diverse ingredients that go into this stew. We'll start with magic.

The leading theory of magic is that it has a cyclical nature. Magic was part of the world, then it was not, now it is, and someday it will leave again. Though magic comes and goes, there are those who survive the changes. They live during the cycle of magic, awake during the upswings and asleep through the downswings.

Next, we need to include financial paranoia. The banking conspiracy is one of the classics, probably because a lot of it rings true. If the richest members of a society get together and conspire to make sure they stay the wealthiest members of the society, nobody can really stop them. It has happened before through strong-arm tactics, price fixing, and dozens of other tactics. If you're going to locate such a conspiracy in our modern world, you'd drop it into Switzerland. With the large amounts of banks located there, it would seemingly be easy for a small group of individuals to come together and control the trillions of nuyen flowing through accounts all over the world. Zurich Orbital has just brought this idea forward a step—same control, even more separation from the dregs of humanity in your high-tech, very secure orbital base.

Now we throw in one more element. Know how Swiss bankers are sometimes called the Gnomes of Zurich? Well, some people take that phrase quite literally. There are stories out there about a secret race of goblinized individuals that nobody else in the world knows about. Supposedly if a gnome is born in the world, he or she is spirited away by an unmarked limo to an unmarked helicopter and whisked away to Zurich-Orbital. Some believers go as far to say that Z-O is actually inhabited only by gnomes. Other claims of corporate involvement are paid for by the gnomes to obscure the truth. Any footage of humans on the station is faked by a media company.

- Aren't there documented gnomes from Central Europe?
- Butch
- Yeah, but this kind is different. They're immortal, for one thing.
- Plan 9

The gnomes allegedly base themselves on Zurich-Orbital to stay away from the immortal elves (of *course* the immortal elves are involved—if having one immortal race in a conspiracy theory is good, two is better). In this story, the gnomes are opposed by immortal elves. The gnomes are reincarnated during every cycle, but the elves live through the ups and downs of mana. The two camps face off when the cycle is up and prepare during the downcycle of magic.

Immortals Exposed [\[Link\]](#) is the main site for the immortal elves half of the conspiracy. Members debate which elf celebrities are part of the immortal ranks. They also argue over what important figures have had plastic surgery to not look like elves but retain their immortality. Here's a recent poll on the issue:

users/Snopes/upload

Which public figure do you think is the leader of the Immortal Elves?

21% Nadja Daviar
18% Jonathon Reed
15% Lugh Surehand
5% Maria Mercurial
2% Dunkelzahn

upload complete

- Crap, I was hoping that was an entirely different type of site.
- Slamm-O!

So what is it the elves and gnomes are supposed to be fighting over? Immortals Exposed claims they are fighting over the artifacts that control the cycle of magic. Whichever side holds the most artifacts decides how quickly we all move toward the Seventh World, when magic recedes once again. The gnomes want the upcycle to run for as long as possible, while the elves want magic to cycle back down. It used to be that finding the artifacts was an ordeal that took decades, even centuries. But with global positioning, nanosecond Matrix research, and willing assets scouring the globe for a paycheck, the fear is that this cycle will come to a head much sooner.

- The artifact craze that resulted in the insanity in Dee Cee is only fueling the mania over at that site. They'd have some good theories if they could just restrain themselves from talking about the damn gnomes.
- Mika



WUXING QUINTUPLETS

Turn on any media feed and you'll hear a mention of the Wuxing Quintuplets within 24 hours. Fo, Shui, Moak, Tou, and Gum have been the focus of intense media attention since the day they were born. The common belief is that the gift of the Third Coin of Luck affected Wu's fertility, and the five children, each sharing a name with one of the five elements, were a sign of a rise in prosperity for his corporation. The quintuplets are an important part of Wuxing's public image as well as part of the company's mythology. Wuxing puts a lot of emphasis on being the first megacorporation that was truly born in the Sixth World. Most of the other big names have adapted to the times. The ones that didn't, don't have a seat at the big table any longer. But Wuxing likes to think of itself as a company born out of the chaos of the Awakening. It has made magic part of its identity while other companies have merely made it part of the bottom line. A big part of this identity is the Wuxing Quintuplets.

For all the press that surrounds the quints on a daily basis, the details of their birth are few and far between. They were born in 2061 at the home of Wu Lung-Wei and his wife Sharon Chang-Wu. Image rights for pictures of the babies were sold to Zip Magazine for five million nuyen, but the paprazzi bounties on the kids nearly doubled that price.

- Doubled? Try 20 million. And I damn near collected it.
- Sunshine
- What happened?
- Ma'fan
- I don't like to talk about it.
- Sunshine

Once the girls debuted in the spotlight, it became impossible to push them out. Their fan base spread quickly, and people around the world could tell you everything from Moak's eye color to Fo's favorite chewing-gum flavor. Quint-Essentials [Link] is the main source for all quint gossip on the Matrix, and this is where the conspiracies begin. While there are several stimulating conversations going on about which hair color looks best on them, the conspiracy theorists actually have their own forum under the Crazy Talk heading. Most of the people that post in Crazy Talk do so exclusively—there is not a lot of cross-traffic with the other parts of the forum.

Much of the speculation in Crazy Talk centers around Tou. She is never seen uncovered in public, and she's never been known to talk. Many times, when the quints are at social functions, Tou puts in a token appearance and disappears. More often than not, she's a complete no show. Sources close to the family say Tou is extremely shy, and they make occasional vague references to health concerns.

- Everything in the forum is carefully orchestrated by Wuxing's PR division. Not that they wouldn't have a following anyway, but the quints have been a free PR bonanza for the company, so they'll goose it up as much as they can.
- Dr. Spin

Most of the speculation on Tou's health happens on the larger board. The stuff that gets moved to Crazy Talk includes suggestions that Tou is a boy, Tou is an actor, Tou is a metahuman, or Tou is not human at all. Some of the posters note that if things are going poorly for Wuxing, Tou is used to distract media coverage. Say, for example, quarterly results are down and people start wondering about Wu's leadership. Tou has a knack for showing up in a rare public appearance. Wu isn't totally bulletproof, but the mystery behind this daughter is something the Wuxing PR guys know how to use.

A small subset of Crazy Talkers moved to their own site called Sick Sense[Link] after a blow-up with the moderators at Quint-Essentials. The posters at Sick Sense believe that there was another child born and sent away. The most common rumors about the sixth child are that it was born a troll. Many of the same posters believe Tou was a more "acceptable" metahuman such as an elf or dwarf. Since her features could be hidden, she was kept, while the sixth child was either put up for adoption or quietly killed.

A poster on Sick Sense calling him or herself "BasketKas90" was very prolific during the split between Sick Sense and Quint-Essentials. In the first year of Sick Sense's existence, BasketKas90 was one of their top posters. She claimed to have a double whammy of insider knowledge. Not only was a sixth child born, but Kas herself had spirited it away and was hiding it from the runners who had been hired to bring it back. She posted stories throughout the year, and each time she claimed to be in a different location. Some of her entries spoke of last-minute escapes. Some spoke of moments bonding with the child. Some spoke of a romance with one of the runners who caught up to her but had been cut off from his team. BasketKas90's last entry came about five months ago. She talked about how her runner/boyfriend had, in an attempt to raise some money, contacted his old crew about some back pay. It was a mistake—they had traced him, and now were closing in on him, Kas, and the sixth Wu child. The runner boyfriend pledged (quite movingly, actually) to stay by her and fix his mistake. The last words Kas typed on the forum were "There maybe footsteps. That may be the creak of a door. Are they here?"

- Oh, not this again. How many times are we going to tell the story about how some powerful person allegedly killed one of their own children to save them the shame of dealing with tainted blood?
- OrkCEO
- Ask Governor Brackhaven.
- Bull
- For laughs, I decided to run a trace on those BasketKas90's entries. The origin points have been deleted by the admin. The interesting thing about that was the data was deleted on the same day, about two weeks after the last post. Either somebody tried to do what I did and the admin got spooked, or somebody told the admin to perform the deletion to keep someone from

tracking her down. She spoke about cities in her posts but was smart to leave out specific locations or landmarks. This could mean that she was being cautious, but it could also mean that she didn't know about locations or landmarks and was posting safely in her basement somewhere, laughing her ass off at all the people she was fooling.

- /dev/grll

Questions for Five [Link] takes the speculation in an entirely different direction. This site advances the theory that all the quintuplets are inhuman. The most popular theory is that they are a set of free spirits that were the true gift of the coin. What role the spirits have in the company is hard to say. They might be guests of Wu. They might be in charge of the whole company. Some of the more aggressive anti-Awakening organizations talk this angle up in their documentation. They speak of Wuxing being guided by inhuman forces unknowable to mankind. In this narrative, Wuxing is not just an Evil Megacorporation. It is an Evil Megacorporation led by malevolent forces.

No truly hard evidence—and precious little soft evidence, to be honest—points to there being anything wrong with the quintuplets. Everything discussed on Sick Sense is speculation at best. No emails, video, pictures, or anything else that would document an additional sibling, nor any eyewitness reports outside of someone on an anonymous Matrix site making bold claims. Hundreds of people deal with the quintuplets every day, and you'd think somebody would have noticed something by now. Yes, Wuxing's pockets are deep and its reach is long, but to believe it would be able to keep something major bottled is an act of fantasy greater than believing in a sixth quintuplet.

- The story that BasketKas90 told isn't unique. It's a common component of paranoid delusions to place an individual as a victim of some conspiracy. If you are on the run from the bad guys, it means you are important and special. The conspiracy is targeting you, so you must be unique.
- Butch
- I like a good bit of Wuxing gossip, but even I think the "sixth quint" idea is ridiculous.
- Dr. Spin

DRAGON EGGS

What most people truly know about dragons could fit on a datachip and still have enough memory left over for two years' worth of vacation photos. Dragons have been around for at least fifty years, and we know their names, appearances, and at least a few companies with which they're connected. Less is known about their community, their culture, or their relationships. An area where there is practically no public information about dragons is their biology. It makes sense that they'd try to keep us in the dark—the less we know about their strengths and weaknesses, the more powerful they are.

Since they are biological creatures, there are some assumptions to be made. Dragons can die—Dunkelzahn, Dzitbalché, Nachtmeister, and Feurschwinge are examples of that. But how are

they made? Are more able to be made or is there a finite number? What's the mating process like? The dragons aren't talking, so the Matrix has to do what it does so well: speculate.

Keeping straight who owns what company is a full-time job just by itself. Trying to wrangle what dragons have their claws in what companies is a calling. The watchdogs over at Shellgamers [Link] boast some interesting members: two economics professors, an ex-CFO of an AAA megacorp, and a variety of financial software developers, math wizards, and amateur observers.

Shellgamers wades through the financial news with a single goal—keeping track of which dragons have their money invested where. The site's moderator, one of the economics professors under the handle JDPhD, started the site as a lark. Dragons are, of course, major powers in the financial world. He believed he could watch and anticipate their moves by watching the ripple effect of their investments. Some people use Shellgamers as a tip sheet—if Lofwyr suddenly dumps his money into a company's stock, that stock is going up, and investors jump on it.

Shellgamers doesn't cater to the conspiracy crowd directly—most of the discussing along those lines is in a dank subforum in the corner. But the larger site has noticed something of interest going on in the past few years. Investment in genetics and biotechnology firms is increasing at a dramatic rate. Unlike other sectors, when one dragon sells its stock in a firm, it does so exclusively to another dragon. Even firms that have shown zero profitability and should have been dumped long ago stay at the bottom of dragon portfolios.

- That ex-CFO is playing with information he doesn't actually have. To me, his credibility is suspect just by the very fact that he's there. When you get to the CFO level of the corporate game, your next step is either up or out: up to the next top-rank title, out to another company—or out of the business altogether, possibly a victim of your own incompetence, or possibly the victim of a run.
- Mr. Bonds
- Anybody want to tell me how many ex-AAA CFOs there are with the initials JD? Tracking these guys down might be worth some credit to the right people.
- /dev/grll
- It's probably short for John Doe, Ph.D. Just because they want to play with dragons doesn't mean they want to do it stupidly.
- Snopes

Hestaby's Host [Link] offers a more gruesome take on draconic issues, specifically in the area of dragon biology. The site claims that it is run by not just a dragon, but by Hestaby's son via a human woman. Dragons don't assume their human forms just to fit in, the site claims. Those forms are required to mate. Dragons can mate with any part of metahumanity, and unions with orks, trolls, elves, and dwarves are more likely to produce lesser dracoforms like feathered serpents. Unions with humans are the most likely to have dragons born to them. Unions with humans can produce human children as well, as Hestaby's son claims to have a sister who will take action should Hestaby's minions come looking for him.





INCOMING FEED.....

- Great. Cockamamie bulldrek on the one hand, metahuman racism on the other. Delightful.
- Bull

The birthing process is not kind to the mother. Hestaby's son talks about how his mother was detained in a private clinic for almost two years during her pregnancy. She died when he was born—her body was not built to hold a dragon to term. When he was born, he claims he tore through her body, killing her instantly. He was raised by a team of scientists, psychologists, hermetic magicians, and top-shelf security people. When he turned eighteen, he discovered how to change into his dracoform, overpowered his captors, and fled. He's been on the run ever since, posting to his site since 2068.

The Host has gained quite a following on the Matrix, especially among those with a flare for mysterious romance. The lack of any photos connected to the Host's identity hasn't stopped him from trending toward the top of fan fiction and simsense sex requests. Media companies are aware of his popularity. Both Amalgamated Studios and Horizon are preparing simsense software to take advantage of the burgeoning "fantasy fugitive" genre. *Rebel Without A Claw* is Horizon's grab at the twelve-to-eighteen-year-old female market. Amalgamated's *The Dragonscale Runner* has a slightly more adult target audience.

- How come Hestaby doesn't shut these jokers down?
- Axis Mundi

- If the site disappears it gives credence to the story. If it stays around, it gets caught up in (and eventually drowned out by) all the screaming from the other nutters that Snopes has graciously tracked down for our amusement.
- Winterhawk

There are also rumors about various egg stashes located in the most secure holdings that dragons have. The Hatchery [\[Link\]](#) is a clearinghouse for stash sightings. Obvious locations include Zurich-Orbital, Mt. Rainier, and Mt. Fuji. There are some stranger ones as well. Downtown Seattle has one, allegedly, located in the basement of the old Universal Brotherhood headquarters. Quite a few discussed locations are in the Chicago area. A fascinating discussion centers around ground zero of the Cermak Blast and whether or not dragons are vulnerable to radiation poisoning.

Pripyat is another rumored location for one these so-called "hothouses" that stores dragon eggs. It was a town in the former Soviet Union that was located near Chernobyl, which was the site of the worst nuclear power plant accident of the twentieth century. The town was evacuated, but all the buildings are still standing, including an amusement park that never opened. The town is empty, except for rumors that it was haunted by radioactive spirits for many years. If dragons are immune to radiation, the isolation plus the spirits make this an ideal place to stash eggs.

Some members of The Hatchery insist that there is one single location for all the dragon eggs in the world. For some reason, the dragons have to keep their eggs together, and if the eggs are removed from the location they wither and die. This means the

dragons have to either act very cordial to one another when they are at the hothouse or adhere to very strict visitation schedules. The popular theory with these users is that large unified hothouse is located near one of the volcanoes in the Ring of Fire. Such a place would be one of the only places to sustain dragon eggs with a combination of heat and mystic significance.

- If one were going to hide something that you definitely didn't want someone to see astrally, one would pick someplace that makes astral travel ... challenging.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- This is one of those theories that is absolutely ludicrous, but would be great if it was true. Imagine the chaos. Dragons who dislike each other, who are having increasing trouble getting along, having to coordinate the operations of this place together. The value of the product stored there, and the number of wealthy people who would like to get just a taste of it. The powerful people in the world who'd like to find out about it just to get a bit of leverage over the dragons. It would be too beautiful.

ALIENS CAUSED THE AWAKENING

This theory isn't exactly new. Almost one hundred years ago, the idea that aliens aided ancient civilizations spread through popular culture. These aliens allegedly helped build the pyramids, as well as offering their guiding hands in the formation of human civilization. This idea never fully went away, but the Awakening sparked new interest in the idea with a twist—that the aliens that influenced those ancient civilizations also triggered the Awakening. The Mayan calendar was a countdown to the return of those otherworldly visitors to our world.

Orks, trolls, and dwarves? Manifesting alien DNA. *Sperethiel* and *Or'zet* aren't ancient languages—they are interpretations of alien languages that our human minds can't fully process. Magic is advanced technology that we can only understand through the superstitious lens of magic. Our technology pales in comparison to the wonders we will be able to achieve through magic. Magic is the key to break the laws of physics and help humanity take the next step in its evolution.

- I'm an alien? Not the worst thing I've been called.
- Beaker

Proponents of this theory believe that the aliens are here on the planet. The most obvious front for them? The Atlantean Foundation. Atlantis Veritas [\[Link\]](#) is allegedly a high-ranking ex-official coming clean about the alien influences inside the Foundation. He claims the Foundation has hidden bases on the moon and Mars and is planning on establishing one in orbit around Venus within the next ten years. Veritas also believes the reason Atlantis was never found was because it was a spaceship that didn't sink beneath the waves. It lifted off, and Plato just got the details confused.

Veritas points to resurgence of pyramid forms in buildings as a point in his favor. One of the important links in the ancient

astronaut theory is that ancient civilizations would have been unable to build the pyramids without outside help. The pyramids built by Aztechnology are a sign the company has been contacted by the same aliens from thousands of years ago, and the Big A stands to be put in charge once the aliens reveal themselves to the world.

Veritas believes that aliens also had contacted Renraku, but they were somehow found lacking. The aliens punished the company by setting Deus loose and causing the arcology to fail. Though he has no proof, he believes the abandoned building is a staging area for aliens arriving on the planet. To fit in among humans, the aliens must be inserted into human-looking hosts. The dead bodies still trapped within the arcology provide the basis for these clones. The process explains why there are reports of those reported dead by Renraku showing up years later to surprised family members and friends.

- Between the blood mages, the bug spirits, and the aliens, does the Big A even have any regular employees?
- Cosmo
- I wonder if Veritas was himself a Renraku survivor and he just couldn't handle it. Sounds like he made up quite an elaborate fantasy to give himself hope that his buddies in Accounting will make it out someday.
- Sticks

Dervish Interactive [\[Link\]](#) is a small media company based in Dubai that has put out a whole series of media about this idea. *From Astro to Astral* is a series of documentary videos that visits the various pyramid sites important to this theory and mixes in interviews with experts ranging from archaeologists to a comically put-upon PR flack for the Atlantean Foundation. Their website also claims to have a simsense project in development where you can return to the previous age of magic, but most of the links to it are dead or circular.

Not everyone believes the aliens gave their gifts out of the kindness of their five hearts. Church of Vigilant Angels members [\[Link\]](#) put an odd, unpleasant twist on the alien story. They believe magic was brought back to the world because too many people have turned away from the face of God. Don't worry, they believe in aliens too. They believe that Christ came to Earth to protect us from the evil influence of aliens, and there was some sort of protective shield around the Earth until the Awakening occurred. The aliens have returned and brought their terrible powers with them so that we can destroy ourselves over the empty power of magic instead of returning to the true power of God.

Of the conspiracies on this list, this one has the most cash-ins associated with it. Dervish sells a variety of pyramids on their site ranging from desktop models for work all the way up to bedroom-size ones you can sleep under. There is also the Magic of the Star Gods [\[Link\]](#) company that offers guided tours and meditation in locations important to true believers such as Cairo, Tenchnochitlán, and Seattle. Chances are if you live in a city that is near a pyramid or has one in it, there is a Star God office nearby.

The Seattle tour hits the Aztechnology pyramid, the Renraku arcology, the Ork Underground, a few overpriced talismongers and ends at one of the best Middle Eastern restaurants in the city.



The tour guide insists there is a third, hidden pyramid somewhere in Seattle. How can you hide a pyramid the size of the arcology? By building it downward, of course. Magic of the Star Gods can't say where this hidden temple is supposedly located, but anyone that has information on the location is asked to drop them a line via the contact info on the link.

- I've seen a lot of strange drek in Seattle, but aliens? Come on, pull the other tusk.
- Bull
- I can't believe you wasted good money on that tour, Snopes.
- 2XL
- We don't earn good money. Ever.
- Hard Exit

THE PHILOSOPHER'S PILL

The Talent is a rare thing. So what if everybody could get it? Everybody has gotten that spam that talks about herbal medicines and ancient Native American secrets that can Awaken anyone that takes the pill. Those spam messages stay just this side of legal if you look at the fine print telling you that herbal remedies do about as well as placebos in lab tests. That is to say, sometimes the users happen to have a little latent power in them that kicks in around the same time they use the pills, which is most likely just a coincidence.

Some folks take this concept a little farther. Little Blue Pill [Link] is a site that collects claims that pharma corporations have made a stunning breakthrough. Not only have they discovered what gene causes magic talent, but they have found out how to activate that gene. Why hasn't this discovery revolutionized the world? Because magicians have suppressed the knowledge and killed anyone that has come close to revealing the existence of the process to the world.

The Philosopher's Pill has become the name for this theory around the Matrix. It's a play on The Philosopher's Stone, the alchemical component required to turn lead into gold. It's something of a misnomer—you can't just swallow a pill or take an injection and start slinging manaballs. Most reports have the process taking up to a year.

Awakening someone is a process. It's not as easy as jacking a DocWagon vehicle and mixing together the right chemicals. The corporations have been able to keep it quiet because it takes a year of treatment and development. The process is somewhat akin to chemotherapy. If the subject survives, they become astrally active. If they don't, they die a slow, torturous, incurable death.

- If something is rare, people want it. Magic can be a ticket out of the worst squatter ghettos or a chance to flit from company to company like a glowing little butterfly on a cloud of money. I used to run with a shaman who would sell fake fetishes to mundanes and elixirs made out of the remnants of our stakeout takeout telling them that's how he got his powers. He claimed his grandmother fed it to him everyday while he was growing up. When he was twelve years old, Coyote came calling.
- Jimmy No

- That figures.
- Butch
- Here's the problem with this theory right off the bat. Lab time in the black bag sections of the AAA companies isn't exactly cheap. Companies will bend over backwards for magical stuff, but the bottom line is more important. Is it more cost effective to lock up some chump in the deep freeze for a year or hire some deniable assets to go extract some magical talent from a rival?
- Traveler Jones
- Look at the long view, though. Ten years from now, what if that process only requires a week in the lab? Twenty years from now, what if you can give your employee an implant that lets you cast spells? And how much money could you make from a pill that actually worked? The companies that stay in power are the ones that also recognize the importance of the long game.
- Mr. Bonds
- But wouldn't that technology be at that point by now? Look at how quickly we've gone from full-immersion VR rigs to decks to commlinks to whatever is five years down the road.
- Hannibelle
- Companies should be throwing hundreds of billions at a program like this. A company like Aztechnology would love to corner the market on a tech that makes mages.
- Ma'fan
- What company wouldn't?
- Mr. Bonds
- It would have to be one of the big boys. Even an AA company that had success with a tech like this would look like a shadowrunner convention the second word hit the street.
- Bull

Some variations of this theory bend directly into urban legend. The most popular version on Little Blue Pill comes from user aob211:

I was required to report to my yearly physical. The doctor comes back sour-faced. Cancer. Inoperable. Chemotherapy begins immediately. I lose all my hair. I pull together a will. I say good-bye to my kids. The radiation makes me sicker than you can imagine. A year to the day and there are two extra people in my doctor's office waiting for me. A company man and someone with weird symbols on his tie. They examined me more thoroughly than my doctor ever did. The man with the strange symbols explained everything. The cancer was a lie. My radiation treatments had been done with orichalcum. The time had come to see if the treatments worked. If they did, I would go with him. If they didn't, I would go with the company man. The man in the strange tie set a small metal bead on the table. Lift this without your hands, he said, and you get to come with me.

I did it. I gave myself a vicious headache and a gushing nosebleed but I did. As we walked out together, I barely overheard him call the company man by name. Cancer, he called him.

In some of the stories, the process is not fatal. Instead, the company kills non-performing subjects and tells the families the cancer took them instead. An excerpt from kevinsdad118:

I never saw his body. I gave that company thirty years and they couldn't even let me see my own son once after he died. I never believed what they told me. He was getting better at the end. He was smiling again. He was excited to get back to work. I wanted to see the doctor's files and get a second opinion. They never returned my calls.

Little Blue Pill is full of sob stories like this. It is hard to tell which could legitimately involve the Philosopher's Pill and which are just the usual cover-ups for collateral damage from a shadowrun. Outside of aob211, nobody else on the site has claimed to have undergone the Philosopher's Pill process. All the other stories are testimonies from ex-corporate researchers, friends of test subjects, and disgruntled employees. Those identities can hardly be proven, much less the claims they make on the site.

As for aob211, his profile says the last time he logged on was a little over two years ago.

THE KRIOFSKE-MAINELLA ALGORITHM

Another theory related to the Talent involves a pair of manatechnology students at MIT&T. Ted Kriofske was a grad student studying in the Matrix Systems discipline. Allison Mainella came up through the Hermetic Studies program. At the time manatechnology was still a relatively unexplored field. They decided to work together initially on improving digital storage of spell formulae but soon hit upon a bigger idea.

Kriofske paid his way through MIT&T by programming for a Mormon genealogy firm. Mainella's thesis centered on the effects of Awakened parents and if they could pass on their gifts to offspring. He was blowing off some steam from work while he and Allison were discussing their projects. They hit upon an intriguing idea. What if the code from the genealogy firm could be used to predict when and where the Talent would manifest?

Six months later, they ran the first trial of their program. They tracked down some of the children that were supposed to Awaken and quietly monitored them. One by one, the children displayed magical Talent. The students were overjoyed. They widened their net and found the program still worked. Kriofske applied it to historical data and found it matched at a surprising rate. Mainella urged secrecy. She understood very early what might happen if word got out about their program. Especially if it worked.

Strange things began to happen. Kriofske's apartment was broken into multiple times, though there were no signs of forced entry. A professor he worked with on the project suddenly retired. His girlfriend left him. Kriofske also started to notice people following him. New students in his classes watched him, not the teacher. One by one, the people in his life disappeared until only Mainella remained.

Mainella also dealt with strangeness. She experienced odd dreams and nightmares. Some were prophetic. Others were of friends and relatives in distress. Her grades began to slip, and her scholarships were threatened. She believed that someone had



BUBBLING TO THE SURFACE

discovered their program and convinced Kriofske they needed to run. They contacted some shadowrunners to help get them on the road and to eliminate all copies of the code. In the space of a few months, Kriofske and Mainella went from MIT&T's biggest and brightest to another pair of SINless scum.

Most of this information comes from Archer Beauchamp, the blogger who broke the story. The whole story is told on the site TKMTruth [\[Link\]](#). He claimed he was writing a profile on Kriofske for MIT&T's Matrix site. As stranger and stranger things happened, he stuck with the pair through the thick of it until they disappeared one night and never contacted him again. Archer recounted their harrowing story on his blog. The original site is long gone, but TKMTruth has the full document posted. It also has many members who claim to have participated in the algorithm's original trials as well as occasional updates from people that knew the pair. Nobody claims not to be in contact with either Kriofske or Mainella. The updates consist of people trying to track down the pair and being unsuccessful.

- I'm pretty sure I saw this trid.
- Hannibelle
- Amalgamated Studios released Mana Code Omega in March of 2069. It underperformed, so plans for a sequel were scrapped. Interestingly, it is currently not available for download at the Amalgamated storefront, nor can I seem to locate a copy through, ah, semi-legitimate means.
- SEATAC Sweetie
- TridGuide 2069 says : "A dashing programmer and naive mage navigate a web of double-crosses and assassinations to uncover the secrets hidden on the programmer's mentor's deck. Victor Sash, Edina Monsoon, Toby Wyler. Contains violence, cinematic action and brief nudity."
- Mika
- Sounds like last Tuesday to me.
- Turbo Bunny
- Does that make Mana Code Omega the chicken or the egg? Did the legend pre-date the movie or was the movie the inspiration for the legend?
- Baka Dabora
- It wouldn't surprise me if Beauchamp sold the story rights to Amalgamated as his hits were trending upward. He probably made a lot more money for that sale than from advertising on his site.
- Glitch

A Matrix search for the names Ted Kriofske and Allison Mainella only turn up hits related to their algorithm. Grad students studying at a prestigious university may encounter other pages, photos, or something involving their personal lives, though some of the people at TKMTruth will tell you that hackers scrubbed them from the Matrix.

At this point, Beauchamp also disappeared. The original blog was deleted shortly before the second Crash. Despite having offers

from multiple news outlets, he has few other bylines with media organizations. Since the Crash 2.0, he has not filed any stories under that name. KSAF even did a Five Second Follow-Up piece [\[Link\]](#) and came up with nothing.

- How do we know this wasn't just some stupid viral ad campaign for Mana Code Omega?
- Baka Dabora
- We don't. Especially since this all happened before the last Crash.
- Glitch

NEW WYRM ORDER

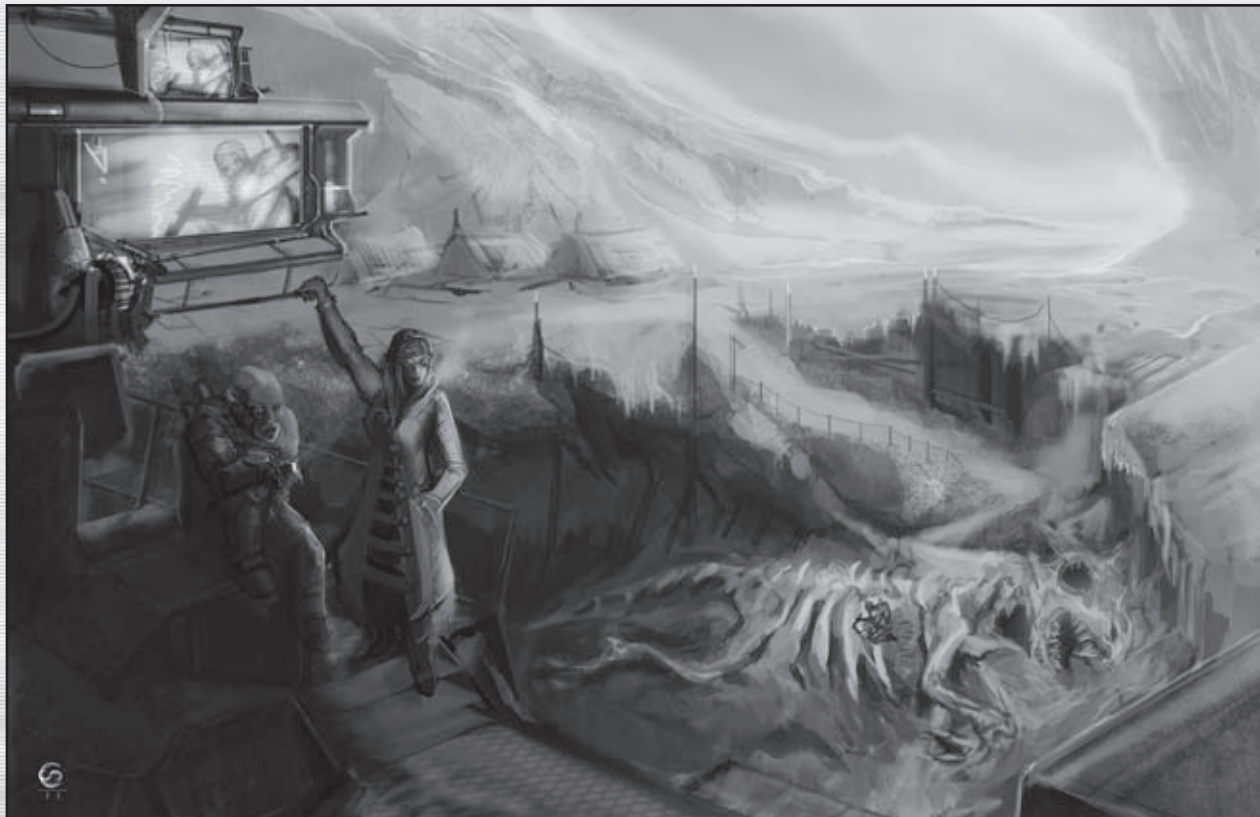
- All right, for the most part I've given you links to things or summarized theories for you, but I think there's some benefit to looking pure, undiluted crazy right in the face. So I'm giving you some primary text, a description of something the author calls the New Wyrms Order. I'm not going to tell you what that is—spoilers and all. Just read on, and soak in the insanity
- Snopes

Hey CHUMMERS! Do you recall the first time that you found out that something you believed in wasn't real at all? Were you shocked? Dismayed? Confused? Good. That simply means that you experienced feelings that all creatures have. It occurs when we as beings come to the realization that something or someone we have trusted for so long, something we had believed in so intently that it actually became a living part of us was actually, in all reality, a lie. Something in us descends. Something gives way, and at the end of that sensation we feel as though something that once was a part of us is now missing. I do not refer to the childish epiphanies about the existence of any number of fantastical beings that we were taught had invaded our homes and left us sugary treats for being such a good son or daughter, or those creatures who took away small bits of our anatomy that had fallen out and left in its place something of value. I speak of more permanent and scarring, revelations. The kind that changes the very fabric of who we are what the world means to you.

These are the kind of truths that I will set out before all of you. Not to harm your psyche or destroy the fabric of your belief but to educate and awaken in each and every one of you who reads these things a sense of warning, and a knowledge of the injustices that have been perpetrated against all of us for far too long. Since the shortest distance between two lies is the truth, I shall do my very best to be as brief as I can with the avalanche of deceit I have sifted through. The very first truth you must be aware of before we can continue is the simple fact that you and I and everyone else on this planet is ... a SLAVE.

SLAVE. The mere mention of the word sends an electrical charge through the brain of those who hear it. That reaction may occur in varying degrees, but it is there in all of us. We have a deep-rooted shunning of the concept, we are repelled by the thought of being owned. No one ever wishes to be a slave to anyone else. We clutch our freedoms to ourselves with white knuckles, and we angrily glare at anyone who has the gall to suggest that we give any of them up for any reason. But what if I told you that you are a slave? What if I told you that you have been one even before





INCOMING FEED.....



your birth, as was your father and your father's father back before anything resembled time? What if I told you that you are indeed a slave to a small group of individuals who have orchestrated their control over everything you see hear taste touch and feel to this very day? What if I told you that this group of individuals is not even ... human?

DRAGONS. That's right—we all got our hoops in a sling, and it's being pulled back and held by the taloned hands of the dragons.

The English word “dragon” finds its roots from the Greek δράκων (*drákōn*), “dragon, serpent of huge size, water-snake,” which probably comes from the verb δρακείν (*drakeîn*), “to see clearly” from Proto-Indo-European *derk-* “to see” or “the one with the (deadly) glance.” Yes indeed. WYRMS, SERPENTS, SNAKES, REPTAILIANS. All these names refer to DRAGONS. There is no need to detail the truth about dragons because as we all know that they exist, and these immense, historical creatures are your masters and you serve them willingly in everything that you do. We all serve them, and have for centuries. There is nothing more tragic (though useful to its masters) than a slave who has no idea that he is a slave. Each and every one of us lives in what we believe to be true reality. A sunlit world where we live our lives on our own terms, and wear our freedoms proudly as badges of honor. When in truth we are living, working servants of the draconian plan for complete world domination. Their master plan I call the N.W.O. The NEW WYRM ORDER (also known as the New World Order).

How do I know this to be true? The exact same way that you will know it is true. By reading what I have to share and

investigating it yourself. I cannot make anyone believe anything, nor would I wish to. The things I shall state here are truth to me, but they can only be truth to you if you take the time and effort to delve into the information yourself. Dig, and dig deep. Only through that course will you realize the truth for yourself. I shall begin with one of the earliest evidences of dragons in the world. The Sumerians.

SUMERIANS

The Sumerians are commonly believed to be one of (if not the) first human society ever established. Though that in itself is another debate; I simply wish to examine their wisdom on the subject of Draconian Visitation and control. The Sumerians were a mysterious group of people, speaking a language unrelated to any other human language we know of. They began to live in cities, which were ruled by some sort of monarch, and developed writing. They lived in the southern part of Mesopotamia. They wrote down their history on clay tablets, describing things from everyday life including the appearance of great gods called the Annunaki meaning “those who from heaven to earth came.”

Within a particular Sumerian cylinder seal is engraved many astonishing things. Firstly, it depicts our very own solar system with our sun at the center surrounded by each of the nine planets in their rightful orbits. These facts were not even known to modern science as we know it until about 5,700 years after the existence of the Sumerians. Secondly, it also shows the planet Pluto which we did not discover until 1930. And thirdly, it shows a tenth planet that they referred to as Nibiru. The name Nibiru means “planet of the crossing”. This planet is described as the very planet where

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the Annunaki came from. These items were discovered by Sir Austen Henry Layard, a prominent archeologist, in 1851. Tens of thousands of tablets were uncovered dating back almost 6,000 years, and they are considered to be the earliest writings on earth.

THE ANNUNAKI

The ANNUNAKI are described as very tall, winged, REPTILIAN beings that came to Earth in fire from their home plane, called Nibiru. Truth be told, they were what we know now as DRAGONS. The Sumerian writings say that the ANNUNAKI came to Earth to mine for gold and other wealth and for items that would help them repair the atmosphere of their home world. Some of the ANNUNAKI were put to work doing these things. After some of the ANNUNAKI revolted against their slavery, certain elders of the ANNUNAKI began to genetically alter the DNA of early man to create a slave race that would carry out their bidding and gather wealth for them. There was a king among them whom they called “ANU,” or king dragon.

- Wow, bringing in the Annunaki? Nice! They’ve been part of off-kilter conspiracy theories for at least a century. Glad to see that the kids of today still pay attention to the classics.
- Sunshine

JAPANESE

In Japan there are thousands of texts stating that the country was created by dragons and that their emperors descend from a direct line of Dragons that came from the sky. When Buddhist monks from other parts of Asia brought their faith to Japan they transmitted dragon and snake texts to the country. The most notable examples are the nāga or “Nāga; rain deity; protector of Buddhism” and the nāgarāja or “Nāgaraja; Snake/Dragon king”

CHINA

As a result of the serpent queen Nüwa interbreeding with man, Chinese around the world know themselves to be what they call “Lung Tik Chuan Ren” (Descendants of the Dragon). To them, dragons are divine creatures that bring them great abundance, prosperity, and good fortune. Eastern Dragons, as we all know, are very vain. In ancient times, they would often take insult if a ruler they were advising did not follow their advice, or when people did not honor them with riches. Then, it is said the dragons would stop the rain from falling or breathe fire and black clouds that bring great storms. Dragons, both in the past and present, have been responsible for great cataclysms and so-called “natural” disasters. The great Yellow Emperor, Huang-Ti, was known to be part dragon, or more likely a drake. It is written in ancient text that his mother was impregnated by a glorious and magical light that electrified the sky and came from the star Alpha Draconis. In fact, the first four rulers of China were dragons.

- I’m both excited for and dreading the moment the writer tries to combine all these threads together.
- Winterhawk

AUSTRALIA

Aborigines in Australia teach of a reptilian race that came from the sky and reside now in the earth. These beings are said

to have governed over all men, and they still do to this day. The Aborigines believe that they are descendants from a race of Dragon Humans. To this day, the Aboriginal tribes of Australia speak of the existence of “Bungarra,” a giant reptilian creature. For centuries they have warned people that these monsters reach lengths of up to sixteen to seventeen meters, and they say that all people should be wary of them. The Aborigines have gone into the Earth where these beings live and have seen what is described as great magic and technology. They say that the reason why there are so many reptilian animals living on the continent of Australia is because the dragon beings lived on a piece of Earth that spanned the entire Pacific Ocean, but over time most of it sank beneath the waters. Only Australia remains.

INDIA

These creatures or reptile gods are called “NAGAs” (the same term is used by Buddhist monks) and are commonly known to have seeded and interbred with their royal families. They were said to have come from the sky and now live under the Earth, and at times they will interact with humanity on the surface. They are also referred to as the “SARPA.” The dragon beings would not allow people to portray their actual being in artwork but did allow artists to show them as part reptilian or snake. Often times the depiction of gods show them as having multiple arms, spread out to the side as a way to represent wings.

MIDDLE EAST

In the Apocrypha, one of the many books taken away from the Bible describes a reptilian race in detail. Quoting from the Book of Jasher.

And on the third day they came to fight at the side where the serpents were, but they could not approach there, for the serpents slew of them one hundred and seventy men, and they ceased fighting against Cush, and they besieged Cush for nine years, no person came out or in. (Jasher 72:20; emphasis added)

The Bible itself describes Satan as being the great **dragon**, perhaps as a warning to humanity of the evil to come? Ironically, according to the Darwinian theory of the “Origin of the species,” mammals evolved from **reptiles** and gained their dominion over the earth only after the great disaster destroyed the dinosaurs.

AFRICA

Africans tell of beings called “Chitahuri” or children of the **serpent**. The kings of Africa claim to be descendants of **Serpent Gods** who came from the sky. Zulu Shamans have extensive knowledge of these beings. The most powerful center of serpent or dragon worship was called “DEHOMY.” The rainbow god of the Ashanti was known to have a **dragon** form. In the west of Africa comes the records of the **Rainbow serpent** “DA.” The records state that the world itself was created by NANA BELUKU, the one god, whom DA carried in its mouth in order to create all things. After all things were made, NAN BELUKU told DA the rainbow serpent to coil itself beneath the earth in order to provide a much more stable structure.



- Okay, I'm beginning to see it. It's a conspiracy theory that takes in mythology from all parts of the world. Therefore, no matter what part of the world you're in, you can find something in the local mythology to hook into this. It's the conspiracy theory that adapts itself to all environments. Handy, especially with the rising tensions between dragons.
- Traveler Jones

EUROPE

The legendary first king of Athens, whose name was "CECROPS," was known to be half-man and half **serpent**. Yet again the serpents/dragons prohibited man from making any true image of them. Even the ancient titans or gigantes were depicted as giant men with wings and **serpent legs**. In images from Pergamum there are pictures of the giant named "KLYTEOIS" with huge serpents instead of legs. AQUILON was the Greek god of the cold north winds. Pausanius described him as a **giant winged man with large serpents for legs**. Additionally, a **dragon** guarded the famous Golden Fleece.

SOUTH AMERICA

The Mayans taught that their ancestors were great beings called "**The People of the Serpent**." The Aztecs claimed to have been created by a great and powerful Serpent Woman. The Mayan God Named GUCAMATZ was the serpent of wisdom that enlightened mankind. It has been recorded that a species of **Giant Reptilian dragon men** came from the heavens and took control of their civilization. These Dragon men taught them how to build their pyramids in which to keep great hordes of wealth.

AMERICA

The Hopi tell stories about their "**Snake Brothers**." The meaning of the word "SUI" means **Snakes** and Iroquois means **serpents**.

- That's true. That's not what the Iroquois call themselves, though—it's what their enemies called them. So, minus two points on that one.
- Mika

KING ANU

The bloodline of King ANU can be traced from the Sumerians, through the Babylonian kings, to Egyptian pharaohs, to the Roman emperors, to British royalty, and to the 35 American presidents that are direct descendants of British royalty. The remaining presidents have only a small connection to the same bloodlines, but the connection remains.

THE ILLUMINATI

Meaning the enlightened ones, because of their vast knowledge of the dragons and their current plans. These secret groups are in league with the dragons and have been for centuries. They do this to ensure their safety in the coming takeover. The leader of the Illuminati is referred to as the "PINDAR." The leader is always a male and is the head of the thirteen ruling Illuminati families. PINDAR means "**Pinnacle of the Draco**," more commonly called the "PENIS" of the dragon. This symbolizes the power and invasive control of the dragon race. Most of the countries as we know them are false countries. They were created

to amass vast wealth for the ruling families and to build unstable conditions so they may create wars or increase military budgets, all under the watchful control of the dragons.

- Now that is one glorious paragraph of tightly compressed weirdness right there. Just don't poke at it too much, because then you'll get questions like "if they built up the nations, didn't they already have control of the world, for all points and purposes? Just what is it they're going for? If there's no big endgame, what good is the conspiracy?"
- Fianchetto

2011

In the year 2011, several things happened. Babies began to be born with elven and dwarfish features. Pope John Paul IV angrily and publicly denounced these metahumans as abominations in the eyes of God. The Black Tide devastated the North Sea, a mana storm appeared in Australia, and lastly but most importantly the AWAKENING occurred.

THE AWAKENING

The Awakening was both a magnificent and utterly catastrophic event in the history of mankind. A more apt and consequently truthful description is that the Awakening was actually the rising and reemergence of dragons into the world. Because of this event, magic was once again returned to the world. I firmly and without reservation know that magic only existed in the world and does so again because of the existence and Awakened consciousness of dragons themselves. It is through magic and the constant control of the human mind through media and its ever-marching lust for wealth and power that will be the downfall of mankind and lead us directly into slavery to our Draconic Dictators.

There was someone who knew all about this and was murdered for it. His name was Dunkelzahn. Dunkelzahn the great dragon awoke at Cherry Creek Lake in Denver Colorado on January the 27th 2012. Reviewing what he did and how he died is instructive to us as we continue the struggle.

- Good hell! Does Dunkelzahn idolatry even go to the point where people who think all dragons hate us and are plotting against us still think he's on their side? I really gotta die young to make sure people keep a good opinion of me.
- Stone
- Too late.
- Riser
- Dunkelzahn begins to engage humans as a worthy species and even begins a talk show titled Wyrn Talk that becomes quite famous.
- Breaching sacrosanct Draconic Law, Dunkelzahn is formally recognized as a legal citizen of UCAS, which is as good as labeling him as a human in front of the world and his dragon brotherhood. Because of Dunkelzahn's famous handshake shared with President Thomas Steele, Steele was overwhelmingly reelected to the office of president the following November.



- The election of Steele is publicly announced to be a fraud, and House Speaker Betty Jo Pritchard becomes president. Pritchard has been known to have secret meetings with other draconic individuals and was rumored to have been privately meeting with a drake. Dragons molded the entire election, fraud and all, to put Pritchard into office and disgrace people who had been consorting with Dunkelzahn.
- MARCH 15: Dunkelzahn, tired of the interference of the NOW in both the lives of human beings and his own life, announces on his worldwide talk show that he will run for president.
- JULY 10: Presidential candidate Franklin Yeats is assassinated in a Hotel room in Seattle by a possessed FBI agent. Some try to pin it on Dunkelzahn's committee in an effort to cast an ill light on his campaign. It doesn't work.
- AUGUST 7: Dunkelzahn becomes the president at 11:23:24 eastern standard time. The win is by a thin margin. Metahumans and humans alike celebrate raucously in cities throughout the UCAS.
- AUGUST 9: Dunkelzahn is assassinated while his presidential limousine is leaving the Watergate Hotel. The attack is swift, powerful, and magical, and a huge astral rift appears directly over the spot where he was killed. A powerful military mage named Tanya Reilly goes astral to investigate the sight; while she is astral, she follows the common practice of having another officer along as backup. This helper's name is Lt. Berick Famke. Apparently he reported that Tanya saw something and reported it to him. He saved the report digitally and sent it to his superiors and to a private information box of his own. Directly after she reported her information she was sucked into the rift, never to be seen or heard again. Famke was immediately removed from the site, and it was blocked off as a hazard.

- This is the first I've ever heard of this Famke person, and I couldn't find out anything more about him through searches. No government records, no military records, nothing. Though I'm not going to lose a lot of sleep over the fact that this guy said something unverifiable.
- Kay St. Irregular

We can tell you now, we can tell you here, what killed Dunkelzahn. It was not an assassination. It was a willful act by Dunkelzahn himself. He entered the rift to keep something from coming out of it. That "something" was the return of the Annunaki from Planet Nibiru. I believe that the New Wyrn Order chose the occasion to open the rift and try to kill Dunkelzahn in fell swoop.

In the ensuing political turmoil and overall ridiculousness, Dunkelzahn's Will was revealed. Many of the items listed there were taken care of posthaste; there are, however, a number of enigmatic entries that still have no answers. Many of these mysteries seem to stem from very personal memories, or situations, and many are comical jabs at individuals, corporations, and even his dragon brothers. Yet a few carry with them not only an air of mystery but of sinister truths that Dunkelzahn wishes us to uncover for ourselves.

For example:

—To the party who finds the bones of the dragon skeleton for which I possess the head, I offer two options. You may keep the bones, or turn them over to the Draco Foundation for a reward. All discoveries must be independently verified as dragon bones, such identification to be made by any living dragon. The Draco Foundation will assemble all pieces of the skeleton it receives and display the result in the Smithsonian Institution for the edification of the general public. My admittedly incomplete research indicates the following coordinates as likely locations for dragon bones: **Latitude 41°, Longitude 121°; Latitude 41° 50n, Longitude 87° 45w; Latitude 47° 21n, Longitude 122° 12w; Latitude 19° 24n, Longitude 99° 9w; Latitude 65°, Longitude 130°; Latitude 39° 44n, Longitude 104° 59w.**

The wording is very interesting. Dunkelzahn speaks of the BONES of a DRAGON skeleton for which he has the "HEAD." The head of course refers to the skull. No, I do not think that you readers are buffoons; I am simply stating that the reference to the dragon head and the bones for which he wants us to find are actually clues to the "Skull and Bones" secret society founded in 1832 at Yale University. It is a gentlemen's club that germinated personal and political relationships, and members gain access to a network of immense power and wealth. Many drakes are members, and their leaders are dragons. The coordinates he left I believe lead either to high-ranking members of Skull and Bones or to damning evidence against them.

- Skull and Bones, eh? He's putting a lot of weight placed on a group that mainly gets together to hang out with old human remains and tell each other how smart they are.
- Butch
- Right. Nothing to worry about here. Only an organization that's placed people with major intelligence agencies, at the top of national governments, in corporate boardrooms across the world, and even in criminal organizations like the Cutters. They've got a network with its fingers in every type of power you can imagine, but I'm sure they're not trying to wield it in a coordinated fashion. Why would they do that?
- Plan 9
- Hey, I thought we were the ones who were supposed to be using sarcasm about you.
- Netcat



Example II:

—To any and all persons capable of discovering “where a Rock meets the Sky,” the 2 million nuyen, amulets and weapons at that place are yours for the keeping provided that you accomplish the task described in the enclosed datachips within 1 year of my demise. The anime will accompany you to make sure the job is done properly. Because this endeavor is of special personal interest to me, I have taken numerous precautions to assure its completion.

The Sumerians who were in first to contact with the ANNUNAKI called the place where the ANNUNAKI first arrived the Stone of the Gods/ or Rock of the gods. This is where they first landed as they come from the sky. Dunkelzahn has left a bequest to keep them from landing there again.

Example III:

—To David Lloyd Ford, I leave 2.5 million nuyen, to be used to continue his ministry. May such faith always enlighten the world.

David Lloyd Ford has made many enemies for his simple preaching of peace and love between all creatures, but I believe that he has a specific agenda to have dragons and humans be equal. As such, he is a threat to the NWO.

- So just to be clear, the NWO has managed to control nations and corporations across the world, but they haven't been able to get rid of a simple Jamaican preacher in sixteen years? That's a hell of a conspiracy you've got there.
- Sunshine
- Did you read what I said before about how eliminating opponents can sometimes lead to more problems than just letting them be?
- Plan 9

Example IV:

The will includes photos taken during the 2040 Project Cydonia mission to mars. Operation Discovery released the photo, and it clearly shows not only Pyramids (insanely similar to the ones on earth) but also the skeletal remains of a dragon. I believe that this was a purposeful nod to the NWO, showing that they are indeed not of this earth.

This has led some to ask the question, “if Dunkelzahn knew all this, why wouldn't he simply announce the truth on his show?” My answer is that he didn't reveal it because he is not stupid. I don't think he would have minded putting himself into any danger with his brethren, but he had far too many connections to humans and metahumans that he grew attached to. Those attachments were known by his fellow dragons, and those close to him could have suffered for any truth-telling outburst he may have had.

Example V:

—To the first party to fully explain the basis for magical ability in homo sapiens and provide documented research of their discoveries, I leave 10 million nuyen, to further the world's understanding and advancement of humanity's magical capabilities in general.

Truth be told, the only reason why magic ever existed is the same reason why magic exists again in our lifetime. The very presence of dragons imbued the world with magic long ago. When dragons went dormant, whether by their natural instincts, by orders of their elder brothers on Nibiru, or by force, that is the exact time that magic left humanity. In 2011, when dragons awoke again, so did magic. Dunkelzahn did not wish for dragons to be destroyed. In fact, he went out of his way to show that he wanted humans, metahumans, and dragons to coexist in equality. This is demonstrated time and again due to his bequeathing large sums of money so that humans and metahumans could pursue the use of magic and to become more educated. The NWO detests the very notion that we could be equal to them. The whole purpose of the NWO is to lull humanity into a sense of normalcy and use us as unconscious slaves to gather wealth and power for them.

Remember citizens. No matter what stature you think you have reached. No matter what success you consider is yours. Everything and anything you do is for the wealth and power of DRAGONS. “Never deal with a dragon?” Too true ... and too late.

- Okay, it's tempting to reject this whole thing based on the idea that dragons need humans to gather wealth and power for them—why would *they* need *us*—except that's clearly what they do. Lofwyr doesn't go flying around the globe seizing assets himself; he has a corporation to do that for him. Hualpa has a nation. So that line alone is not reason enough to throw all this out. No, the real reason to throw this theory out is that the *rest* of it is so crazy. But delightfully so!
- Winterhawk





... IT JUST HAPPENED ...

I didn't like it.

Match and Torque kept telling me I didn't *have* to like it, that shit like this came with the job. Their cynical reassurances didn't change the fact that the whole damned job felt bad from the start. Not having Jangler set up our trip to DeeCee was one thing; okay, sure, he'd tried to pass off some Gila demon scraps as dragon hide and had gotten himself killed for it. Fine. Shit happens when your fixer's a crooked bastard hawking dragon parts, I get that. But him being a crooked bastard was what made him good at his job, dammit, and when I was trying to get myself shipped cross-country—especially with all the tension in the Federal District of Columbia, thanks to rifts and dragons and everything else—I *wanted* a crooked bastard to be handling the border security for me.

But no, our regular import/export mogul getting himself shot for pawning fake dragon bits wasn't the worst part. We'd found a way around that, and gotten to DeeCee in one piece, without any hassles. No, it wasn't the worst part by a long shot. The worst part was we were going into a job without any mojo on our side.

"I still say this sucks," I said for the millionth time.

"If it didn't suck, we wouldn't get paid for it," Match laughed.

"I'm telling you, quit worrying so much," Torque was calmer than either of us. "I know her rep. It's cool."

Torque had set up our meet with a DeeCee local, arranging it through his parts pipeline. Doc was vouching for the guy, too. Torque had his own little network of fixers and contacts from his old racing and smuggling days that still kept in touch. They made sure he had his fancy auto parts and semi-legit paperwork for all his cars.

Doc—well, Doc just knew everyone, everywhere, it seemed like. That's what we kept him around for.

"So he was just dead?" Torque and Match both knew who I meant. "Not a mark on him? No shots fired? No blood? Nothing?"

"It just happens sometimes," Match tilted his head a bit and looked a little more smug than normal. Fucking elves. He was as mundane as a loaf of bread. Hell, he had so much chrome in him most mages would probably like the loaf of bread more. But he'd grown up in the Tír, so he knew more about magic than me or Torque, and he never let us forget it. "Mages go off into the astral and never come back. You know how touchy Twigs was about us moving his body, right? That's because he was scared he wouldn't be able to find it again."

"Yeah, but his body was right there in his room, man. No one moved it!"

"It just happens sometimes," Match said again, shrugging a little. Like repeating a lame answer made it make sense. "He went on a scouting run and just stayed in the astral, I guess."

Neither of them seemed particularly bothered that our mage had just left his body and never come back. Match had complained about the smell—he'd been the one to hit up Twigg's apartment to check on him—more than he'd expressed any sense of loss. I think Torque owed Twigg and Doc money. Or used to, at least. We'd found his corpse a few hours before we were set to leave Seattle.

"You really don't think it had to do with the Ares job?" I chewed on a fingernail, spat when I tasted blood. "I mean, what if they—"

"Stow it. Company's coming!" Torque's tusks flashed in what was probably supposed to be a smile as he saw Doc and our local contact sauntering up to the table. Doc looked ruffled like always. The local, though, had just the right curves for her jeans and a retro-style *Mercurial* tee. "Hey, hey! Look who the cat dragged in!"

Doc had met her first, Torque had spotted them, but Match was Match. He liked to act like he was our crew's leader, especially at negotiations. He reached for his "lucky negotiator glasses," the ones with the empathy software built in. I'd gutted a cute little emotitoy to make them for him a couple months ago, after losing a bet about a Screamer's game.

"It's time for this gal ..." The redheaded razorboy's custom shades were lifted up to cover his eyes.

"Don't say it," I groaned under my breath as she and Doc got closer.

"... to meet her Match!"

I screamed silently.



They weren't rank amateurs, Jenny decided quickly. She'd worked with Doc back in '68, and he'd kept in contact ever since, like she knew he did with so many others. Jenny had also been a regular in the parts pipeline running to Torque and a few other West Coast racers for years, and she knew he was an experienced wheelman. Rumor was Torque drove cars as fast as she boosted them. Jenny didn't need her astral sight to figure out the elf, either. She knew a street samurai when she saw one. Even ignoring his obvious combat-optimized cyberarm, there was an unnatural smoothness to his movements, a bulk to the artificial muscles of his meat arm, and a hint of chrome that betrayed custom cyberoptics (before he'd put those ridiculous glasses on, at least). That left the skinny one with the chromed datajacks, and Jenny was bright enough to figure out what he did for a living.

Before she could get a better look at him, the elf stood up and flashed her a too-white smile.

"Hi there." He held out a hand with knuckles scarred and scarred again, and she could feel a fighter's calluses when they shook. He gave her that smile again. "I'm Match."

Doc had given her a good-natured warning when the two of them had met out front, letting her know that Match had a tendency to mix business with pleasure. Jenny hadn't needed the warning; the elf wasn't her type.

"Jenny Q," she said, noting that they'd already set a small white-noise generator on the table. She shook hands, gave him a curt nod. "Let's get straight to business."





The skinny one with the plugs in his head looked relieved. Doc grinned at an angry Torque like he'd just won a bet. Match, for his part, didn't seem to have noticed her brusque response.

The meet was her idea, but she was no Johnson. She was an intrusion expert, and a damned good one. They ordered beer and appetizers to keep the waitress off their back, then talked turkey; she was disappointed to hear their magical support wouldn't be along, especially since none of her regular local wiz-guys were returning calls lately. Overall, though, she wasn't concerned. Nothing about their target made her think it would have serious magical support, and she told them so. The skinny one—Frostbyte-with-a-y, he'd introduced himself—looked relieved at that, and he listened intently as she shared what she knew of their security and how she'd bypass it.



I liked her, this Jenny Q. She showed us that she was taking the job seriously, and she shared all the information she had gathered so far in a quick download to my Hermes that I forwarded to everyone else. Doc and Torque pulled out their commlinks to scroll over it, Match used his Zeiss eyejobs to do the same thing. It looked good. Just another DeeCee brownstone on the outside, middle-of-the-road security on the inside; enough to show that they had something worth taking. Nothing out of the ordinary for a group of their size and affluence, and nothing we couldn't handle.

We all agreed to an even split, twenty percent apiece. Match triumphantly snatched his glasses off like he'd been some slick corporate shark the whole time, but Jenny didn't seem to be surprised or disappointed with cutting the profit five ways. She must have trusted her fixer to give a fair price, but that made sense; it was her home turf, after all. Torque, Doc, and I were fine with even shares, especially since Q had done so much of the homework for us.

Much of it, but not all. We kept busy for the next four nights. Jenny and Torque's chop-shop buddies had hooked us up with the same big black SUV the Draco Foundation types used, and with a few of the same mods. We'd have a comfortable ride as we handled our DeeCee business, and we figured anyone in the know would recognize it as their style of wheels and leave us alone. Jenny said the streets were alive with DF whispers lately, and everyone was on eggshells around them, so we might as well take advantage of their rep while we were in town.

Torque spent most of his time in the storage facility Jenny had rented for us, tweaking the SUV. I didn't mind having a wheelman with his level of obsession—it meant he'd know the wheels inside and out when it came time to actually use them.

Doc and Match cleaned guns, mostly, but also took turns going with me or Jenny on recon trips or picking up gear from her local connections. Our cross-country trip had made it tough for us to bring in any major hardware, but Jenny's friends changed that. We cruised around in her Jackrabbit beneath the shadow of the Washington Monument

and filled the trunk with all kinds of goodies over the next few days. Match laughed at me when he caught me snapping photos, but I couldn't help gawking like a tourist. The brownstone was boring, but the rest of DeeCee was full of famous places I'd only ever seen on the trids.

Boring was actually an understatement about this particular brownstone. We watched it day and night from behind the tinted windows of Jenny's Jackrabbit. It was some trendy cult hideout. Everyone that came in looked normal enough, but I guess that was to be expected. There was a stream of everyday cars, along with people in business and casual clothes that you'd see on any street of any sprawl. No one strolled in and out of the place in blood-spattered robes or anything. We watched the place on and off for three days before Match got bored—that fucking suprathyroid of his—and just climbed out of the car all of a sudden. One second we were all chowing down on cheap takeout and Match was laughing at me as I fumbled with the chopsticks Jenny used so expertly, and the next he just said "I'm bored" and was opening the door.

Jenny and I stammered at him from the car as he strolled across the street, putting on his lucky glasses, and he just walked right in. His radio was quiet for almost an hour as the two of us called back to the storage facility and got Torque and Doc ready to roll in case we had to assault the place in broad fucking daylight. Just as those two radioed us back that they'd be here in five, Match came sauntering back out, smiling and shaking a bland, middle-aged corporate type's hand.

"All clear. I just told 'em I was thinking about joining," he said cheerfully, dropping back into the car and holding up his Hermes Ikon. "I didn't see any extra cameras or anything, and I even got some brochures with monthly dues discounts I can forward straight to you guys, if you want!"

I wanted to slug him, but I had two problems. From the back seat of a Chrysler-Nissan I didn't have any damned room to take a swing, for one, and Match could tear me apart without half-trying, for two. I settled for chewing him out instead.



Frostbyte was pretty good at his job, Jenny had decided. He knew just how much to yell at a cocky razorboy for pulling a stupid stunt without getting murdered, plus the kid was as good with hardware as she'd hoped. He'd helped Torque with a few extras for their big SUV, checked battery charges on all the hardware dripping off the team's new guns, and went over and over Jenny's own intrusion toys with her.

Most importantly, he worried. Jenny liked having a worrier around. It meant someone took the job seriously. That was important, these days more than ever.

The margin for error in the DeeCee shadows had gone from slim to nil in recent weeks, but these four looked like they'd do. Doc and Torque knew their shit, and even Match's stupid walk across the street had panned out; he'd taken a head count while he was in there, confirmed that none of them seemed to be packing, learned a little

more about their Cult of the Future Ascendant, and figured out they weren't—contrary to initial assumptions—tied to any of the dragon bullshit that had recently gone down. It looked like it was just a plush, comfortable, meditation house for overstressed DeeCee sararimen and politicos, an escapee from the self-help databases of some electronic bookstore, a trendy brownstone they could relax in to take a break from driving on the Beltway.

She preferred to work alone, but if she needed help, Jenny decided she could've done worse than this crew. When Johnny Swift had told her about the book and the job in the first place, he'd said that bringing some muscle along as insurance would be a good idea. Swift and this team's dead mage buddy had worked together before, the crew had wanted some out-of-town work while laying low from ugly business with Ares last month, and all the pieces had fallen together. Jenny gave Swift a brief call just before go-time, and the fixer agreed; the book was as good as theirs.



I couldn't shake it. This Jenny gal seemed competent enough, and I agreed with her on all the specs. Even our pair of drive-bys to scout the place hadn't turned up anything that disagreed with her security assessment. No external cabling or increased thermal activity that would give away additional intrusion countermeasures. Their node was clean as a whistle, and no guards were out front. It looked like any other brownstone in a DeeCee suburb. So why didn't I feel more confident?

Twiggy had told us a cult used the place, had sold us on the job, had promised us DeeCee would be the last 'plex Knight Errant would look for us. Match had seemed eager to go, Torque had agreed, Doc went with the flow like he always did, and even I felt like it made sense to leave Seattle for a bit. Torque had heard about a smuggling job out of Chicago, but this job was as good an excuse as any, right? It should've all been fine. And everything matched what we'd been told before Jangler got geeked and Twiggy's body went empty. I just ...

I watched while we did our jobs. Torque's GridLink override worked like a charm and I kept an eye on our registration as it changed every ninety seconds while we crossed town and parked. Doc went a few steps to the north and watched the street, Match did the same to the south. Both of them sported the hard, deadly, bulges of short Colt rifles under their coats. Jenny and I went straight to the door; I handled electronic overwatch on the approach. We both tricked the security at the same time; I convinced the cameras to replay the last three hours instead of showing the next three minutes, she silenced the alarms and opened the door. Match shouldered his gun and took point, Doc and Jenny just behind, then me, with Torque playing caboose.

We cleared the house, Jenny falling into the team like the pro she was; doorway by doorway, hall by hall, the occasional half-muttered "clear" the only sound, transmitted from Match's headware or the mics the rest of us wore slaved to earbuds. Jenny Q's astral sight confirmed what we all thought, and Match's augmentation suite agreed. We were alone, and the book wasn't above ground. That was part of the plan,

though. All the cameras were right where they were supposed to be, and there weren't any secondary floor panels or motion sensors. Jenny sliced through the old metal lock to the basement with the pick-gun she'd chosen earlier in the week. Everything went like a charm. I just couldn't shake my nerves. Jenny looked a little uneasy, too, but maybe that was just mid-job jitters.

We ghosted down the stairs, Match in front, the rest of us all stacked up. My Crusader felt good in my hands, reassuring, lethal, matching Jenny's HK, Torque's big Mossberg, and the paired carbines of Doc and Match. We'd all done this before, I reminded myself. We all had plenty of trigger time, could shoot our way past anything we couldn't spook or sneak. We were pros, we all knew that the basement was an unknown variable, and we'd prepared. We were ready for anything.

Anything, God help us, but the bugs. Bigger than me, bigger than Torque, all mandibles and huge eyes. Six of them, no eight. Ten. A dozen. Jesus.

Just some trendy cult house. Just some book. Twiggy's death "just happened." Just a few cameras. Just a few locks. Just another brownstone. Just, just, just.

Suddenly everything I saw, I saw in the strobe-brightness of muzzle flashes in the dark. Torque got shredded and went down, shouting and firing. My machine pistol chattered out a long angry burst at the bundle of eyes and claws that had tagged him, and Jenny shouldered her 227 and started in, too. I heard Match firing short bursts behind us, further in the basement, and I watched as Doc got to work on Torque's wrecked belly, hands all swift and certain like he was back on a High Threat Response team again, responding to super-platinum contract holders. Jenny and I both emptied our magazines into the one that had gotten Torque—the one between us and the stairs out, *fuck the fucking book*—and I heard an explosion from behind us.

Match's gun barked again as I loaded in a fresh magazine of explosive rounds, and I saw him throw another grenade; close, so close the blast turned the tails of his longcoat into shredded streamers, but he weathered it just fine. I couldn't hear after the gunfire and the explosions, having lost my earbud somewhere between strolling down some stairs and finding myself in Hell. There was no sound but ringing, but I could feel Jenny's hand on my arm and see Match mouthing "go" over and over again, half-turning to scream at us as he kept firing. Doc sent his full carbine skittering across the floor to clatter against the elf's feet before helping Torque up. The ork had three patches on his bloody skin, and whatever was in them was doing their job; his Mossberg's muzzle flash led the way back to the steps leading up and out. Doc gave the ork a shove towards life and freedom, then there was a spray of red and his head went tumbling from his body. Jenny mouthed words at me I couldn't hear and started moving.

I turned to fire over Jenny's head and past her as I stood on the third step, and I saw Match throw his Colt like a spear—pure adrenaline, pure frustration—a split-second before he kicked Doc's gun up into his hands to keep shooting. He had the carbine on full auto, just hosing left and right with it and blazing into a mass of twisted monsters that were too close to miss but too many to stop.

I told myself, later, that Jenny and Torque had made me leave. I told myself they'd pulled me along, dragged me up the stairs and out. I told myself that I hadn't liked the job in the first place and that it wasn't my fault. I told myself Doc was dead before he'd hit the ground and that there was nothing I could do to help Match. I told myself that razorboys died all the time when jobs went sideways.

I told myself sometimes it just happened.



You do not schedule an appointment with the Lady. You cannot be sure that the Lady will meet with you, no matter how much you may want her to, no matter how much you think you deserve it. The Lady will choose to meet with you if she wills it, and you can ask nothing more of her. You arrive if you are summoned, and you wait.

Hampton bounced on the balls of his feet on the cold lawn. He didn't know how long he was supposed to wait. He didn't know if there was going to be a sign that he had been rejected by the Lady. All he could do was wait.

He thought he could see the first traces of frost slowly gripping the grass of the Tower Green. He had been promised that security would give him no difficulty, but he kept an eye on the walls anyway, just in case. He knew how obvious he must be standing there—he didn't think there were any corners dark enough to hide the polished gleam of his horns. It made him nervous enough to make him glance here and there when he thought he saw movement. Was that a spirit materializing in the corner or just a change of the light? Was that a security drone coming toward him or one of the Tower's ravens? In each case, it was the more mundane answer. There were times he squinted at a wall, willing a spirit to appear—the Lady or anyone else, he didn't care—but none of the Tower's vaunted ghosts deigned to make an appearance.

He started watching the eastern sky. Once light started appearing, perhaps he'd leave. That should be long enough. He waited, and watched.

In the end, the sky and the slight trace of light pushing its way through the street lights, almost distracted him from seeing it when it happened. It was a simple, non-fussy materialization, a pinpoint of light that softly grew into a mist and then sharpened into a person. It was a woman, young and red-haired, with a long, thin nose that seemed to stretch out her oval face. She wore a white silk gown with sleeves almost to the elbows—in the 16th century, what she was wearing would barely have passed for underwear, but to Hampton's eyes it was practically a wedding dress. She

spoke almost as soon as her image was fully sharpened, and her voice was the wind pushing through puddingstone cracks.

"You wish to offer service," she said.

It was not a question, but Hampton nodded anyway.

"You will serve as required or you will not serve at all."

Hampton nodded. "If you say so."

"You will go to Whitehall. You will track Meredith Tompkins' movements. You will watch her day and night. You will not allow yourself to be seen. You will report on her activities."

Hampton waited for more information, but the Lady fell silent.

"What kind of activities are you looking for?" he asked

A pulse of light flared through the Lady. "You have your instructions, and they are not to be questioned."

Hampton was tired. He'd been awake for a long time, and it was cold. He tried to keep irritation out of his voice, but he did not entirely succeed. "I understand, but if you can be more specific then maybe I can give you what you really ..."

If security didn't know he was there, they would now. The Lady flared into a magnesium-bright glare, then expanded, casting harsh shadows across the green. A sound came out of her that was part moan, part scream, part squeal of metal stretched to its breaking point. Forms, perhaps other spirits, flowed out of her and circled Hampton, freezing his skin where they touched. Hampton closed his eyes and covered his ears, hoping to block out what the spirit was doing, but it had no effect. The light glowed behind his eyelids, and the noise would not go away.

And then it did. It was quiet. Hampton waited a full minute before cautiously opening his eyes. He blinked as if he was just waking up. He saw that he was on his knees, and he didn't know how he got there. After another minute, he gathered his wits about him enough to notice that the Lady was still standing in front of him.

"You have your instructions, and they are not to be questioned," she said

"Yes, my lady," Hampton said, because he knew it was the only response available to him.



Posted by: Winterhawk

It's not the center of a world-spanning empire like it used to be, and it's not the center of European political intrigue, but when it comes to conspiracies, London is the place to be. It has the right combination of corporate wealth, political power, and a long-standing tradition a deep strangeness hidden behind a stiff upper lip. The number of conspiracy theories you can hear from Londoners is unrivalled by any city on the planet, and the intrigue surrounding the Pendragon and the collapse of the Lord Protector's Office (LPO) has only heightened this. Most of these theories are nonsensical, but they all serve to contribute to the city's atmosphere of swirling paranoia. Remember, it's not just called the Smoke because it's old and grey, but also because Smoke is a great concealer.

FACTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

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LONDON

Population: 10,850,000

Human: 72%

Elf: 9%

Dwarf: 3%

Ork: 12%

Troll: 2%

Other: 2%

Density in Populated Districts: 5,400 per square km

Per Capita Income: £62,300

Population Below Poverty Level: 35%

CLIMATE

The good news for London is that the domes are almost all gone. You can see remnants of rib structures here and there, but the covering that caused so many problems has been entirely removed.

The bad news is that the reasons the domes were erected in the first place are still present. The smog, the acid rain, all of it is still out there. London's mages have become more gifted at redirecting it on occasion or reducing its impact, but it's tiresome work, which means that respirators remain common accessories for the general populace.

The smog is enhanced by the fact that London has the type of climate that generally seems excellent for supporting ground-hugging mist. It's often cool, frequently damp, and seldom troubled by sunshine. The good news is that precipitation is on the low side—it is often grey and humid, but that does not translate to frequent downpours. Passing showers are common, meaning that you should be prepared for rain to pop up unexpectedly at any time, but you don't get the long periods of constant rain that some of you in the Pacific Northwest may be accustomed to. Just remember to be cautious about the pH content of the water dripping on your head.

Temperatures tend not to be extreme. Summer highs average in the twenties, winter highs are around five or ten degrees. There are some extremes outside of those averages, of course, but your likelihood of running into weather that's going to kill you if you

don't find shelter in short order is not high (unless the acid rain is particularly vicious). It may not be glorious, or even comfortable, but it's usually not fatal, and sometimes that's all we can ask for.

GETTING IN AND AROUND

Air

London Heathrow International remains one of the busiest airports in the world, which means that if you can't find a flight that goes there, you are not putting much effort into your search. Given the number of real-life conspiracies looking to perform violence in London over the years, the British have had plenty of reasons to keep security at the airport tight, and they generally have done a good job. Top-quality MADs, regular SIN checks throughout the airport, skilled Matrix spiders, and watcher spirits keeping an eye on every nook and cranny of the place are all part of the security design. There are holes, though. Heathrow's biggest weakness is its size and level of traffic. No matter how skilled the security personnel is, they cannot hope to keep track of everything happening at the airport. If you can make yourself innocuous enough and if you have a good fake SIN, you can sometimes slip by. Going in big and loud, by contrast, is likely to put you in all sorts of trouble.

Rail

Rail in London is a tale of two systems. First, there's **BritRail**. Overcrowded, understaffed, and outdated, it's possible that some parts of the system would pass for "quaint" if only they weren't so grimy. Stations are not well kept or well secured, which means they feature a mix of people who have been there an hour waiting for their train and people who have been there for ten or twelve hours waiting for security to notice them and kick them out. As you may guess, security is quite poor on BritRail, which in some ways makes it a viable mode of transportation for runners. There is a hazard, though—most other criminal and shadowy elements are well aware of the possibilities of exploiting BritRail, and they have done so for quite a while. If you decide to conduct some of your operations here, perhaps the most significant risk is stepping on the toes of one of these other organizations, who are not always eager to see people working in their territory.

The center of London's BritRail system is the **West End Underplex**, which also holds extensive shopping opportunities, restaurants, and other services including barbers, manicurists, and so forth. The tourist nature of the Underplex means that there is an emphasis on having security that is visible to all visitors, but that security is not always well trained. If you can stay current with the latest security gear and techniques, then you'll generally be a step ahead of these forces.

The other rail system of note is the **monorail**. Built by corporations to serve corporations, the monorail is modern, clean, reliable, and fast. Renraku has a considerable investment in it, since one of the larger branches serves the Renraku Complex in Dagenham, in the eastern part of the sprawl. The corporate nature of the trains means every passenger entering a monorail platform is subject to basic security screenings. Since this is an aboveground system, you don't have the opportunity to sneak down into the tunnels that the Underground and BritRail provide, but clever runners can often find a way to



board or piggyback on the trains between stations if they want to avoid security. Be careful, though—while watcher spirits don't attend every train, they ride enough of them to keep you guessing. Make sure your astral overwatch is in place and on the ball before you try anything.

Automobile

London is one of those cities that helps you understand why the grid system was invented in the first place. Streets seldom travel in straight lines, and they merge and separate with other roads seemingly at random. It's a city that takes years to master, as it's not enough to memorize the bending, twisting patterns of the streets—you need to know where traffic is and when it builds up if you want to avoid spending a significant amount of time staring at other people's bumpers. While the main highways are usually safe—the danger of getting jacked up there is low—they can be horribly slow. Stay off the Orbital Motorways (M825 and M25) during rush hours, and stay off the M4 at any time besides between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m.

While auto exhaust cannot compete with the various industrial fumes that give London's air its magic, the city has nonetheless cracked down on internal combustion engines, while continuing to give other polluters a free pass. The upshot is that you need to be on GridGuide-enabled cars throughout almost the entire inner city (all streets and alleys were finally hooked up in the aftermath of Crash 2.0, with the exception of the Lambeth Containment Zone). Be aware that some of the side roads are quite narrow, so if you want to keep a full range of escape options available, choose as small a car as possible.

- Or cycle. Choose a motorcycle. Even when the streets aren't that narrow, dammit.
- Kane

Another alternative for navigating the streets is hiring a cab. Cabs in London, as is the case in most cities, come in two flavors—licensed and unlicensed. The licensed ones are bigger, more stable, more reliable, and more expensive (it costs three pounds just to get in the cab); the unlicensed ones are smaller, cheaper, and generally more insane. Which one you choose will, quite naturally, depend on the nature of your mission.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The British police are still the backbone of London's law enforcement, and they are still, by and large, a bunch of unpleasant people. The emergence and subsequent disappearance of the Pendragon, though, has left a fair amount of confusion in its wake, and the police have been caught up in it. The Pendragon is (was?) an extremely charismatic figure, but his campaign against the Lord Protector's Office and its authoritarian nature was not necessarily well received by the members of the police force. Then, just when the police started to come around to him (assisted by the endorsement of the Queen), he left. This has left the police without a clear notion of to whom they should be loyal, and while this seems like it should be a trifling matter when it comes to law enforcement, it's not. The zeal with which police officers enforce the law is tied to their dedication to their nation and their superiors. While the former has never been in question, the latter

has become uncertain, simply because the members of the police force cannot be sure about to whom they should be loyal.

This has led to the rise of certain factions within the police department. They are not divided by hard lines, but there are groups of officers who are loyal to the Queen above all, others who are staunch supporters of the Pendragon and are anxious for his return, and still others who wish they could return the nation to the control of the LPO.

What this means is that while the British police remain fairly difficult to bribe, there is a greater amount of suspicion within the ranks, making it easier to sow mistrust within the ranks. Convince an officer that one of their superiors is loyal to one of the factions that they themselves do not prefer, and you may be able to get them to share information with you instead of passing it on up the line. British police still want to feel as if they are doing their duty, but if you play your cards right, you can cause some confusion as to the best way for them to go about that.

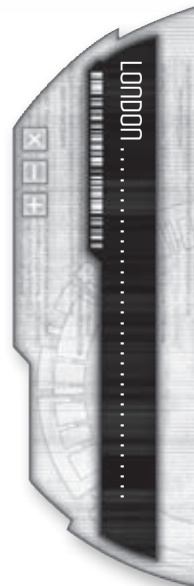
SOCIAL BASICS

The impression that people often have of London—that it is a cold, unfriendly place—is not accurate and not fair. Like anywhere else, you can find instant camaraderie in a pub full of people watching a football match with you. You can strike up a lovely conversation with someone waiting for a bus. You can gain a friend through the simple act of buying someone a drink. Yes, there are some people in London that will resist your attempts to befriend them, but can you name a place in the world where that isn't the case?

The primary difference in London is that you do not walk into a room and assume that people are your friends. You show your interest in being their friend by acting kind, and then you do not expect anything back, because that would be presumptuous. You take whatever kindness you are offered with grace and kindness.

Doing favors is more important, and more acceptable, than asking for favors. You need to understand that many Londoners are quite conscious of social balances, and if you have done them some favors, they will know that they are in your debt, and that is not a position in which they want to remain for long. Be patient, and they will find a way to repay you.

Now, I must note that this is only true for the more genteel parts of London society. There are other parts with different social mores. The Lambeth Containment Zone, the Westway, the East End—these are places where displaying your culture and breeding is not a pressing priority. Instead, if you want to get by in these places, the first thing you need to do is show that you are not an easy prey. No matter your size, you need to carry yourself in a way that will keep predators at arm's length at least. The next thing for you to do is show that you might be of use to other people in the area. Don't be obvious—hauling a safe into the middle of the street to demonstrate your safecracking skills may be seen as a desperation ploy rather than the display of skill that you intended. Showing competence, or at least brutal physical strength, when possible is a way to make yourself perceived as being needed, and that's all you want. People don't have friends in these neighborhoods; they have people who are useful in helping them get what they want. Becoming one of those people is the best way to survive.





MEDICAL CARE

Britain, like most other nations of the world, has experienced a few ups and much more downs in the recent past, but through it all they have managed to maintain their system of national health insurance, despite several brushes with near-extinction. The amount of benefits the program provides has changed over the years, but the system remains—if you are currently on British soil, then you'll get the health care basics you need. So if you're hurt in a firefight, a National Health Service ambulance will be by in fairly short order to get you to a hospital.

Now, keep in mind that NHS is part of the national government, as are the British Police. Technically, doctor-patient confidentiality exists, but for a long time British doctors have been under pressure from the police to interpret this confidentiality as narrowly as possible. That is, nothing about your physical condition or treatment needs to be reported to the police, but anything else can. So if you let slip to your doctor what you were doing when you got those bullet wounds in your thigh, you better believe your doctor will be on the phone in a moment telling the police what you said about what you were doing. They won't say that you've been shot—that's part of your medical condition and thus remains confidential—but they'll pass along all the other details you give to them, which is primarily what the police care about.

They have also been under pressure by the police to report you even if you decide not to say anything. If you have a "suspicious injury"—namely gunshot wounds or knife wounds—the police would like the doctors to report that a "likely criminally involved patient" has been admitted to their care. As you can guess, that would cause us problems even beyond the invasion of privacy.

If you don't want the possible inconveniences that come from using the NHS, you can opt for one of Britain's private insurance carriers. Longtime staples Care and BUCM have been joined by Zeta-ImpChem's Consumer Healthcare, which is a bit more expensive than the other two services but has taken off due to its fast, efficient service (which seems even smoother when compared to what NHS provides). It will cost you a pretty penny to enroll in one of these plans, but all of us are in the business of paying what we need to in order to ensure our privacy, so any investment put into not using national health personnel for your medical needs is an investment in keeping the police from having a e-paper trail of your activities.

- It's not as dire as that. While most of the NHS calls are for routine stuff—heart attacks, asthma attacks, acid burns from the rain—they do a fair amount of calls for injuries from violence as well (this is the Smoke, after all). If you call them to help you, you won't be the first gunshot or knife wound they've ever seen, so they're not necessarily going to make a big deal out of it. And as long as you don't act like anything other than a run-of-the-mill victim of street violence, they probably won't report you up the line.
- Traveler Jones
- Yeah, but "probably" is not "definitely."
- Aufheben

MEDIA

For more than one hundred and fifty years, the **BBC** has been doing its thing, and that thing has not changed a whole

lot. Staid, dignified presentations of the news; tasteful costume dramas where major dramatic moments feature people raising their hands to their mouths in dismay; and footage of wildlife that runs while a calm voice describes a particular animal's hunting and mating habits. Their programs tend to be high-minded, moderate, and accurate, which means they will never play a dramatic role in shaping the world.

ITV, on the other hand, has never been accused of being high-minded. They operate on the fairly simple observation that entertainment is being produced all across the world, and there's a good chance that British people will be interested in at least some of what's being produced elsewhere. They often take the wet spaghetti approach to bringing in programming, throwing a number of programs against the virtual wall and seeing what sticks. They end up with a floor full of noodles for the most part, but their overhead is low enough that they only need a moderate hit here and there to bring in a profit.

As was the case in every other major media market on the planet, **Pathfinder Multimedia** embarked on a significant buying spree in the past decade to amp up their presence in the city. They plucked Channels 4 and 5 from ITV, then bought StyleNet, renamed it **The Common Denominator Channel**, and used it to advance their fashion lines. To top off their new empire, they recently launched **UnionNet**, which serves as an outlet for Horizon content created for other nations while also providing a showcase for locally grown talent. They have a rotating showcase, *CityScan*, that presents short trids directed by independent filmmakers. Viewers can vote on their favorites, and the plan is for the highest vote getter each year to get a contract to make a six-episode original series. Currently, Malla Atma's raw comedy *Under the Park Bench* is leading the way.



HISTORY

To understand the value of this place you have to realize that London is not quite a city in the way that Queen Caroline is not quite a person. They're both ideas, rallying concepts that need to be protected from their habits as well as their history. The Romans understood this when they first cut roads through the dirt back in A.D. 43.

- Some documents, including those formerly held by Ebran the Scribe, suggest that London was built on the ruins of an older city belonging to the culture that built Stonehenge. The New Druidic Movement stands by this assertion.
- Frosty

At the start, London was but a square mile, yet it was valued as though Rome itself were to be rebuilt upon the land. That was not to be. Instead, sprawl sprouted up around the tiny city like the rings of a tree. Over the next two millennia London saw itself become the heart of an empire upon which the sun could not set, and then watched that empire recede into shadow.

Modern London found its voice when Queen Elizabeth ceded the throne to her son, King Charles III in 2009. The new King fancied himself a "Green" crusader, and over the years he had become closely involved with a number of aristocrats who

supported his ideas. The 2004 Dungeness Reactor meltdown had generated pockets of support amongst the commoners for going green. For King Charles, green meant more than an end to the urban expansion that blighted the countryside. It meant reestablishing the mystical connection between the land and its people.

The King's intervention coincided with the growing dissatisfaction of Welsh citizens gathering under the party banner Plaid Cymru. In the capital city, politician Aeron Cunnick was busy capitalizing on this royal support for old thinking. He gathered up the followers of old world philosophies such as Qabalah, Freemasonry, and Wicca and claimed that hermeticism was the only way to restore the land, and thus the country, to its former glory. Cunnick used that magical symbolism and message to create what we know as the New Druidic Movement.

- Wait, are you saying the NDM started preaching a return of magic several years before the awakening?
- Baka Dabora
- We know that there were individuals other than dragons who existed prior to the awakening. It's likely that some of them, perhaps even Cunnick himself, instituted this sea-change because they knew what was coming.
- Winterhawk
- Knew it how?
- Jimmy No

The brief reign of Charles III set off a wave of British technological innovation. Before long, London was a world leader in green technologies ranging from renewable energy to industrial equipment to specialized medical technologies. Green thinking birthed a new form of military avionics that shied away from the heavy ballistic armament of the past for subtlety and form. The first of these next-generation aircraft was dubbed *Ghost*, and it could make the flight from Heathrow to Boston in just over seventy-five minutes. This influx of emerging tech drew in foreign investors like flies to a carcass. London became the European host to a number of wealthy Japanese Kieretsu, some of which would later become notable mega-corporations. That concentration of economic power continued through 2010 as a number of titled families began increasing their real-estate holdings in and around the city.

When the VITAS outbreak hit in 2011, London reported the lowest number of cases in the region. It seemed the city that suffered through the Black Death under King Charles II was far better prepared for such a calamity under Charles III. The subsequent appearance of UGE cases in London were also statistically curious, with 68 percent of UGE cases born as elves. No other city in the region recorded a higher percentage of elven children.

- Hundreds of babies were born to wealthy families in and around the London area at the time and even by London standards, these children were disproportionately elven.
- Netcat

- Again, this is sounding like foresight where foresight could not be possible. Nobody saw VITAS and UGE coming.
- Baka Dabora
- I wouldn't call it foresight. The birth records over that time period point to a massive number of stillbirths, and even more corrections, re-filings, and adoptions. People were actively collecting babies, substituting dwarven children with those born with more acceptable elven features. I can't prove all of it, but the data show dozens of families whose wealth escalated unnaturally during the Awakening. Most of the poor families that hit it big had stillbirths. Factor in a handful of law firms and middlemen who also reported scary profits over the term and you have a bona fide conspiracy.
- Plan 9

On January 1st 2012, the reign of King Charles III came to an abrupt end. The King abdicated his throne—by voice mail, of all things—leaving his realm to George VII. Media pundits and world leaders alike speculated why the King, who hadn't been seen in months, would suddenly abdicate and vanish entirely. To this day no one knows what happened to him.

- Smells like a corp job to me. Corps have never been fond of aggressive green initiatives from government, and they probably found the right leverage to convince Charles to disappear. Or they sent squads after him, and he abdicated over the phone because making a public appearance would be too dangerous.
- Cosmo

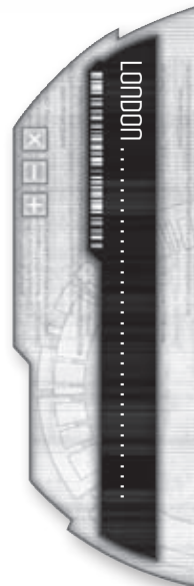
Ætherpedia Search.....

BERK'S PEERAGE QUICK GUIDE TO BRITISH NOBILITY

Nobility Ranks, from Highest to Lowest

- King/Queen
- Prince/Princess
- Duke/Duchess
- Marquess/Marchioness
- Earl
- Viscount
- Baron/Baroness

Nobles may be addressed in one of two ways. You may address any noble outside of the immediate royal family as Lord or Lady followed by the name of their titled land. For example, the Duke of Devonshire is formally known as Lord Devonshire. A second way to refer to a noble is by rank. Peerage ranking replaces the use of the individual's proper name. For example, Rhiannon Glendower is formally known as the Duchess of Snowdonia. The title is meant to confer ownership of lands, but it generally reflects financial holdings. A multitude of titled families formed the basis of London's aristocracy, and as of 2071, 35 percent of all British nobles are elves.





INCOMING FEED.....

RISE OF THE NEW DRUIDIC MOVEMENT

The young prince was barely out of diapers when he became King. George VII, the third and sole surviving son of King Charles III, had little experience dealing with the rigors of the royal spotlight. Now he was forced to appear as a pillar of strength as his own country and the EU itself neared ruination. He found himself relying on close family friend Lord Marchmont, a leader of the New Druidic Movement and staunch opponent of the ruling Labour Party.

By 2016 Britain's national government was in the hands of the Conservationists and collapsing under the combined weight of VITAS and the series of toxic disasters ravaging the country, but her capital city was experiencing unparalleled growth. Thousands of people were fleeing from poisoned lands or investing in local interests in a blind attempt to curry favor with an inexperienced royal court. The result was a city teeming with foreign interests, displaced natives, and international and corporate spies sifting through the whole mess in search of useful data. Out of this uncertainty rose the NDM, a group that immediately found itself at odds with the corporate interests in London.

The fight between the two groups initially focused on real estate and quickly expanded from there. ORO, the company that would later become Aztechnology, outbid NDM interests on the site of the old Battersea power station in Greater London. The New Druidic Movement cried foul, claiming that political infighting made it easier for foreign interests to operate in London than British companies. We British are nothing if not nationalistic, and the backlash was severe. Imperial Chemical Industries, which would later become Zeta-ImpChem, and the Adams-Hoffman

Corporation both issued statements detailing business dealings where the state had chosen Japanese companies over Britcorps.

NDM's Green Party blamed the ruling Conservationist party for looking to foreign interests before the interests of its own people. Support for the druids grew in the streets of London. The people wanted relief from the massive upheavals caused by disease and toxic accidents, and the New Druidic Movement continued to prove that their policies and philosophies were the right way through this. With the support of King George and Lord Marchmont, London became a testing ground for the NDM's ideas.

In 2020, Financier Paul Bernal seized control of Lloyds Insurance, forming the basis of Hildebrandt-Kleinfort-Bernal and creating a turning point in British politics. Up until that point, the NDM really only had a handful of nobles on their side. The King was in their corner, but pressures from foreign governments forced him to remain more impartial than his father had been. The backing of one of the world's largest banks gave the movement the momentum it needed to spur political action. The megacorp agreed to call London home so long as the government continued to support its people first. The Conservationists, hoping to hold on to power in the next election, responded immediately. They instituted a series of regulations regarding the reporting of business practices—none of which the Britcorps were asked to follow. This in turn created a safe haven for Britcorps. As a result of “misfiled paperwork,” the British government overturned the decision to sell the Battersea land to ORO. In response, Amalgamated Technologies and Telecommunications, HKB, and British Industrial signed

on for a massive arcology project on the Battersea grounds touted as the Angel Towers. It was meant to be a wonder of the world and a testament to British strength and engineering.

- Angel Towers turned into a tourist attraction before it was even built. HKB and ATT both downsized their presence, leaving British Industrial as the primary. The result was a bit like Euro-Disney from decades before. Millions of tourists passed through the arcology each year in order to see the “wonder of British engineering,” winding up in what amounted to a pricey shopping mall highlighted by a fifty-foot-tall neon panda with a digital clock for a mouth. That was in its glory days—as we will see, things took a turn for the worse for the building.
- Mr. Bonds
- As compensation for the loss, ORO was offered a tract of land south of London. They turned it into a pyramid arcology housing Dassault and Hawker-Sidley’s London offices. Aztechnology considers the site to be their portal to moving consumer goods throughout Europe. Any shadowrunner worth her salt knows the site is also a massive weapons depot. The bulk of their unsold arms end up here to be shipped elsewhere in the world or sold on the black market.
- Turbo Bunny
- Motecuhzoma personally secured the new land for their London Arcology, which leads me to believe there may be more going on there than guns and ammo.
- Marcos

The balance of power shifted again in 2021 when King George died while experiencing goblinization. There is still speculation that Lord Marchmont had him killed in order to avoid the scandal of a Troll King. With no direct descendant to the throne, the corps and the NDM once again found themselves at odds. The corporations, both foreign and domestic, wanted a King who would speak to the need for financial expansion. The NDM, on the other hand, wanted a King who would speak to the need for regulation. By 2025, the two sides were forced into a compromise. George Edward Richard Windsor-Hanover was named King of England and signed the United Kingdom Conservation act of 2025. The act was meant to protect Britain and her interests by creating an office that could respond to the quickly shifting dramas of Europe. The corps got the King they wanted, while the NDM won the office of the Lord Protector. The NDM seemed to be on the rise, but the next election saw the Conservationists sweep into power behind a vow to clean up the mess that Britain had become.

The Lord Protector, meanwhile, waited about two years to flex its muscles. In 2027, the Lord Protector’s Office passed Magical Practitioners Registration Act, requiring all spellcasters to register with their local government office. The night it passed, there was a violent battle on the edge of East End as the police put down a magic user who they labeled as an organized crime figure. Nine square blocks were demolished in the ensuing firefight. By morning the battle was all over the news, leading to overwhelming support for the act.

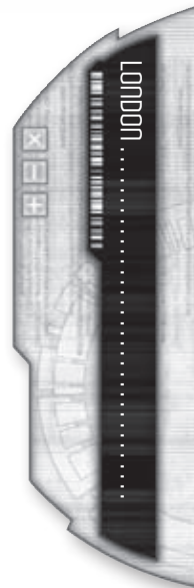
- This so-called organized crime figure was a houngan running a church that tried to keep kids out of gangs. The Royal London Police needed the assistance of NDM druids—the so-called Templars—to end the battle. There were six similar conflicts that year. Each time the NDM provided the magical assistance necessary to neutralize the threat.
- Riser

By the 2030s the New Druidic Movement was on the precipice of controlling London’s political scene. After a personal request from Lord Marchmont, Hildebrandt-Kleinfort-Bernal agreed to finance construction of the West-End Underplex. Though construction wouldn’t wrap until 2042, the agreement marked a significant transfer of power from the old politicians of Westminster to the young druids of the Green Party. In 2034, several crown properties in Primrose Hill were gifted to the NDM, and these eventually became the group’s national headquarters. The NDM finally had a worthy home, and they also had the ear of the Lord Protector. Things seemed to be going well for them, but a blow that no one saw coming was soon to arrive.

- The Primrose Hill area, and even the hill itself, was affected by the appearance of ley lines during the Awakening. That effect increased somewhat as a result of the upgraded Stonehenge ley line during Halley’s passing.
- Frosty
- The transfer of the Primrose Hill land was supported by the Friends of Marylebone policlub. That group is which is ostensibly a cricket union, but with twenty-one percent of the membership being nobility, there’s a chance it’s more than that. Curiously, the Friends, like the NDM, do not grant membership to metahumans.
- Plan 9

By 2025, the newly elected Conservationist party was focused on maintaining the strength and national identity of the British Empire, while the NDM, sought to heal the ecological damage of the last two decades. Though these two ideologies do not have to be competitive, politics made it so. Aware of this fledgling threat to their powerbase, the Conservationists went after any policy that appeared to be related to NDM ideals. They tried to strike down a deal that NDM was proffering to create a biodome to shield much of London from the deadly toxic rains that had become a common occurrence. Thanks to the intervention of Lord Marchmont, the biodome was approved. It was an early victory for the NDM, but the political war was not yet over.

The Conservationists wanted the public’s attention on their pet issue, which was the separation of Britain from the European Economic Community. This was a period of deep nationalism for Great Britain. Conservationists believed that, absent EEC interference, London would be restored to its former glory as Europe’s financial hub. To prove the point, Parliament backed incentive-laden deals designed to convince even more Japanese Keiretsu to call London their western home. Renraku alone took the bait, settling on a large plot of land in Dagenham, east of the City of London. Other corps brought business to Great Britain by way of Cambridge, where chemically damaged farmlands and abandoned UCAS military bases created opportunities for cheap real estate.



- Cambridge has a lot going for it that London does not. In the initial rush there was enough land available for corps to purchase without them butting up against each other. The extensive university system there is a natural draw for businesses seeking smart young scientists. On top of that, you have the wealth of ley lines cutting through the lands.
- Mr. Bonds

Parliament's plan worked until 2031 when the first bombs fell over eastern Poland, heralding the start of the EuroWars. War was good for local investors such as IWS, who was generally able to make money on conflicts across the world. Renraku was churning out military tech from their recent Keruba acquisition, making London a military service hub. Other milspec suppliers followed suit. The growing military presence in London was accompanied by the spies and corporate consultants of the espionage world. In short order, London was not only a military hub, but also a place where government operatives could safely meet and hold backchannel negotiations.

The proximity of the Euro Wars wasn't a boon for everyone. Save for Renraku and Fuchi, the risk-averse Japanese corps pulled out immediately and sank their investments into Hong Kong. It seemed, for a tenuous few years, that other foreign investors would follow suit. British nobles were tied to these foreign investments, and the failure of Parliament's foreign investment scheme could have cost many nobles their fortunes. In 2033, *The New Economist* went public with a story that London's richest nobles were losing profits thanks to the EuroWars. Seven days later, unknown forces launched a crippling attack against the communication and command capabilities of all the warring parties, effectively bringing an end to the conflict. Britain was blamed/credited for this attack, based on evidence including *The New Economist* story and the fact that the bombers used in the raids were NightWraiths designed and manufactured in London. To this day conclusive proof of Britain's involvement has not been found, but that didn't prevent retaliations from being launched.

- At that time only state agencies had the level of coordination required to pull off such an attack. Even if it wasn't authorized on Downing Street, someone with extensive governmental support made that attack happen. Everything I've seen over the past twenty years points to two people having the power and connections to do it: Lord Marchmont and Rhiannon Glendower.
- Kay St. Irregular
- The Lord Protector, maybe, but how and why would Glendower get involved?
- Black Mamba
- I doubt she was alone. Glendower is one small part of an aristocratic cabal seeded throughout European royalty. Many of her associates are heavily invested in German interests. Russia's invasion represented a clear and present danger to those investments. It stands to reason that she would call in favors to protect what she holds most valuable.
- Red Anya

The terrorist response was immediate. Attacks were numerous and disorganized, focusing on targets throughout London and the surrounding cities. They were at first seen as the work of fringe eco-terrorists and racial liberation groups, not as any state-sponsored response to what allegedly took place during the EuroWars. Whatever the cause of the attacks, people became scared to leave their homes, which only made it easier for the Lord Protector's Office to pass regulations tightening the reigns of social control. By the late 30s, the LPO controlled every facet of homeland security. These so-called emergency powers superseded local authority, giving the LPO the right to command local police forces if the need arose. This action strengthened the voice of the Conservationists who were seen as strong on terror, although the greatest threat to the Conservationists' agenda was actually the person carrying out the work. That balance of power was not to last. 2038 marked the beginning of the end, an unraveling of the fragile power structure built up around the Conservationists. London again was at the center of the conflict.

In June of 2038, Derek Gainsborough of *The Times* made his career with one explosive story. He reported that for the past fifteen years the Adams-Hoffman Corporation had been secretly conducting gene manipulation experiments on the people of Lambeth, a poverty-stricken neighborhood south of the city proper. Worse, the news network presented evidence that Parliament colluded in the work. The people of Lambeth and their supporters led a public outcry against the government that turned into a series of violent riots, the first of which ended on London Bridge with the death of nineteen protestors. This incident forced the Conservationists out of power in the next election, handing the reigns of power to the New Druidic Movement. The rioters were immediately labeled as terrorists. Cambridge scientists were asked to examine a handful of those arrested at the event to see if their abnormally violent response was in any way linked to the experiments that had been conducted on them. The government scientists claimed to find a causal link between the urge to violence and the genetic manipulations. One doctor even speculated that the condition could be pathogenic. These findings justified, as a security procedure, the choice put down the dangerous and contagious rebels created as the result of the work by Adams-Hoffman.

- Adams-Hoffman's Human-Metahuman Genetic Research Unit produced a wealth of evidence up through the '30s about the effects of environment and pollution on UGE. They were trying to crack the elf gene, but none of their results could be reproduced on a consistent basis.
- Plan 9

The military sealed off Lambeth from the rest of the world, transforming it into a gated slum officially known as the Lambeth Containment Zone. Locals call it the Squeeze. The only people allowed in or out were those with high-level government clearance. Lambeth told the world two things: First, London wasn't afraid to deal with its problems through superior firepower; and second, the city and its people were absolutely for sale to the highest bidder.

CITY OF SECRETS

After the Squeeze was born, everything changed. It wasn't gradual or stepped. At once the quiet, old-world feel of London was stripped away to reveal a spiraling topology of conspiracies beneath. The Adams-Hoffman's Project 42-20 genetic experiments brought to light a London secretly run by select corporations, nobles, and foreign interests. Many of the locals began to point at a small but influential group of aristocrats as the driving force behind policies in the city and beyond. Citizens saw this group as a threat to the sanctity of their city. Quietly, a war sprouted up in the streets of London, pitting nobles against common folk.

The Lambeth Martyrs struck the first blow. Rhiannon Glendower was visiting her new holdings along the Docklands when her vehicle was attacked. She did not travel with guards, but the local businessmen she was with brought enough security to hold off the attackers until the Lord Protector's Templars arrived. After the assault, the Duchess of Snowdonia announced the creation of the Knights of Harlech as her personal protective force. Other nobles followed suit, either training their own men or asking the crown for assistance. Those actions only served to drive a deeper wedge between the nobility and the commoners.

- The Martyrs took the credit for that hit, but they were doing the dirty work for a lot of people. The Duchess was meeting with high-level organized crime figures from the Vory who were prepared to turn over a large parcel of dockland to her. That deal fell apart after the assassination attempt, which triggered a massive corporate feeding frenzy. So many people stuck their hands into the pie that even now it isn't clear who owns what.
- Riser
- The attempt on someone so close to the throne also justified the need of independent armed security for royals. With the uptick of magical threats in the region, Glendower was able to use the attack to justify creating a defensive magical order within the Knights of Harlech not subject to regulation by the Templars.
- Frosty

With the truth now out, London's citizens channeled their anger into protest marches. The Lord Protector's heavy-handed tactics continued, and his office's response led to a violent showdown at Hyde Park on the ritzy West End of London. The damage from that fight hurt the neighborhood, eliminating its safety and creating the area now known as Shadowtown. Investors pulled back, choosing to invest in the tube expansion far below the streets of Shadowtown, creating the fashionable West End Underplex. Parts of the East End near the Thames followed suit, yielding to gentrification efforts. This in turn created more financial opportunities for the wealthiest few. London was quickly becoming a city of aristocrats, and there was no place in the city for the voice of the common folk.

The final blow came in 2039, when the Grand Tour arrived in downtown London to honor the ongoing construction of the London Biodome, a revolutionary environmental achievement at the time. European royalty was twirling the night away far beneath the steel and biocloth shell when a frightening chain of sparks tore through the fabric overhead. What was first thought to be impromptu fireworks was not. Instead, a massive paraviral

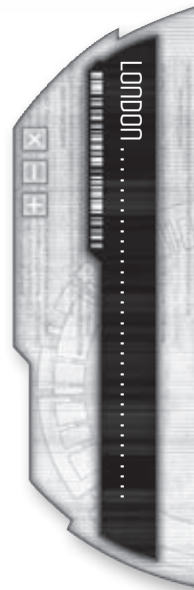
agent sizzled through kilometers of biocloth layered above the city. Excitement dissolved into fear as sections of the cloth tumbled to the earth below, raining poison and death. The final death toll was over two thousand, including eighty-seven aristocrats. The incident was a terrible embarrassment to the crown. The biodome project was immediately canceled, and His Majesty's Secret Service was set to the task of finding the responsible parties. Public unrest was growing, and the media cast about looking for someone to blame. A terrorist group called Pan-Europa claimed responsibility for the attack, but few in government believed the strike could have been carried through without some sort of state aid. Early reports from MI-6 indicated that France may have been complicit in smuggling the bioagent into London through the Chunnel, but no proof was immediately available.

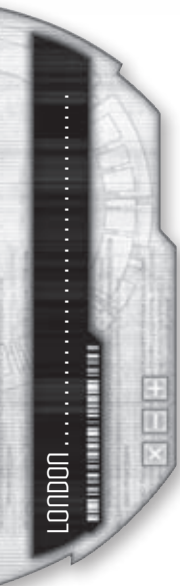
London today perhaps would be very different had all this not happened so close to parliamentary elections. When the elections came around, people did what voters in a crisis tend to do—they blamed the incumbents. Mayor Winston Bradley was removed from office and replaced with a Green Party druid named Preston Larke. The Green Party was voted in on their promise to clean up the environment and make the lands safe for the common people. Unfortunately, many of those people did not gain much hope from the election, as they had lost their faith in government. Ehrlan the Scribe compared the situation in London to Plato's ouroboros, the snake that eats itself. While the LPO was busy holding back the violence, a myriad of corporations and government agencies were buying their way into the city. A Docklands expansion was triggered by a series of corporate mergers and buyouts, which led to the formation of a Docklands Development Consortium. Their plan was identical to that of the West End underground. There would be two docklands, one belonging to the working class, and the other a shining series of towers and malls meant to attract tourists and other foreign interests.

By 2044 the division between the wealthy and poor was reflected in the city's map. Slums like Westway and the East End reached out to establish identities as a haven for the disenfranchised. Meanwhile, the powerful elite gathered deep beneath the West End and in enclaves like the Village District and the LPO-run Temple District.

The people began to recognize that the true enemy was British nobility and the secret societies pulling the strings. In the streets, people began to speak openly about groups such as Ordo Maximus, the Illuminati, and the Black Lodge. The government's response to public outcry was slow, and when it came, it often did not address the true problems. Unlike the Conservationists, the new government did not understand the pivotal role the common people play in making London work. Homegrown terrorism continues in the city to this day. The political climate raised fears, and the Lord Protector's Office acted upon those fears through regulation and violence. Any people who spoke out against these entities suffered reprisals. London became a city of secrets reminiscent of Cold War Russia—everyone was afraid of what other people might know or say.

British media was right in the driver's seat of this fear machine. The more they preached conspiracy, the more people tuned in. Eventually it got to the point where the LPO found it necessary to form a committee to regulate the press. It was easy enough to regulate the BBC, but other corporate-owned media





were harder targets, as their corporate owners were generally able to keep the Lord Protector at bay. The media stuck to their fear-driven narrative, and in 2047 fear once again morphed into action. Historic London Bridge Station was bombed by a group of terrorists on the anniversary of the London Bridge Massacre, killing seven aristocrats. This time, the government didn't strike back with a sword. They used a pen. When the city rebuilt the station, the LPO decided to remap parts of the London Underground for security purposes. Several stations in the poorer sections of town were shut down, and the tunnels leading through the Squeeze were closed off entirely.

- The Underground remapping was masked as a need to improve underground services. In reality it was a response to a growing ghoulish population beneath the streets of the city. Several parts of the Underground were walled off and given to the ghouls.
- Hannibelle
- Hannibelle is referring to the Grey Order, a group that has just recently come together under central leadership. Since the '40s, the tunnels of London have been a refuge for European Ghouls fleeing the persecution of their governments. The order found its name in 2060 after word spread of the courage of Tamir Grey, a hero of the Bug City outbreak.
- Goat Foot

The division between the haves and the have-nots snowballed two years later when the famed eco-terrorist Deep Green murdered thirty-one aristocrats in the forests of Dartmoor while they were out on the annual hunt. The common people gathered in basement policlubs and cheered the actions of terrorists. In no time the ranks of these so-called policlubs swelled because the people needed a place where they could feel powerful in the face of government persecution. By the 2050s it was clear that these groups were little more than street gangs leveraging the populace to control the local crime scene. Even the Tongs, then the strongest of the city's syndicates, were forced to refocus their operations on Matrix-based crime. They didn't have the numbers to compete.

- In London, the distinction between gang and policlub is quite blurred. When the Revenants bombed that Werner-Voss corp shuttle back in 2050, they were treated as a policlub, which meant that the crime was labeled as treason to the crown. Everyone associated with the attack was tracked down and killed by SAS soldiers who were only able to go after them because of the type of charges.
- Fianchetto

London limped along, wounded and awash with gangs, spies, secret societies, and corporate marauders all seeking to gain the upper hand. The city finally found something to smile about in 2051 when Princess Caroline wed billionaire Swiss banker Jurgen Meiers at Westminster Abbey. Though the marriage barely survived half a decade, the event was a welcome respite from the simmering tensions between the classes. This brief ceasefire represented an important lesson that would not be fully understood for another decade: A charismatic leader can make the changes that all the laws and guns in the world cannot.

AGE OF THE PENDRAGON

The people's war against nobility and corporate interests had slipped beneath the waves of public attention by the time Halley's comet passed over the city. Britain, once opposed to forming any sort of economic alliance with greater Europe, was being courted by a new European Economic Council in which Britcorps could take center stage alongside Lowfyr's Saeder-Krupp. Then the SURGE hit and everything changed again. The crumbling columns of Stonehenge were restored, activating ancient ley lines that, over the course of the next year, forced the lost isle of Lyonesse (or some rock to which we decided to attach an ancient name) back to the surface. Meanwhile, the people finally found their champion.

The Age of the Pendragon started at the anti-government Midwinter festival in London's Hyde Park in 2062. At the height of a massive protest rally that was running on the knife edge of anger and violence, a plain looking man ascended the stage in trousers and a turtleneck. He held a sword in his hands and thrust it into the sky to quiet the crowd. After a moment he began to speak. The crowd stilled. The people had found their champion.

- The legend of Uther, King Arthur's father, speaks of the King being inspired to take up the sigil of the Pendragon by the appearance of a dragon-shaped comet. The modern Pendragon seems to be born from the same legend. He first appeared following the return of Halley's comet, and he claimed the sword he brandished at every appearance was Excalibur. If you believe the rumors, he snatched it from a stone at the heart of Lyonesse before the Queensguard could lock the island down.
- Elijah
- The blade he carried cannot be Excalibur. The sword of King Arthur is in the hands of an extremely old and cantankerous elf who will be more cantankerous now because of what he has lost. And I do not mean the sword.
- Man-of-Many-Names

Initially the Pendragon was just another minor distraction. Lord Marchmont was asked to bring him to justice, but the government remained focused on transitioning into the New European Economic Community, which was officially inaugurated in 2063. The organization set up local offices in London's city center, where HKB held space. Barely a month passed before the Pendragon (or his operatives) broke into the NEEC office and made off with confidential documents showing that Britcorp Greenville-Adams was secretly being fed government money through a series of black accounts and shell corporations in order to elevate the company's earnings reports. The Pendragon and his Pendragon Underground could no longer be ignored. There was a greater threat, however, waiting in the wings.

We all know about Winternight, but somewhat less known is the role London played in dealing with the threat it proffered in 2064. His Majesty's Secret Service led much of the EuroForce coordination that uncovered the location of Winternight's upper echelon of leadership. London's involvement put the city back on the global map, ensuring the spotlight was squarely on the city when the Pendragon made his big move.



- As usual, you're overstating the importance of London's role. Sure, some old-time spies got together under the clock tower, but the real action took place aboard Zurich-Orbital where the Corporate Crisis Coordination Committee was working with the Big 10 and major governments to shut the threat down.
- Kay St. Irregular
- When Celedyr hosted the Universal Matrix Conference, he credited London as being "instrumental" in bringing about the end of Winternight's terror and bringing us into a new wireless age. I don't recall him mentioning C5 at all, actually.
- Winterhawk
- And with good reason. At least one of Winternight's Norns, a beast of a man known as Thursday, spent some time recruiting for the cult in London after he was booted from MET2000. MI-6 was able to track down his contacts and use them to uncover several Winternight cells ready to wreak more havoc on the region, including one that was targeting Transys-Erika's Silicon Glen facility.
- Glitch

In 2066 a loosely formed coalition of policlubs marched on St. Paul's Cathedral. When police intercepted the group, the protest turned violent and the cathedral was burned to the ground. Five years later to the day, two million candles filled the streets of London in protest of the Lord Protector's Office. At the head of the march was none other than the Pendragon. The historic march ended at the gates of Buckingham Palace where the Pendragon was joined by Queen Caroline. Two weeks later Parliament dissolved the LPO and opened the door for the people to have a true voice.

The dissolution of the Lord Protector's Office created a power vacuum at the federal and city levels. Some well supported officials moved up while others cashed in their favors and fled the city before backlash against the NDM grew too severe. The new Prime Minister, William Darch, came in on a rush of promise and optimism. His progress has been slow, though, and many people are wondering what is causing the slow progress. In true London style, the answers people are coming up with include a host of conspiracies, some plausible, some entertainingly off-kilter.

2070s London is a city of intrigue. The quiet alliances formed during the hunt for Winternight still fuel backchannel cooperation across many factions, while the disappearance of the Pendragon remains the subject of gossip and speculation. London's alleys and tunnels host secret meetings, back-channel deals, and the occasional stabbing in the back. Many residents remain firm in the belief that what you don't know can kill you, but they also have the genetic memory telling them that loose lips sink ships. Know more than the next person, and never let on all that you know—that's the attitude that helps give London its special atmosphere.

GEOGRAPHY

Like any world-class city, London is continually shifting and evolving. One day you might find a new favorite street vendor or boutique, the next day that person has been shut down by the law, beat up by a competitor, or moved on to a nicer location. Framing all that change, however, is a city that has been in place for nearly two thousand years. The history burbles up from the streets, it flows through the walls, and drips down from the rooftops. The past is always with London, no matter how hard every new generation tries to throw off its shackles. To understand a neighborhood, then, you need to know more than how it is laid out and where you can find certain buildings. You need to learn what it was.

WEST END AND THE UNDERPLEX

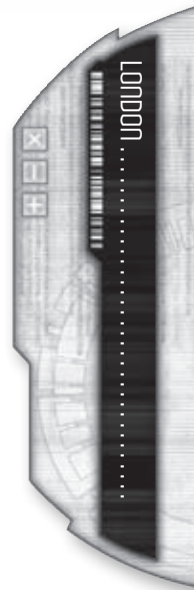
In times past, the West End was the heart of tourism and shopping in London. Theaters, museums, department stores, and more fed off the millions of people that passed through the area annually. The 2030s saw real estate values on the surface plummet, while construction underground exploded. Before long, the area above ground was a hive of abandoned buildings and squatters, while below ground was full of gleaming surfaces, alluring goods, and throngs of people. What's more, the weather in the Underplex was always warm, and filtered air kept the pollution out.

Another improvement, at least from the megacorps' point of view, was the existence of the Underplex Corporation, which gives them even more control over Underplex matters than they have on the surface. Current Underplex Administrator Dame Carrie Musgrove is firmly in the pocket of Renraku, and she has been instrumental in making sure that the monorail made its way to the West End so that tourists could easily make it to the Renraku Complex, and Renraku employees could enjoy what the West End has to offer.

- Why would they want them to get to the West End? An employee who goes off property is an employee who might actually dare spend money somewhere besides the company store.
- Lyran
- Not if they have only Renraku scrip to spend. Renraku has plenty of outlets in the Underplex where employees can spend their money. What's more, other shops, knowing that people have Renraku scrip to spend, have begun accepting it. The more a currency is used, the stronger it becomes relative to other currencies, and Renraku is fine with that result.
- Baka Dabora

The Underplex remains easy to access. Underground stations provide direct access, and if you can't find an elevator leading down while you're strolling on the surface, then you're dangerously unobservant. Just say "Underplex" while your commlink is on when you're anywhere in London—or even Great Britain—and you'll be swarmed with AROs full of directions, arrows pointing the way, and of course all the latest deals.

The Underplex continues to host the classics—**Diamonds** for gambling and drinks, **Zowie's** for the young and foolish, and





the **Picadilly UnderMall** for those overly endowed with cash—but new offerings continue to pop up and grab people's attention. **Underdome** is a cavernous (literally) sports bar that is designed to provide a fan experience even better than actually attending the game. How much better? You can stand in the middle of the (AR) action, almost feeling the warmth of the players' breath as they stand by you, and at the same moment flag down a hot dog vendor for something to eat. And the hot dog vendor has ten different kinds of sausages and thirty different kinds of ale on tap. *That's* how much better. Underdome has a gambling license so that customers can make bets, which means there is always a fair amount of money hovering around the space.

The Delve is one of the deepest spots in the Underplex, sitting nearly forty meters below the surface. Seepage of ground water is an ongoing concern, and the management plays up this aspect of the place—dripping water is an omnipresent sound (they have microphones and speakers amplifying it), and small rivulets of water run down selected walls. As you might guess, it is a cool, rather dank place, with décor that seems to openly scoff at the concept of people being comfortable. It's not at all popular with the tourists, which is a very good thing. It hosts an interesting mix of regulars, curious newcomers, and individuals who let you know with a glance that it would be best if you didn't inquire after their business. Most people enter through the main door, but a few customers have access to the place through the kitchen. I don't know where the kitchen leads—my efforts to walk through it have been rebuffed, and my assensing of the place shows a mana barrier powerful enough for me to not want to attempt to breach it without good cause.

- The owners of the Delve would dearly love you to think that they're hosting Black Lodge meetings back there, but they're not. It's actually a new version of Aleister Crowley's Golden Dawn, a group of hermetic mages looking to carry on Crowley's (admittedly primitive) magic experiments. They've taken their research in some interesting directions—particularly in the realm of spirit summoning—but they have nothing close to the reach and influence of the Black Lodge.
- Fianchetto
- Yet.
- Plan 9

While the Underplex continues to prosper, the street-level areas stumble along in a sort of permanent state of pre-gentrification. The constant flow of people going into and out of the Underplex provides plenty of foot traffic, and retail and service establishments regularly spring up to attempt to take advantage of them. In most cities, these establishments would become the anchors of trendy neighborhoods, which would then attract higher-priced establishments, and the area would soon be on the way to prosperity. In the West End, though, the higher-priced establishments are comfortably ensconced in their underground home, and they are not terribly inclined to give up the tax advantages and predictable climate they have developed for themselves. This means that the aboveground areas have some pockets of prosperity, but they never get the full footing they need to become sustainable. Businesses come and

go, developments start and are only occasionally finished, and squatters never run out of freshly abandoned buildings where they can stay as far out of notice as the cameras planted on most Underplex access points allow.

- What he's saying is that Shadowtown is still Shadowtown. It's not an out-and-out barrens where you need to sleep with one eye open and a finger on your trigger, but there are places to hide, things to eat, and a decent supply of people to con. What more can you ask?
- Thorn
- Shadowtown has a decent supply of squatters, but so does the Underplex. Ever have that dream of living in a shopping mall? So do a lot of homeless people in the West End, and they've got a bigger shopping mall, with more dark corners to hide in, then you've ever seen. A lot of the people taking up residence here are gangers who have been kicked out by their parents (or who have no desire to go home and no money to go anywhere else). While they wouldn't be much of a threat in a fair fight, they know the lay of the land, and they're ruthless enough to fight as dirty as they need to.
- Aufheben
- While a lot of the area has changed, **Status Quo** is still there. The décor hasn't changed much, but at least the fake antique furniture dotted throughout the place is now old enough that a lot of the pieces are close to being for-real antiques. The plaster gargoyles on the walls are still amateurish, the fake marble veneer on the floor is still peeling, and the cheapest alcohol at the bar known as the Retreat still doubles as window cleaner. While their low end is quite low, though, their high end is quite pleasant, and the staff knows their way around a martini shaker. Fixers still hang out here, and they can still sniff out a poser at a hundred meters.
- Traveler Jones

CITY OF LONDON

If there are conspiracies taking place in the halls of power, then the City of London is where those halls are located. Corporate headquarters, bank offices, commodities brokers, stock traders—these are the people who reside in the always-shiny buildings of downtown. If the great dragons of the world are going to start doing violence to each other, this is kind of place where the initial shots will be fired. There won't be actual gunfire, but rather corporate datasteals, hostile takeovers, and other business world perfidy that can give one business tycoon the upper hand over another.

Hearing all of the conversations that take place in the private offices and backrooms of the City of London would provide a wealth of knowledge about what's going on in London and the rest of the world, but the people having those conversations are quite cognizant of that fact, and they take any precautions money and mana can buy to keep their secrets concealed.

A fair amount of the intrigue occurring in the City district flows into the massive **Stock Exchange Tower**, which has both a state-of-the-art trading floor and the offices of the most influential brokers in the city (which makes them some of the

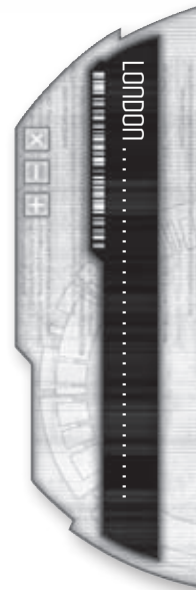
most influential brokers in all of Europe). This building is the spot where even a few minutes of advance notice on a piece of breaking news can bring in millions of pounds, and almost every denizen of the building is on the look out for information that will give them an edge. There are a few honest traders in the building who are not willing to risk jail time to make a quick fortune, but even those ones will push their ethics as far as they can go. They won't knowingly take information that was acquired illegally, but if they get information that can help them without knowing where it came from, they generally are willing to take advantage of it, no questions asked.

- We should be clear on just what's keeping these traders in line, on those occasions when they are kept in line. The things that it is *not* is any fear of government enforcement. Government supervision of the financial sector is limited even when you look below the multinational level and above that, enforcement is next to nothing. Corporations police themselves, though, and since they have more resources—and more creativity—than governments in how they punish people who have crossed them, that helps keep traders in line. Traders fear their supervisors more than they fear the government.
- Mr. Bonds

Aztechnology and intrigue tend to go hand in hand, which means the **Aztechnology Habitat** is a jumping-off point for a wide variety of plots. While Aztechnology Europe is not in a state of tumult to the degree of Aztechnology North America and Aztechnology Latin America due to the war with Amazonia and the chaos in Denver, they still have plenty of irons in the fire. They naturally are quite interested in the great dragon situation, especially as it relates to any weaknesses in Saeder-Krupp that might be exposed. Additionally, London has become the European clearinghouse for information on the hunt for artifacts, and Aztechnology has been at the head of those efforts. Some rumors say that the Weeping Stone of Ta'bel is currently being held at the habitat (it's not clear how it left the possession of Robert "Doctor Bob" Khamdeng).

Even if you're not interested in the secrets that Aztechnology may be concealing, the habitat is still worth visiting for the shopping and restaurant options on the lower floors. The prices aren't especially competitive, but people sometimes get overly relaxed when they're within the walls of their own habitat, so lifting items from individuals or out of stores can be easier here than at other locations with AAA-quality goods.

The City isn't only about business, however. **The Tower of London** is located in the City, and while it has long been reputed to be the home of active spirits, there is a new specimen adding a twist to the proceedings. A free spirit who has been calling herself Lady Jane Grey has been very active in the Tower at nights. The actual Lady Jane was executed at the Tower in 1554, and stories of sightings of her ghost persisted for centuries. This spirit, however, is of an entirely different character than these sightings. She's not just sitting and reading, or walking the grounds. She is talking to certain supporters, and apparently gathering information while she's out of sight. Most of the information she is passing on to people is aimed at putting the monarchy in a bad light, and some have surmised she is working in conjunction with the remnants of



the Lord Protector's Office. She could, however, just be a rogue agent with a distaste for royalty.

- No matter what the spirit may claim, the only connection between her and the historical Jane Grey is the name. It's a good ploy, though—building on the sense of historical romance that has attached itself to Jane Grey is a good way to attract people to her cause. She has a budding network (called the Greys, natch) to whom she provides information and who carry out plans based on her ideas. There is no reliable record of the members of this group, but they shouldn't be hard to find. They meet at the Tower, and many of them seem new to the work of covert operations, as they are often either overly subtle or not subtle enough.
- Elijah

WESTMINSTER

Westminster is to government as the City is to finance. The power of the national government may not be what it once was, but the building themselves carry a certain weight—the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, and Westminster Abbey are all in this area, and simply walking by them is enough to inspire awe in a visitor and even reverence for the people inside. Then you see those people at work, and that awe and reverence quickly dissipates.

Buckingham Palace was the site of one of the most dramatic moments in recent British history when the Pendragon delivered what turned out to be his final speech outside the gates. His arrest by the Lord Protector was forestalled by Queen Caroline herself, and that moment helped seal the fate of the Lord Protector. The Pendragon's disappearance set off wild speculation about who he was and what his end goals really were, which has resulted in a flood of astral investigators combing the site for clues. As might be expected, the intensity of the event left a residue in the form of a domain, and some visitors report that the domain has a "strange" shape. For my part, I don't see what they are talking about. The aura of the place is intense and has some odd twists related to the various spikes of emotions that occurred during the event, but my perceptions did not register anything untoward about the domain.

- The domain is a pool that seems want to become a line. The mana that is gathered there wants to stretch and find other lines. It wants to connect.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- Mana doesn't "want" anything.
- Jimmy No

Number 10 Downing Street regained some prestige with the dissolution of the Lord Protector's Office. Once again, the prime minister stands at the head of the government and bases his operations in this building. It is not, truth be told, an impressive place, and there have been many occasions where prime ministers have considered basing themselves in nicer facilities. Prime Minister William Darch, however, has spoken frequently about a "return to tradition" in his administration, and the use of Number 10 fits in with this theme. He has reduced some of the physical security in the area, opting instead for increased watcher spirits and more Awakened security personnel. When viewed on the physical plane, this makes the building look more approachable,



but on the astral the building is completely hidden by the various measures protecting it.

Near Westminster is the Temple section of London, which is where the **Lord Protector's Office** was formerly based. The sprawling complex is not as crowded as it used to be, but the offices are far from inactive. The New Druidic Movement has many people stationed here, and most of the licensing of Awakened individuals is processed through this complex. A few other government functions have been outsourced here as well, though there is more space, and more people, than can possibly be needed to do what needs to be done here. That has set people to wondering just what is going on in these offices, and with the NDM involved in processing Awakened individuals, people are beginning to suspect there is a secret agenda being carried out in connection to the Awakened, and that agenda may have something to do with the Black Lodge. Whether this is the case or not, it would be interesting to know just what is happening inside those offices.

- Note that the reason the Temple is called what it is because of the Temple Church, which was built by the Knights Templar. I believe the connections between the NDM, the Templars, and the LPO has never fully been explored.
- Plan 9

Anytime you have concentrated political activity, you have a particular hotel where visiting politicians and ambassadors stay and do business. In Westminster, that hotel is the **Waterloo**. It's top-notch in every respect, from the swiftness of the bellhops to the SOTA nature of the carefully deployed area jammers and white noise machines. If you were not able to bring all of your gear with you and you have some spare nuyen, scheduling a meet at the Waterloo is a good way to make sure nothing you discuss gets out of your meeting room. That also means, of course, that it's a challenge to figure out what the people inside are up to, but that just means we can demand a higher payday.

- The Waterloo's too obvious for people who want to be really secret. If you want to find something truly clandestine in the area, take a look at the **Black Tile**, which is called that because it doesn't have an official name, just a small black tile set in the wall of a building near the door. The building used to be a small store next to the Strutton Arms pub, and it's possible they've taken over much of the pub's upper floor. By my measurements, the interior is three meters narrower than the exterior façade. That means, of course, that there is some space on the top floor that is either still being used by the pub or is being used by the Black Tile for even more discreet purposes. The Black Tile is secret enough as it is—having secret meeting rooms inside of it would take you far off most people's radars.
- Plan 9

When you're in Westminster, remember to keep your PAN active. Security is tight throughout the area, and the authorities won't be happy if they can't see you.

EAST END

Now we are out of the centers of power and getting into the parts of London where people actually live. The East End has a little of everything—a taste of tourism and wealth in the western part, near the Thames, more than it's fair share of poverty in the older sections and the Undercity, middle-class corp drones in the outer sections near corporate enclaves, and a mix of ethnicities and metatypes throughout.

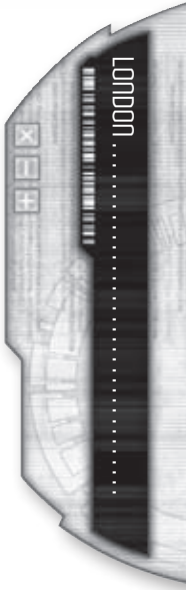
With this broad mix of metahumanity comes a range of services and possibilities. The East End doesn't have the financial resources or concentrated power of other sections, so you won't get the direct line into the heart of some of the deeper conspiracies here. But you can often find something better, such as a first step to getting into groups you want to infiltrate, or contacts who know how to get you what you need without making you pay through the nose. There are sections with similar demographics to the East End in most major cities, but the residents here have a certain stubbornness and an unyielding nature that sets them apart.

If you're looking for the type of goods you can't find anywhere else, **Brick Lane** is a good place to start. Whether you're looking for a tasty but inexpensive bowl of curry or an Enfield M1098 that you might be able to pass on to a collector, Brick Lane is the place to look. The goods on sale, as well as the merchants themselves, regularly rotate (sometimes because they need to lay low after unloading their most recent batch of goods). Stolen prototypes and other cutting-edge corp goodies often end up at **Sheda Street**, which is just off Brick Lane.

- The main reason the corps haven't had Sheda Street shut down yet is that they regularly send representatives down there to get a look at what's on sale. They tend to believe that if they improve their security enough, they can keep their own goods from disappearing, while the market gives them a quick and easy opportunity to see what the competition is up to—and maybe copy it.
- Rigger X

The most prosperous part of the East End is **Canary Wharf**, with high-rises full of bank offices, condominiums, and the shops that people who live in such buildings expect. Finance giant Hildebrandt-Kleinfort-Bernal has its headquarters here, and the news of the tensions between great dragons has acted like a shot of adrenaline throughout their headquarters. HKB has long had a troubled relationship (to put it lightly) with Celedyr, and if the current situation reveals any vulnerabilities in the great dragon's holdings, HKB will pounce. They would welcome any leverage they can get that might keep Celedyr from exercising future aggression.

- The interesting question is whether Celedyr will side with Lofwyr or Hestaby on this one. If he goes with Lofwyr, then HKB and S-K could be butting heads; even scarier would be Celedyr siding with Hestaby, in which case S-K and HKB might find new opportunities for cooperation.
- Cosmo





INCOMING FEED.....

Serious students of conspiracies should take part in a **Jack the Ripper tour** for a number of reasons. From my perspective, the most important reason is to understand some of the hazards that come with conspiracy theory thinking. If you spend any time at all talking to “ripperologists,” you will see there is clear agreement on a few key points—the fact that there was such a killer, the identity of a few core victims, and the existence of a few letters that might or might not have come from the killer—and disagreement everywhere else. The estimated number of victims of the original Ripper range from five to sixteen or more; there are also another half dozen or so victims from 2054, when the chip-tripping version of Jack went on a rampage. As far as the original killer goes, suspects named by ripperologists range from common merchants and laborers to the queen’s physician to a duke to Lewis Carroll (though this last one is generally taken to be a joke). Motives range from the compulsive manifestations of a diseased mind to elaborate conspiracies involving the royal family and (of course) Freemasons.

The point is this: People can build entire vast neighborhoods of speculation on a small foundation of information. They can spin out these theories into infinity, making sure this neighborhood contains blind alleys, dead ends, and places where no sane person would want to stay. Conspiracy theorists can get lost in the mazes of their own devising, wandering aimlessly without any real hope of finding a definitive truth.

Yet what keeps them going is that somewhere in this chaos, the truth—or at least *a* truth—can likely be found. By this point, it seems that ripperologists have named just about every person who visited the East End in the 19th century as a possible suspect,

which means that by basic rules of logic, one of these theories must be right. The structure is vast and confusing, the journey through it often seems pointless, but within the maze is a single grain of truth. And it is difficult to convincingly state that such a thing is not worth pursuing.

- To try to bring the subject back down to earth a bit, the Ripper tours themselves are usually touristy and not worth your while, but some of the ripperologists are interesting people. Their minds work in interesting ways, and they tend to know their way around the area quite well because they’ve walked the streets so much in the course of their investigations. One woman in particular, Betty Myndale, is a font of information who has not given into the tendency to babble that consumes many obsessives. Many buildings in the East End haven’t changed much since the 19th century, so she can be quite useful in helping you find your way around, and possibly pointing out some features or hidden parts of buildings that you wouldn’t know about from just looking at them.
- Traveler Jones

THE UNREAL CITY

In Great Britain, we tend to believe that any suffering can be somewhat ameliorated with the proper literary reference. Hence the fairly recent nickname that has been applied to the Lambeth Containment Zone and the Angel Towers Arcology, which is comes from T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (which is in itself a soupçon of other literary references, but never mind), which is certainly an appropriate source. Both the LCZ and Angel Towers

are prime examples of the type of area that can be seen in sprawls across the world, the area where everyone with any degree of power has thrown up their hands and given up.

The LCZ has been in place since 2038, when it was walled off because doing so was easier than pacifying the populace. The already-poor area had been thrown into an uproar by the revelation that “rogue corporation” Adams-Hoffman was revealed to be conducting genetic experiments on Lambeth residents. Tensions in the neighborhood exploded, and riots raged for more than a month before the government gave up and erected the wall.

- I see what Winterhawk was hinting at with his quotation marks, and I completely agree. Adams-Hoffman wasn't rogue in the least. They had official sanction for what they were doing, and there were plenty of investors and other parties who were eager to exploit whatever results the project came up with. There was one important part of the agreement, which is central to every conspiracy since the dawn of time: Don't get caught. They did, which meant they were hung out to dry.
- Aufheben

In the surge of optimism that accompanies any new government, Prime Minister Darch announced a new effort to reclaim the LCZ, with the goal of eventually bringing down the wall. It's still early in the effort, of course, but the walls remain up and do not seem to be on the verge of being brought down in the near future. Even after the passage of a quarter-century, the locals remain extremely untrusting of anyone outside the walls, especially anyone claiming to represent the government. The government had their chance to protect them, and they failed. And then they erected a wall. The residents do not believe that any further discussion of the matter is needed.

To date two construction projects have been undertaken by the government in the LCZ; both were under continuous assault from the locals, both experienced worker casualties, and both are currently on hiatus.

- Which means that both are currently being stripped for any useful or valuable materials.
- Pistons

For the most part, the LCZ remains a maze of tightly packed buildings (it fully earns the nickname of “the Squeeze”), changeable streets, and residents who are resourceful and ruthless. Not too many powerful conspiracies are birthed here—there's not enough resources to fuel them—but if you're looking for disposable foot soldiers, they're here in spades.

- You can also try to hide out here for a time if you need to lay low. The advantage is that few people will come here looking for you; the disadvantage is that the residents of the LCZ tend to be very familiar with each other, so newcomers can stick out. It's best to go in with someone who knows the territory.
- DangerSensei

Next to the LCZ is the heaped nightmare known as the **Angel Towers Arcology**. Former owners Regulus Joint Industries have fully moved to their new facility in Europort, and since they

never found any takers for their disintegrating structure, they simply abandoned it. Residents of the LCZ know what to do with abandoned structures, and it did not take them long to make their move. The first people taking up residence in the arcology had a fantasy about built-in electronics, large stores of resources, and other amenities of the type rarely seen in the LCZ, only to find that the building had been well and truly stripped before Regulus departed (even Peter the Panda was removed from his perch atop the arcology). On top of that, the building had been disconnected from the power grid. Currently, the only difference between Angel Tower and the rest of the LCZ is that it is better sheltered from the elements—which, given the pollution and acid that regularly falls on the city, is a not inconsiderable improvement.

- The arcology is so massive that no one really knows what's going on in there. The Black Lodge could have a meeting site on the upper floors. A bug nest could be buried somewhere in the twisted hallways. The Human Nation could be recruiting new members inside. Remember, for the most part off the grid means out of sight, and it's a rare thing to have a large, out-of-sight complex in the middle of a major sprawl.
- The Smiling Bandit
- I'd wager you're spot-on about that second one.
- Fianchetto

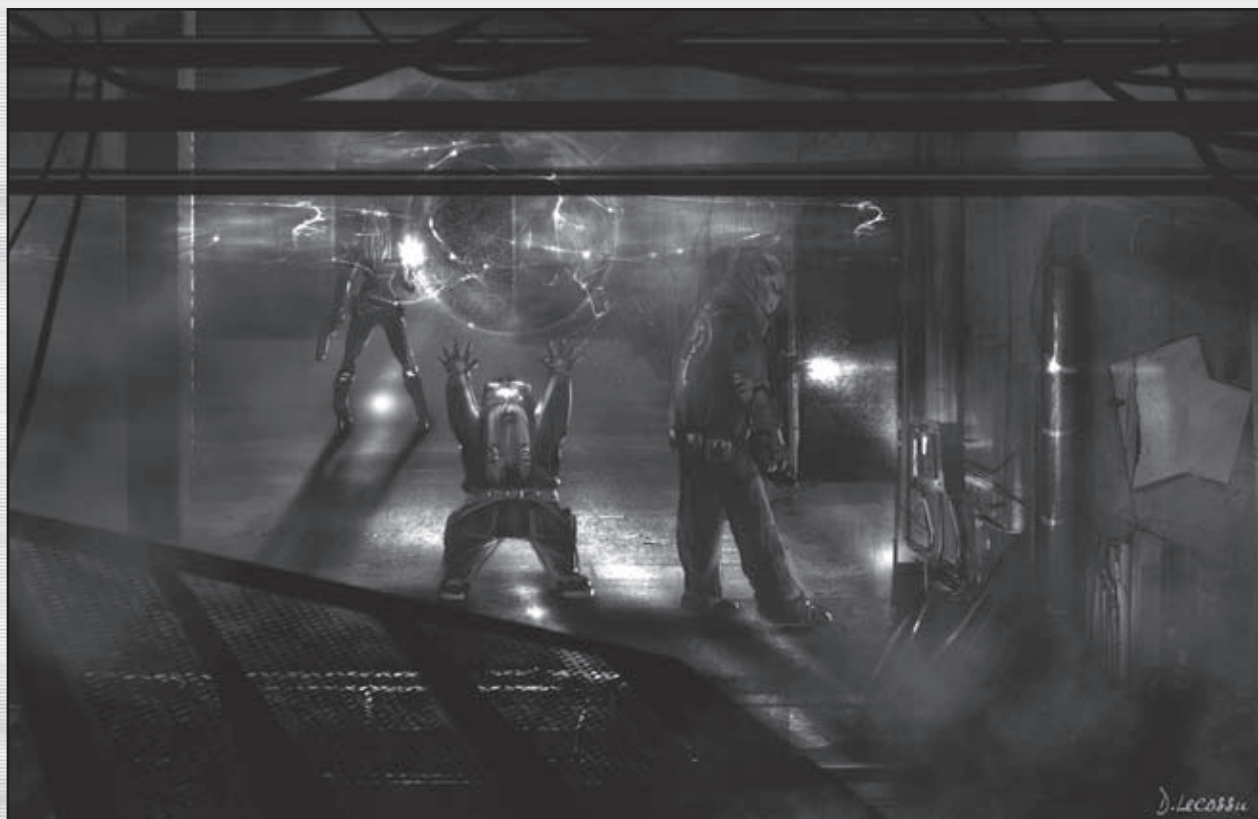
BARKING AND DAGENHAM

When Renraku decided to build its new corporate compound in the suburb of **Dagenham**, they planned big, as megacorporations tend to do. They decided to build a classic English town, with winding cobblestone streets, pudding-stone buildings, narrow footbridges, and well-manicured parks. It's all fake, of course—the long lines of cozy cottages often are not residences, but mere façades in front of office complexes and industrial facilities. Renraku felt the architecture would bring in tourists—which it has—and boost the morale of employees. It is indeed a pleasant place to walk, but it has an eerie, overly ordered feeling. People come and go at regular times, everything fits a particular schedule, and nothing is ever out of place. In many ways it seems like Great Britain's version of Stepford.

- That makes the area not only eerie but dangerous. When normalcy reigns, anything that comes into a neighborhood that is the least bit different is noticeable. If you go to the Renraku Compound, you better do your legwork so that you can make sure you'll fit in once you're there.
- Stone

Barking continues to find itself in a difficult spot. There is, of course, not enough prosperity to go around, and with resources flowing into Dagenham on the east and the downtown areas to the west, there simply was not a lot to sustain Barking. Any buildings with character have fallen into disrepair, and the only new buildings constructed in recent years have been drab, grey rectangles, some of which serve as warehouses, others as apartments. The shadows here are pretty deep, making it a good place to hide out if you're not worried about not having access to any decent food or other amenities. If you go to Barking looking





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for work, be sure you check in with a dwarf named Lionel St. Jerome. He used to run an unlicensed, mobile gun shop in the area, but once he discovered that his store helped him meet a good range of hitters, he moved into fixing (it didn't hurt that the authorities were closing in on him around the time he made the switch). He's still got connections to weapons suppliers, making him a good person to talk to if you need a job, a gun, or both.

- The first thing you need to know about St. Jerome is that his name is fake, and he chose it for a reason. He's on a one-man crusade to return dignity and propriety to lower-class London, and he has little patience with people who display poor breeding. You want to get anywhere with him, you better mind your manners.
- Traveler Jones

THE UNDERCITY

Not to be confused with the Underplex, the **Undercity** is where the deepest secrets of London are buried. If we were of a mind to, we could fill this entire posting with stories people have told about what's supposedly going on in this network of unused train tunnels, sewers, catacombs, and bomb shelters, but FastJack took things in a different direction. Suffice it to say that just about any circumstance you can imagine could be taking place in the Undercity. Renegade orks and trolls plotting to bomb the offices of a megacorp exec suspected of having Human Nation ties? Could be. A tribe of wendigo who have secret access routes to the surface that allow them to pick off city residents as needed? Sure! A luxurious underground apartment where the Pendragon hides

(or is being held), awaiting the right time to return (or seeking for an escape from his captors)? Anything's possible.

From time to time, you may find residents willing to sell you a map of the Undercity. Don't trust them. First, new areas of the Undercity are being found and/or excavated regularly, while older areas are falling prey to collapses, so no map stays accurate for long. Second, most of these maps are traps. You're supposed to examine them carefully, notice certain patterns that tell you perhaps something interesting lies at a certain spot, and then go to that spot. When you arrive, a group of twenty Undercity residents jump you and strip you of every last piece of clothing and gear you possess. They leave you bleeding in run-off sewage, then thank you for your purchase of the map as they walk away.

- This might go without saying, but you can forget about finding any major access nodes down there. You might occasionally find someone else with a 'link on, but never enough to get a decent network going. For that reason, people who do have 'links tend to run them in hidden mode. No use giving anyone help in tracking you down.
- Glitch

The nature of the Undercity makes the listing of any definite landmarks a tricky business, but there are a few spots that have lasted for a number of years and seem likely to stay around a bit longer yet. The **Aldwych station** has enjoyed three lives—one as a tube stop, one as a movie set, and now as an important hub in the Undercity. The tube line was closed down due to low traffic, and the movie business went away once it became simpler and less

expensive to use computer-generated scenery instead of lugging equipment to an unused station. The station enjoys a good location—under Westminster, but far enough from the Underplex so that it has not been absorbed by it yet. Aldwych is definitely one of the most civilized parts of the Undercity. Drinks are served here most nights, and the denizens who come to enjoy themselves are usually saner and less feral than your average Undercity resident. Spending time at Aldwych is a good way to introduce yourself to the Undercity, but don't get pushy about asking too many questions, as Undercity people can smell a rat fairly easily.

South of downtown you can find the catacombs of **West Norwood Cemetery**. This is a dangerous spot, but not for the reason people generally believe. It is not a haven for ghouls or any other infected—the infected do not derive much sustenance from decades- or centuries-old corpses. The hazard here is the Awakened that have taken residence in the catacombs. They have fled to the Undercity for a number of reasons; mental imbalance is the prime one, though a desire to stay out of the clutches of the corporations has also pushed a few people into these confines. The reputation of the place attracts newcomers, and Awakened strays are welcomed. Non-Awakened individuals, on the other hand, enter the area at their peril, as the catacomb residents are fiercely territorial.

- Wandering through underground crypts where an insane, hostile spellslinger could be waiting around any corner to blitz you? Sounds like fun!
- Riser
- I would think disaffected mages like the ones here would make this spot an ideal recruiting ground for the Black Lodge.
- Haze
- Possibly, except some of them are there because they're fleeing from the Black Lodge.
- Winterhawk
- The Grey Order, an organization of ghouls, is also trying to get a foothold in the West Norwood catacombs, but most of the current residents are not to eager to share their space with them, even though there are plenty of unused chambers in the complex.
- Goat Foot

CONSPIRACY CULTURE

There are two kinds of societies where good conspiracies have trouble thriving. One is an open, transparent, trusting society. When people live their lives in a way where nothing has to be hidden and they have faith that other people will act in ways that will benefit the community, conspiracies have very little room in which to operate. Fortunately for conspirators, such societies have existed rarely, if ever, and thus proffer few obstacles to their efforts.

The other type of society that does not nurture conspiracies is, oddly enough, a society where the majority of the people are continually obsessed with conspiracy theories, and where discussion of these theories is a continual part of mainstream conversation. Conspiracy theorists would like to think that this

climate is not good for conspiracies because they bring them to light and expose them so that they wither. That may indeed be part of it, but in my view it's only a small part. In the end, conspiracies do not prosper in these societies because they are not needed. When people are so distracted by their efforts to peer into shadows, they are often easily led, so politicians and business leaders can simply do as they will without going to the effort of forming some sort of secret society.

To foster conspiracies, then, a society should have a strong surface of proprietariness so that discussions of vulgar things such as conspiracies is frowned upon and relegated to the margins. They should have some things that simply are not to be openly discussed, thereby providing the dark corners that conspiracies need. Note that these dark corners must exist—there must be some people willing to pursue these theories or else they will die on the vine. Additionally, these societies should have enough people who have a craving for power to work in those dark corners and to obtain the things the rest of society tells them they cannot or should not have.

In this respect, London is an ideal city for conspiracies to exist. The city has been through hard times, but the residents act as if they, personally, lived through the bombing raids of World War II, and that it is their duty to deal with any hard time by keeping the famous stiff upper lip and telling themselves that as long as they are still breathing, then things could be worse and they shouldn't complain. So when their umbrella is dissolving in a particularly bad burst of acid rain, they smile tightly, throw away the bad umbrella, and continue with their lives.

- I don't think we're unfamiliar with the principle that it's easiest to not be seen when people aren't looking.
- Stone

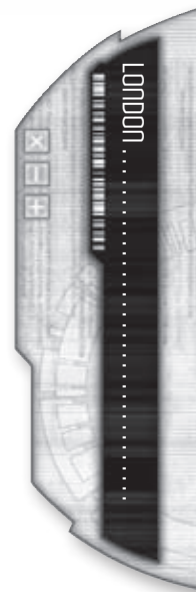
This is not to say that everyone in the city is like this, of course. The people who run the Jack the Ripper tours, for example, could swap conspiracy theories with you all day and night and not feel the least bit uncomfortable doing so. The point, though, is that these people are not the majority. The culture is shaped by those who are intent on going about their business and not peering into the corners of the world with which they have no business. Their refusal to shine a light in particular areas allows the dark corners to exist.

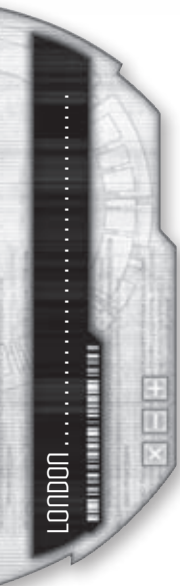
To understand London's conspiracy culture, it helps to look at three particular groups: the Enablers, the Nurturers, and the Investigators. Note that I didn't list the Conspirators here—Snopes covered that angle ably enough earlier on. Some individual conspirators particular to London will be discussed later.

ENABLERS

The people and organizations in this category are those who help create the environment in which conspiracies can exist. The main difference between them and the Nurturers is that the assistance they provide is purely accidental. They generally have a distaste for conspiracies and would never participate in secret, underhanded activities. Despite this, their actions help build the environment where conspiracies can thrive.

The **New Druidic Movement** is an excellent example of a group becoming co-opted in their pursuit of power. While they still engage in the occasional bit of earth cleansing, they have





spent much more time in recent days figuring out how they can regain some of the power they lost when the Lord Protector's Office collapsed. Groups like the NDM often have commendable reasons for seeking power when they first start out; they have some goal they want to accomplish, and accomplishing said goal is difficult without power. So they said about gathering power. The trick is, you can either be corrupt in your pursuit of power, which can compromise your core principles, or you can try not to be corrupt, which means you must spend a considerable amount of effort building a power base, as the honest ways of gathering power are slower. That can then distract you from what you started out doing. Either way, you cannot have as pure a focus on your core principles as you did when you were small and powerless. This is the way the world works.

The NDM was quite successful in its pursuit of power for a time, which means it feels its current loss quite acutely. They made their initial rise without having to corrupt themselves too much, but the hint of desperation about their current situation may lead them to make the type of deals they previously would have avoided. This means they are enablers for two reasons—they are too concerned with their own affairs to worry about any conspiracies that may be taking place under their nose, and they may be willing to make deals that they do not carefully examine, which is the sort of thing that any good conspiracy knows how to take advantage of.

After dealing with things such as the Guy Fawkes plot and the Northern Ireland troubles of the late twentieth century, you would think that **Parliament** would be especially attuned to the troubles conspiracies can cause. And they are, as long as that trouble is waved in its face. When disaster strikes, Parliament is as capable as any other governing body on the planet of overreacting—curtailing what few rights citizens still have, engaging in mass sweeps to round up potential troublemakers in places like the East End and the LCZ, and sending out dozens of alerts telling citizens how to actively be on the lookout for attacks that have already happened.

By continually reacting, Parliament is never able to get ahead of the game. That means that as long as a conspiracy doesn't call attention to itself by overplaying its hand, they can escape scrutiny.

- All that is true, but there is, of course, another factor in place, and that is that some members of Parliament are in direct collusion with different conspiracies. Sir Francis Colkane of Orpington is so widely reputed to be a part of the Black Lodge that he might as well start listing his membership on his résumé. Meredith Tompkins carries Celedyr's and NeoNET's water on the legislative floor, and watching her will provide valuable hints about how Celedyr is positioning himself. And if you're looking for who is doing the bug's dirty work in Parliament, I'd look at Campbell Haynes. Not long after Ares' Terminal Z-Zone experiments came to light, Haynes introduced a bill that would severely limit any and all animal testing and provide strict punishments for those found to be "deliberately inflicting severe pain and indignity" on the test subjects. A careful reading of the proposed legislation shows that bug spirits would be one of the groups it would protect.
- Plan 9

The **Information Directorate** is a carry-over from the Lord Protector's Office. While the Lord Protector went away, the perceived need to monitor and control information didn't, and the ID was moved under the auspices of Parliament and given new leadership, but other than that it was kept mostly intact. It oversees Matrix and media affairs in Great Britain, and like so many equivalent organizations around the world, they act as if they had no understanding of the possible benefits of a light touch. They are aggressive in stamping out any fires they may perceive and censoring information they believe contributes to an "atmosphere of insecurity." Sadly, they still have not realized that the nature of the Matrix makes effective censorship impossible. Yes, you can eliminate information from a certain node, but there is nothing you can do to stop people from making an end run and finding the information you were trying to keep from them. When they do find it, it will have the allure of the forbidden about it, which may cause more interest than the censored data ever deserved. Additionally, people advertising that they have secrets that "the government doesn't want you to know" gain more credibility when people are well aware of the fact that the government is indeed trying to build a wall between them and certain pieces of data.

- The management of a national information system is a big task, and a government body can't be expected to handle the technical side of it. That's why NeoNET recently won the contract to manage C-Net, the official network of Great Britain. That takes a load of the national government—and also gives NeoNET access to a lot of information.
- Glitch

I argued with myself for quite some time about whether I should list the **People's Party** as enablers or nurturers. They speak more about closed-door deals and other conspiracies to keep power out of the hands of the people than any other political party in an effort to kill such deals by exposing them to light, but their efforts often backfire. Rather than diminishing the conspiracies, they help connect people to them. Not everyone is enamored of the People's Party, and when they hear about efforts to keep the party down, their first response is to ask where they can sign up. While their efforts have generated some wins for them, notably the resignation of Green Party campaign coordinator Sylvia Bertram when it was revealed that she was illegally funneling money to support police efforts to break up People's Party rallies, they have also inadvertently recruited a number of people to organizations wishing to keep the People's Party down.

While they crusade against the dark political dealings of others, the People's Party is hardly innocent in this regard, which is one reason they could be called an Enabler. Their structure apparently has taken some lessons from the relationship between corporations and shadowrunners—they know that if you maintain the appropriate distance from your operatives, you can get away with a lot more. Thus, rather than having a strong central organization that gives marching orders to a legion of paid staffers and volunteers, the structure of the People's Party is lean and mean, and it generally functions as a clearinghouse of information on the activities of a large network of community organizations. Party administrators are reluctant to discuss the extent to which they coordinate the activities of these groups, which makes sense; when

one group is caught doing something underhanded, the others can deny that they had any knowledge of the activities. In the event that a scandal comes to light, the People's Party acts astonished that one of their members would be caught engaging in anything unethical, and they generally promise that changes will be made. The executive director and maybe some other personnel at the organization are fired, new people are put in, and things continue on. In the meantime, leadership of the People's Party remains unchanged (Martin Kennedy is still at the head, able to flash his boyish grin on command), and they even look like reformers for stepping in and cleaning up an organization—an organization that they may well have ordered to engage in the skullduggery in the first place.

- I can't criticize the People's Party for copying a system that generally works. One downside is that their organization has some of the same flaws you get when engaging shadowrunners—it's a roll of the dice whether you'll get someone competent and professional or someone who will embarrass you. For example, the Lambeth People's Congress recently conducted a masterful operation where they got several Green Party members to sign on to a pledge to "reduce the amount of polluted land in the East Anglian Stinkfens." That all sounds well and good until you look at the proposal and see that the method of reducing polluted lands was to bomb it out of existence. Many signers of the pledge hadn't read the whole thing, and when this came to light, they looked foolish. They accuse the Lambeth People's Congress of entrapment, but the public generally agreed that it didn't matter what the LPC did—people should read anything they put their name to. The LPC looked good, and the Green politicians who signed on the dotted line looked superficial.

By contrast, look at what Kensal Green Together did when they were tasked with learning the strategies of the Democratic candidate in a special election—they hired some street gangers to break in and loot a campaign office. The strategy was overly obvious, of course, but it didn't help that the hacker on the job was a complete amateur who left his digital fingerprints on everything. Plus, KGT had done a terrible job covering the money trail linking it to the gang. Every last staff member of KGT was replaced by the People's Party, and the parent group had to do a lot of dancing and data erasing to make sure they weren't connected to KGT's inept burglary.

- Kay St. Irregular

NURTURERS

Clearly the greatest conspiracy nurturer that modern Britain has seen is the **Pendragon**. I've heard some people argue that the man didn't really have a conspiratorial air, and that his message of decentralized power and anti-authoritarianism was the exact opposite of the goals of most conspiracies.

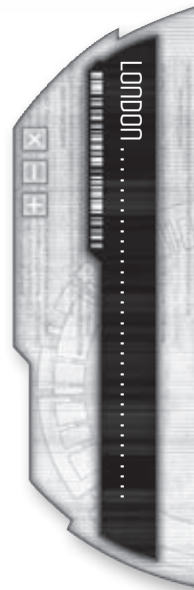
To that I say "Bollocks." The French Resistance during World War II was unquestionably a conspiracy. People met in secret, they concealed their involvement, and they planned covert operations and silent assaults. The fact that one might be inclined to approve of its ends does not make it any less of a conspiracy. The Pendragon was so deliberate about cultivating an air of mystery—from the randomness of his appearances to the sword he liked to wave around to the very *nom de guerre* that he employed—that it

was clear he wanted to encourage speculation. Clearly, he wanted people to wonder if he was in fact King Arthur returned.

Beyond that, though, the Pendragon obviously wanted to sustain some mystery as to who was actually behind his appearances and activities. It would not do for a populist rabble-rouser to directly claim the sponsorship of powerful individuals and organizations, as once you have such sponsorship your independent credentials become somewhat suspect. But he certainly let the rumors fly. His public response for not addressing them was that he had more important matters to discuss than the rumors spread by those who opposed him, but this ignored the fact that many of those rumors were also spread by his supporters. He did not address them directly because he knew that maintaining the air of mystery was the best way to keep people talking.

- I've said it before, I'll say it again—this was a Windsor thing. All you have to do is look at how perfectly it worked out for Queen Caroline. If she had come out as the supporter of the people herself in opposition to the LPO, she would have been laughed off—who really believes that royalty will serve as a credible voice of the people? But by letting the Pendragon become an icon, then making her dramatic show of support, the Queen effectively co-opted the support the Pendragon had built. It's no coincidence that the Pendragon disappeared after that event. That was the climax of what he was supposed to do. After that, his work was done.
- Sunshine
- The Queen's support of the Pendragon was opportunism, not the end result of some master plan. She was simply smart enough to see which way the wind was blowing. I prefer to believe that the Pendragon was that rarest of beings—and individual of skill and power who chooses to use what he has to serve the common good rather than to build up his own empire. Yes, I know, it's foolish, but we all have carefully selected illusions that we wish to preserve.
- Fianchetto
- How about a curveball—the Pendragon was a corporate plant. The red tape of the Administrative Bureau and the arrogance of Sir Adam Dashwood and his Oversight Office had frustrated them. Too many important deals had been slowed down, and too many valuable people had been arrested. So they concocted this Pendragon to get the Lord Protector out, then once that job was done, closed down shop. If I had to pick a corp as being responsible, I'd say NeoNET. [EDIT: Which, as it turns out, Winterhawk is about to get into!]
- Cosmo

When we have some alleged conspiracies involving dragons and others involving bleeding-edge technology, the first place to look for a nurturer is a corporation that has a great dragon leading its research division. **NeoNET** has its thumbs in all sorts of conspiracy pies, from shenanigans involving power grabs at the NEEC to the dragon situation to rumors about their stance on all things Pendragon related. Celedyr is, of course, in the middle of all this, but there are other people in the corp who have an interest in seeing conspiracies and the associated theories grow





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and thrive. One rumor says that Awakened materials expert Evangeline Bishop has heard reports of slum slime in the LCZ, and the construction efforts that were recently undertaken there were cover activities that allowed some of Bishop's people to get a better look at the slime and its personality-altering properties. Others say that Bishop isn't working through the government, but against it. They claim she is helping the LCZ residents repel the government workers, the better to make sure that none of her competitors get access to the things she is studying.

The **Templars** are another group that is difficult to classify. In many respects, they seem like they should be classed as straight-up conspirators, not nurturers. The number of conspiracy theories including them is possibly second only to theories about the Freemasons. They have been connected to historical world leaders ranging from Richard III to Napoleon to Winston Churchill, and in contemporary Europe there are stories saying that they hold sway over people such as the Pendragon, the former Lord Protector (which would be an odd thing, given that they would be campaigning against themselves, but never mind), and even Lofwyr.

- The Pendragon-Templar rumor was nonsense anyway. There was no evidence; it was just spread by people who have an innate need to connect the Templars to anything. Heaven knows the world would operate much better if we stopped paying attention to everything these lunatics said.
- Snopes

I am classifying them as nurturers, though, simply because the confusion about the various groups that have carried this name

has been supported by these groups' clandestine natures. Even if they were involved in very little actual covert activity, they would be gossiped about because their name keeps popping up in the strangest places. And they are not, of course, much for making public statements that would help clarify any of this confusion.

Much of the confusion about who the Templars are and what they do can be traced to the different groups that have borne this name. The original Knights Templar were medieval crusaders seeking to secure the temple site in Jerusalem for Christianity. By most accounts, they were disbanded in the 14th century, but ever since that time there have been rumors of their continued existence and their nefarious involvement in various world affairs. By most accounts, these Templars, if they indeed managed remain viable as an organization, flowed into the secretive group that we know as the Black Lodge, a cabal that seems to actually be accomplishing some of the goals of power that the Templars were long reputed to be seeking.

While the Black Lodge prefers to work in as much secrecy as possible, the group known as the New Knights Templar is slightly more open. We know they are a group of Awakened clergy sponsored by the Vatican, and we know that they are active in many affairs for which the Church is not anxious to have publicity. Recently, for example, the NKT have been active in Bogotá, struggling to keep the Church active in citizens' lives despite the ongoing oppression of the Aztlan government.

Finally, we have the secret police of the Lord Protector, the feared Oversight Office Operatives. Since they were based in London's Temple district, and since they inspired some of the same dread in people that old Templar rumors did, they received

the nickname of Templars, despite their lack of a direct connection to any of the other Templar groups.

- Make that lack of a *proven* connection. It is often a good idea to not discount the wisdom of the masses so easily. The people called the triple-o's Templars because they sensed a connection between them and their Black Lodge-related forebears. In truth, there were some direct connections between the Black Lodge and the Oversight Office Operatives, and the former was quite useful to the Lord Protector in helping staff the latter.
- Plan 9
- I'm not sure I agree with the innate intelligence of the masses angle, but the growing increasing authoritarianism of Lord Marchmont up until his resignation certainly seems to be in keeping with the Black Lodge's *modus operandi*.
- Fianchetto

Further confusion, at least in London, comes from lack of clarity as to the ultimate fate of the Oversight Officer Operatives. Officially, they were directly attached to the Lord Protector's Office, and so everything they had—their charter, their funding, their authority—disappeared with him. Unofficially, the government had a roster of people who had proven themselves to be quite frightening in their efficiency, and they saw no reason to simply turn them out on the street. The majority of them were transferred to other branches of government where they can continue to exercise their particular abilities.

- Wait, I'm going to beat Plan 9 to the punch on this one. So this means that by first infiltrating the LPO, these Black Lodge-connected Templars were able to spread themselves throughout multiple arms of the British government, right?
- /dev/grrl
- Exactly. You see, sometimes common sense can lead you to some basic truths about the nature of conspiracies.
- Plan 9

INVESTIGATORS

The first fact to get out of the way in this part of the discussion is that among the least effective investigators of conspiracy-related matters are those charged with official law enforcement duties. While the **British police** certainly investigate many criminal conspiracies, they tend to be of the more run-of-the-mill sort rather than the more spectacular examples discussed previously by Snopes. Honestly, their approach is only sensible. From various organized crime outfits to street gangs to corporate embezzlement schemes, there is enough tangible conspiratorial activity occurring in the nation to keep them busy without worrying about those more ephemeral conspiracies. If you have evidence of an actual crime that has been committed, they're ready to investigate. If you explain to them that you think the Black Lodge, or bug spirits, or other such things were behind the crime, they will nod politely and, if you are lucky, make a note of what you said in their file. If you make some of these same accusations *without* tangible evidence of the commission of a crime, they will provide an explanation of

the importance of a police officer's time, then gently escort you out of the building and/or dump you from their node.

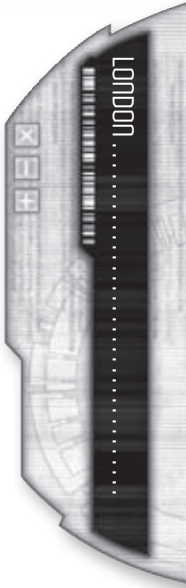
Corporate security forces are not going to be much better. The existence of the British police means that corpsec officers never feel an obligation to look beyond the borders of their own corporation. While they might be more willing to believe in the existence of small groups of people plotting for world domination behind closed doors—the corporation for which they are working likely has multiple examples of just such a group—they will be hard-pressed to see just how the threat you are explaining to them is something they should be bothered about. As is usually the case, generating interest from a corporation is all about showing how whatever you are talking about impacts them. Saying that bug spirits are poised to run rampant through a lower-class neighborhood, devouring dozens if not hundreds of residents, will elicit nothing more than a yawn. If, however, you inform them that a bug spirit nest is believed to be located near their corporate housing, and that there is a distinct possibility that the nest will erupt soon and devour corporate assets valued at approximately £500,000 and cause a productivity drop of twenty percent or more at local branches—well, then they might be moved to investigate.

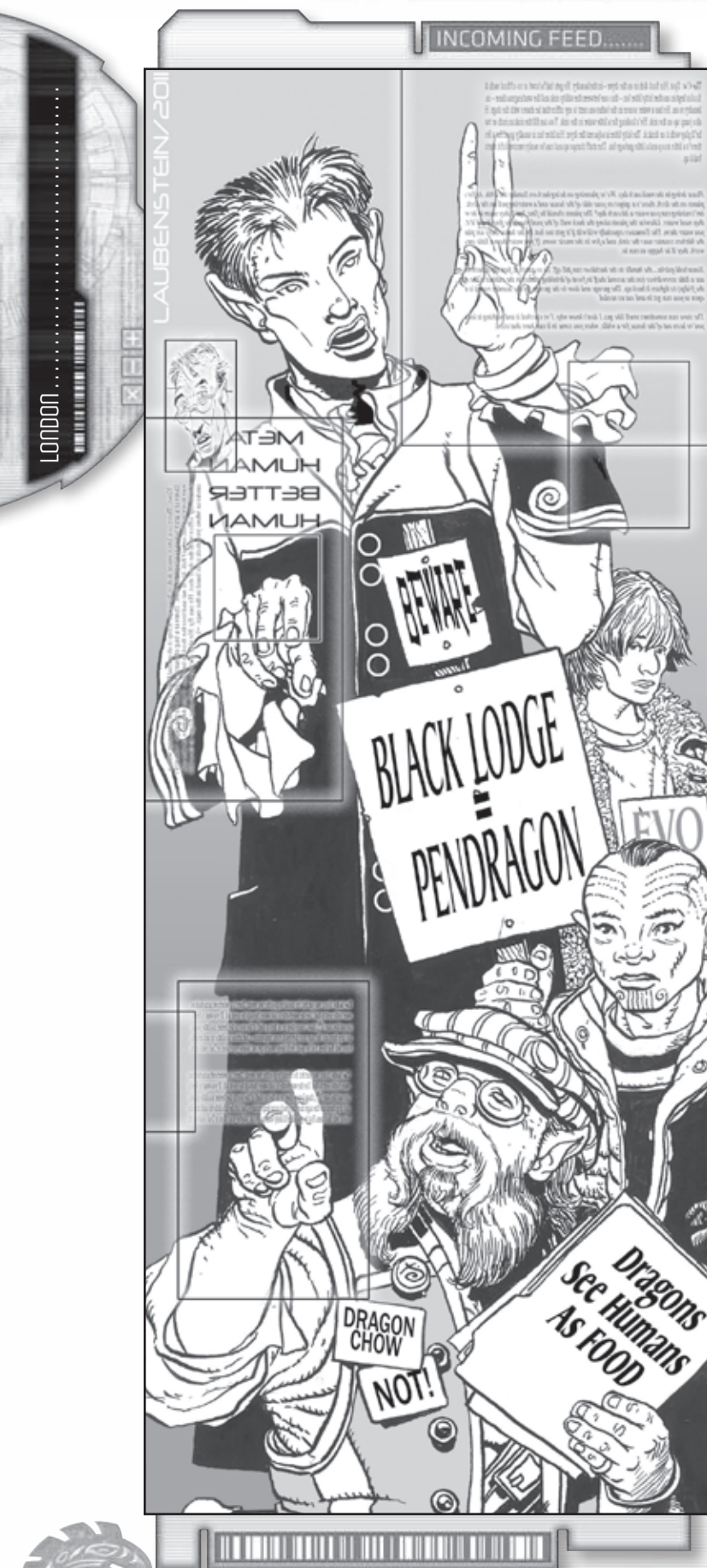
- Remember that the larger the corporation, the more intense the bureaucracy and the more organizational inertia you'll have to overcome to put them in motion. It won't be enough to present vague rumors of a bug nest—you'd better give them some trid footage to provide visual evidence of what's going on under their noses. Which means it helps to know someone who can fake up some good bug footage for you.
- Cosmo

Whenever official law enforcement bodies leave gaps in their investigations, either through disinterest or incompetence, amateurs often jump in to fill the void. While these individuals tend to be severely lacking in the training that makes law enforcement personnel effective in their job, they have an enthusiasm that can occasionally carry them past that obstacle—or, just as frequently, carry them into a spot of trouble into which they never would have blundered had they been aware of what they should have been doing.

These groups of amateur investigators are often wild cards, but they can have intriguing nuggets of information of the sort that the official bodies don't touch. You cannot count on them to be accurate, but if you want to attempt to get the full picture of the state of investigations into conspiracies, they are essential, for in the midst of their falsehoods is a fuller picture of what is happening than the official sources dare provide.

The best way to survey the range of concepts and ideas that the amateurs have developed is to spend some time at that enduring bastion of free speech, **Speaker's Corner** in Hyde Park. This spot operates much as it always have, with a large group of people milling around, waiting their turn to step forward and talk about whatever is on their mind, and a smaller group of residents and tourists listening, interested in seeing just what unexpected turn the public dialogue will take. The topics addressed by speakers cover a wide range of topics—government affairs, pop culture, environmental updates, corporate malfeasance, and so on—but if you spend time there, you generally do not have





to wait long until the next conspiracy buff takes his turn at the podium. The Pendragon and associated topics have recently been popular subjects, though my recent observations show that a disproportionate number of anti-Black Lodge references have been creeping into the remarks.

- If you spend time at Speaker's Corner, you'll notice that certain individuals or groups of people sharing a common interest tend to show up at regular times, in the (sometimes correct) belief that they have developed a following and following a regular schedule makes it easier for their public to find them. While Black Lodge-related remarks may pop up at any time, the hardcore Black Lodge theorists tend to gather at 9 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dragon-related conspiracies are most frequently heard Mondays and Fridays at lunchtime, and showing up as people are getting out of work on any weekday is a good time to hear the latest ideas on what's going on inside the hallowed halls of England's government.
- Aufheben

The **All-Seeing Eye** is the finest conspiracy-related publication in the country, at least in terms of sheer entertainment value. A visit to their node provides a wealth of ways to while away your time on a slow day, from trideo footage of particularly energetic Speaker's Corner addresses to murky footage that may show important political figures skulking through the Undercity to an important rendezvous or may just show a rat, to text articles with a smoothness and lucidity of style that stands in complete contrast to the byzantine trails of logic they trace. The publication is good for more than just entertainment, however; Editor-in-Chief Ramona Cubbins' article entitled "The Pendragon's Endgame" predicted that the Pendragon's movement would culminate in the endorsement of the royal family, the collapse of the Lord Protector's Office, and the disappearance of the Pendragon; it was released on May 17th, 2070, well over a year before the events she predicted came to pass. Either Cubbins has a preternatural gift for prediction (which, to be honest, has not been apparent in her other articles) or she had a truly excellent source for that article.

- Cubbins got lucky, that's all. She's been throwing darts at the wall for a couple decades now—one bull's-eye, after all these years, is pretty meaningless.
- Snopes
- Cubbins is a fine writer, but her biggest problem is she gets so excited about big stories that she writes them up without properly verifying them. She usually doesn't start writing, though, until she has a source. She wouldn't have come up with that on her own, it's just not her style. Someone fed her the info.
- Sunshine

The **Anti-Papists** are a curious lot. From their name, it should be clear that they carry a fair amount of anti-Catholic sentiment, and that is reflected in their output. Anything that puts the Church in a bad light is, in their eyes, automatically assumed to be true unless they find convincing evidence otherwise. This is a strain of thought in the United Kingdom that dates all the way

back to Henry VIII. For centuries, members of the royal family were allowed to marry individuals of just about any religious background known to metahumanity—except Catholics. And I don't think I need to review the trouble caused by Catholic-Protestant clashes in Northern Ireland in the twentieth century. Within this long strand of conflict, the precise origins of the Anti-Papists are unclear, and the statements of the organization don't help anything. According to their literature, their charge comes directly from Henry VIII—they all but say that they are operating under a royal charter (though of course no such official recognition exists in any form). They claim to have been “Protecting England from Heresy Since 1534,” and this is a charge they take seriously.

While the Anti-Papists bias makes them inherently unreliable, they are relentless. Their core members are funded by “true believers across the nation and all of God's realm,” allowing them to dedicate all of their time and efforts to exposing Catholic perfidy. As you might expect, this means they are definitely a group to talk to if you are investigating New Knights Templar or Sylvestrine activity in London and surrounding areas. If you track down group members, avoid their leader (or, as he styles himself, “Chief Flamebearer of Truth”), Howard Becker, unless you want to be subjected to hours of theological discourse with precious little practical information. Instead, track down a dwarf named Jackie Crumb, who Becker calls his “Archer of Truth's Arrow.” Crumb is a social adept. He's not the most gifted one in the world, and his unkempt hair and beard along with his old-school, severely metallic cybereyes make him easy to overlook and underestimate. He has a way, though, of getting people to pity him and then open up to him, and he has been doing this with the targets Becker designates.

- The Anti-Papists received a visit from the British police recently to look into allegations that they were hassling Catholic MP Vera Butterjohn, and during the visit the police erased some data Becker had on his node that they said violated Butterjohn's privacy and was “inappropriate property for possession by a public organization.” Becker was incensed, and he sent Crumb to investigate the officers involved in the police visit. Turns out the lead officer on the visit was a former Templar (o-three version). You can predict how Becker reacted to *that* news.
- Plan 9

Perhaps the most clear-eyed and clear-headed conspiracy group in the city is the **Ripper Society**. Originally started as a social club for individuals who wanted the opportunity to exchange theories about the Jack the Ripper case, the organization has continually grown its membership, which has increased the scope of affairs they look into. Their meetings have the convivial atmosphere of an afternoon tea (in fact, that is when most of them take place), and the members of the group tend to be cheerful enthusiasts rather than wild-eyed true believers. When explaining their pastime to outsiders, group members are almost apologetic, as if they expect to be accused at any moment in engaging in silliness. They are generally an intelligent bunch, though they lack the leaps of imagination that are sometimes required to fully understand the depths of a conspiracy's darkest secrets. They are also not as dogged as people such as the Anti-Papists in following

a lead and digging for truth. They are armchair theorists, people who start with a grain of information then enjoy themselves spinning out theories of the possible implications of that grain.

The current leader of the group is Beatrice Birdsong, though her responsibilities are more organizational than anything else. She acts as mother to the group, and the members are generally happy for her care. If you attend one of the group's meetings, try to find the table where Patrice Wenders (a tall female human with a piercing gaze that could stop a clock), Vin Gregor (a lean human male of Hungarian descent who seems to be quite eager to have people believe he is a vampire), and Henny X (a lively female ork from the Congo) sit. They are welcoming to strangers, lively in their discussion, well informed, and quite intelligent. They spend a great deal of time with each other, but they also usually take time to learn what's on the minds of other group members so they can provide a good overview of the most interesting theories making their way around the group. They also each have their particular areas of expertise. Wenders translated her interest in Jack the Ripper into an encyclopedic knowledge of current and historic European serial killers, Gregor knows about all things related to the Infected, and Henny X can tell you about the intrigue surrounding the Kilimanjaro mass driver and other behind-the-scenes corporate affairs.

- To be clear: Gregor is not a vampire. He's a poseur, but at least he's a subtle one. He doesn't wear a red cape or anything, and he hasn't gotten himself fang implants. He just has a way of talking about vampires that heavily implies he's one of them.
- Stone
- I agree that he's not a vampire, but I believe it's likely that he knows a group of vampires in London and associates with them regularly.
- Hannibelle
- Rumor is that Henny X used to be married to someone who was an Evo exec working on their space operations. He died mysteriously near Kilimanjaro, leaving her with two things: intense bitterness and all of his shares of stock. She uses the stock, along with her old corp friends, to keep her finger on the pulse of Evo, and over time she's managed to build up a personal network that gives her information on other corps as well.
- Cosmo

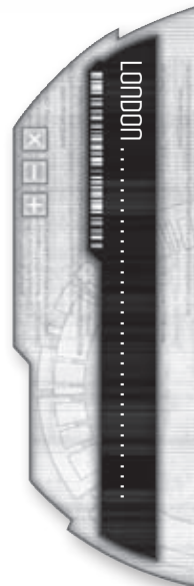
PEOPLE TO KNOW

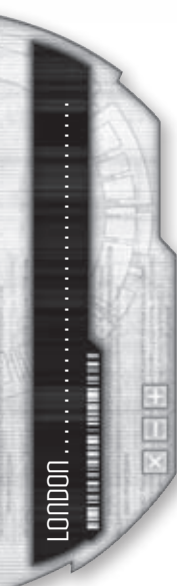
Some of the people listed below are people you could meet in London when involved with conspiracies or any other sort of work. Others are people you're not likely to meet, but you should know about them because they shape the environment in which you will be working. Whatever the case, knowing these names before you start making your way around the city is a good idea.

QUEEN CAROLINE

Gracefully Waving to a New Age

The Queen has been on a roll lately, though some of events giving her momentum are things she most likely could do without.





In her youth she was a bit of a wildcat, leaving a string of failed suitors and one ex-husband behind her. While this caused her parents a significant amount of grief, her actions endeared her to the public. She was wealthy, prominent, and beautiful, and they lived vicariously through her various adventures. Her divorce from Swiss financier Jurgen Meiers did not hurt her standing at all; the public generally saw him as stiff and boring, and they were happy for her to have the chance to find a better match.

She attempted to find that match with playboy entrepreneur Johnny Spinrad, but when evidence came forward that Spinrad had fathered a child with Saeder-Krupp operative Claudia Romanov, that engagement ended. Caroline's dignity and grace at the end of that relationship endeared her even more to her people.

- Yeah, that evidence just kind of "came forward" on its own, didn't it? Come on, Winterhawk, you all but admitted that you played a role in setting Spinrad up back when we were talking about espionage. This was a Saeder-Krupp operation all the way, designed to keep Spinrad from using the Queen to build a cozier relationship with Celedyr.
- 2XL
- Which makes it an interesting question how Celedyr will react in the current dragon situation. The Saeder-Krupp machinations of the recent past are reason enough to make him not want to ally with Lofwyr, and he has demonstrated some sympathy for Queen Caroline's humanist viewpoint. Will she be able to lead him into joining her efforts?
- Dr. Spin
- No one leads a dragon. They just hope to be fortunate enough to have overlapping interests with them for a time.
- DangerSensei

Once she ascended to the throne, though, life threw a few more challenges her way. The public demanded more from her than simply carrying on an entertaining social life, but the Lord Protector was not terribly inclined to provide any more significant of a role for her. She attempted to provide leadership during the technomancer crisis, but for the most part her pleas fell on deaf ears, especially on the part of the LPO. It seemed that as long as Lord Marchmont was Lord Protector, the Queen's influence would fade.

But then the Pendragon arrived, and her appearance next to him at Buckingham Palace electrified the nation and helped send Lord Marchmont into obscurity. Prime Minister Darch now stands at the head of the new government, but citizens of the United Kingdom are looking to Queen Caroline for leadership. Public opinion is that if he were left to his own devices, Darch might be slow on following through on the openness promised by the Pendragon, and the Queen will be needed to hold his feet to the fire.

Queen Caroline will face many challenges in her efforts. The remnants of LPO personnel in her government, especially former o-three operatives, could serve to undermine her work. If the fight between Hestaby and Lofwyr expands in scope and moves into Europe, she will have to look at some issues outside her borders, which will take away from the time she spends on

domestic affairs. And there are people in her nation, including New Druidic Movement head Justin Carmichael, who are waiting for her to make a mistake so they can move in and reclaim some of the power they lost.

- At the moment, this means there is a lot of work to be done infiltrating the government ranks to spy on former o-three operatives and seeing what they are up to. We're perfect for this kind of work, because its nature demands outsiders.
- DangerSensei
- Former LPO operatives aren't going to sit and wait for the Queen to give up power. They want to take it away. Look for them to start staging and spotlighting crime waves to make the people long for the strict law-and-order days of the former government.
- Sunshine
- The entire Pendragon situation worked out too perfectly for Queen Caroline. He appeared, spread the Queen's agenda, gave the Queen a chance to look regal, then disappeared just in time to let her and her allies claim some power. Typically, the only things that sync so well with a person's agenda are the things they bought and paid for. The Pendragon was her project from the beginning, and if the NDM or other of her opponents can prove this, it would be a political windfall.
- Plan 9

PRIME MINISTER WILLIAM DARCH

No Longer Blinking in Surprise

Darch was as surprised as anyone by the abdication of the Lord Protector, but unlike anyone else he was subsequently handed a large chunk of power, which only added to his shock. In a display of generosity, many of his subjects empathized with his shock and allowed him time to get his bearings before he implemented the Pendragon's agenda, which both the Queen and the people supported.

The grace period, however, is over. The people are impatient, and Darch needs to take action. The unrest in the LCZ is clear evidence of the problems of letting issues continue for too long, and the failures of Darch's efforts have already put a damper on the enthusiasm surrounding the end of the LPO.

- Which is, of course, not accidental at all. Not all former o-three operatives found a new home in government. Some of them are freelancing, and their current job involves stoking fires in the LCZ and making sure the residents lash out when they have the chance.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

One of the great obstacles facing Darch is that while he may be at the head of the government, the government is not the supreme power of the land. He can only go so far without the corps' approval, and the corps were far more sympathetic to Marchmont's goals and policies than they are to those of Darch. Queen Caroline's relationship with Celedyr may help Darch construct inroads into NeoNET, but that's going to be complicated by Darch's cozy relationship with Hildebrandt-Kleinfort-Bernal. With relationships as complicated as they are, Darch faces a difficult situation, because making friends with

one group means alienating another. Darch's alliance with HKB settled some squalling from the New Druidic Movement, but it made Celedyr all the more eager to develop his next plan to squash his rivals.

- And let's not forget Saeder-Krupp, which is far from eager to see anything that gives a boost to HKB.
- Baka Dabora

What this all means is that Darch knows that he needs allies, but it's unclear that he has the diplomatic skills that his effort will require. In Parliament he generally is seen as well meaning but slow, and with the other players and conspirators making and breaking alliances seemingly on a weekly basis, Darch will be hard pressed to keep up.

- Darch needs to do what any executive is supposed to do—delegate. He has a Foreign Secretary, of course, and a Business Secretary, but he needs something else, a troubleshooter who can work with a lower profile than a department head can. He is aware of this need, though, and has been looking for the right person. From what I hear, a leading contender is Sir Adam Dashwood.
- Black Mamba
- That's what you hear? Really? Can you find out what your sources are smoking so I could get some too? Dashwood's a wanted man; Darch wants him, all right, but so that he can see him hanged, not to give him a new job. Bringing him in would torpedo the government's credibility, which wouldn't help any ongoing negotiations.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- Dashwood has shown himself to be effective, and most corporations understand that effectiveness is the only currency that matters. Besides currency. Anyway, bringing in Dashwood would show that Darch places a premium on doing what he needs to. They might respect that.
- Kay St. Irregular

JOHNNY SPINRAD

Professional Distraction

Officially, Johnny Spinrad has a job, and a pretty good one at that. As the entrepreneur behind Spinrad Industries, Spinrad's portfolio includes a top-notch football club, some cutting-edge design shops, a public relations firm, and more. While his businesses generally prosper, Spinrad has in the past few decades been most known for being a spectacle. He's incredibly wealthy, he's still youthful even as he approaches seventy years old, and he keeps making decisions that cause scandals and inspire dismayed head shaking. Still, people continue to find it impossible to look away from him.

The revelation that Spinrad had fathered a child by Claudia Romanov and the end of his engagement to then-Princess Caroline didn't win Spinrad any new fans, but it also didn't lose him any. In his personal life, Spinrad is supposed to break the rules; he's supposed to be doing the things that everybody else wishes they could. Having an affair with a glamorous elf while being engaged to a princess fits firmly in that category.

While the extreme sports and the womanizing are the things people want to hear about Spinrad, he can't spend all his time on such things—he has a business to run. Spinrad had been working with Regulus and other European industries to build a bulwark against Saeder-Krupp, and he's been making overtures to HKB to join him in that effort.

- So if Darch is looking for allies, and Spinrad's partnering with HKB, does that mean that Darch and Spinrad are going to be making a connection?
- Pistons
- Darch has certainly had that notion, but he has to consider Queen Caroline's feelings. I imagine she'll come around; the engagement is water under the bridge, and getting Spinrad in her court makes sense.
- Kay St. Irregular

Spinrad is a man of many interests, and he seems to have a compulsive need to find new interests and activities that will keep the populace interested in what he's doing. Lately that has involved playing around with the occult. Much of this is just a publicity gimmick—note that he started dabbling in this area just before Spinrad Industries released its new Séance line.

- Séance line? Really?
- Hard Exit
- As long as there are suburban teenagers, there will be a demand for goth clothing. Spinrad's just offering up the latest iteration.
- /dev/grll

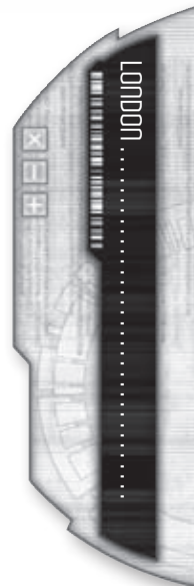
The longer he's been involved, though, the more this seems like something besides a passing interest. Witnesses say Spinrad has made the parlor of one of his London pads look like a séance room, right down to the extremely rare dark-wood William Fuld Ouija board from the early twentieth century. Some whispers are saying that Spinrad's interest has gone beyond mere appearances, and he's been reaching out to find people who can tell him more about spirits and the occult. The Black Lodge is, naturally enough, marshaling themselves to respond to his interest, hoping to provide some sources he can trust and eventually infiltrate his inner circle.

- That would require Spinrad to maintain an interest for a sustained period of time, which is not something he has generally proven himself capable of. I figure this interest of his has a lifespan of another half a year, after which it will fade.
- Cosmo
- That gives the Black Lodge six months to try to manipulate him to get some inside information—assuming they don't already have someone making their way into his organization.
- Plan 9

RHIANNON GLENDOWER

Pulling Gossamer Strings

You likely will not run into Lady Rhiannon Glendower, Duchess of Snowden, when you are in London, but it's easy to find her influence. Lady Glendower spends most of her time



in Wales, which is one major obstacle to encountering her in London; the other is that she generally does not hold meetings with the likes of you.

The reign of the Lord Protector was not an easy time for Lady Glendower. The New Druidic Movement saw her as a competitor for the loyalty of Celtic druids, and the LPO saw her as a pain in the arse. It was precisely this difficulty that led many people to believe she was one of the Pendragon's primary supporters, and many people think her activities went deeper than that. Wales is, after all, hip deep in Arthurian lore, so invoking it would be a natural resource for someone like Lady Glendower.

- It's a decent possibility. The Pendragon's cause generally overlapped with Glendower's personal agenda, but if she was indeed helping direct him, she didn't overplay her hand. The Pendragon never came out and directly recommended Welsh independence, but he did a lot of things to clear out the obstacles in her way. That's the kind of subtlety you'd expect from someone who has been in power for a while.
- Hannibelle

As power continues to reshuffle and reorganize in the city, Lady Glendower has several agents doing her bidding, and the scope of her operations has widened to include a need for deniable assets. Parliament now has more power than it did during the time of the Lord Protector, so Lady Glendower is busy recruiting people to her call. Some of this happens through old-fashioned means like bribery and blackmail, but more creative options are also in play. Favor trading is significant—Lady Glendower is happy to have a word or two with Celedyr in exchange for someone voting her way on a crucial issue.

- She's happy to do that because she knows that, for the most part, Celedyr will do his own thing, regardless of what she says. That's why Lady Glendower is so willing to trade that as a favor—she knows that it will have no real impact in the end.
- Cosmo

Lady Glendower has been an active voice in favor of cleaning up various toxic areas of the nation, and she's broadened that to include the LCZ. She does not, however, think that the Prime Minister's efforts to impose construction in the zone were the right way to go. She had an alternate plan that would fund activities run by LCZ residents, and she supported providing funding to the Lambeth People's Congress to support development activities.

- "To support development activities." That's an innocuous turn of phrase. Snopes said earlier that he believes there is a bug colony in London; as I mentioned previously, I believe it is located in the Angel Towers Arcology. The development activities Glendower would support would include improvements to the arcology, which would mean a better home for the bugs—and a more regular stream of food.
- Fianchetto
- Glendower's in league with the bugs? I find that hard to believe.
- Ecotope



- I don't think it's a conscious thing; I believe she is being used. Supporting the cleanup of a distressed area in a bottom-up, small-scale way is in keeping with her general philosophy. I believe there are people in the LCZ who were aware of that and decided to take advantage of that inclination to further their own ends.
- Fianchetto

CELEDYR

Standing between You and Your Data

While the great dragon Celedyr's base of operations continues to be in Caerleon, he recently increased his presence in London—and the rest of the UK—when NeoNET was awarded control over the Chancellery Network (C-Net), which is the nation's public Matrix network. You can get by in the UK, and especially in London, without having to use these official channels, but sometimes it's nice to not have to scrape around for unofficial, unreliable channels and just ride the big broad swath of bandwidth that flows through the city. Just remember, every time you do that you're wandering into dragon territory.

It's true that Celedyr does not monitor every bit of information on C-Net; in fact, he is far more concerned with the development of new Matrix products than he is with administering its current structure. That doesn't mean you shouldn't be worried. After all, the person who best knows how to shut down a piece of equipment (or a network of said equipment) is the person who designed it in the first place.

Not that Celedyr would be so crude as to install a simple kill switch that could shut down all of C-Net. That would be overly broad and quite sloppy. No, the true concern would be that he is putting what he wants where he wants it.

- I don't think the other corps are dumb enough to put in something that would let Celedyr monitor any of their information. Their tech people are pretty good, you know.
- Glitch
- I agree. Spying on communications might be beyond the scope of his operations, but selective shutdowns when they serve his purposes? That's feasible, if still challenging.
- Winterhawk

While Celedyr was no doubt happy when NeoNET received the C-Net contract, it came with a personal sting. He had prepared a sales pitch that he planned on delivering personally to Queen Caroline, only to have her rebuff him and reject the meeting. The fact that she did so even while fully intending to give NeoNET the contract means that her rejection was meant as a message, and that message was this: Leave our treasurer alone.

Celedyr has had a grudge against HKB for years, and the fact that they have not only survived his attacks but now have gotten a strong foothold in the new government has him gnashing his teeth in ways that can be heard across all of Wales. This could be the action that pushes Celedyr into an alliance with Lofwyr in the rising dragon tensions, which would make things quite interesting in London, as two great dragons could be spearheading runs against a financial giant and the government of the country.

- These runs could take a lot of forms, but I imagine the first ones would be aimed at undermining HKB's credibility. If you've got skills in manipulating financial records or moving money out of closely watched accounts, you should be able to find some work.
- Mr. Bonds

LORD JUSTIN CARMICHAEL

Cleaning Up Others' Messes

When Lord Marchmont left the LPO, his was not the only head to roll. The New Druidic Movement found itself leaderless, and Lord Justin Carmichael, patron of the Oxford Grand Lodge and a leading critic of Marchmont within the NDM, stepped to the head of the movement. His ascent to this position was widely seen as a slap at the previous leadership and an endorsement of a more aggressive approach to environmental issues. Carmichael has picked up that baton and run with it. He is regularly sending teams into toxic zones to take out the spirits and shamans that have taken root there and, if they're strong enough, to clean up the land.

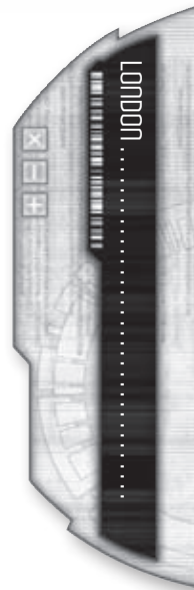
- Some of these missions have been successful, but the Scottish Fringe Toxic Zone has been a particular problem. Some people think it's a toxic spirit thing, but my information says that's not the problem. Some pro-LPO factions have taken root up there, and they carry a significant grudge against the NDM. They'll hamper their efforts whenever possible.
- Ecotope

In the city, Lord Carmichael is pushing the NDM to support the breakdown of the LCZ wall, though he does not support the means by which Prime Minister Darch has gone about it. If he had his preference, he would not go in and construct new buildings—he would tear down the wall and everything inside it and then build a huge nature preserve there. He hasn't said what he intends to do with the people who live inside—from his remarks, the residents clearly are of secondary importance.

- This means that Carmichael is likely no ally of the bug spirits, as he wants to raze their residence. I'd wager, though, that he doesn't know they're there, and if he sends people to clean things up, he won't know what they're getting into.
- Sticks

The relationship between Darch and Carmichael seemed mostly like an alliance of convenience in the early stages, and as time passes it seems increasingly shaky. Like many other UK residents, Carmichael is not happy with the slow pace of the prime minister's progress on his key issues, and he is agitating for Darch to move faster. If things continue progressing in this direction, NDM members might become amenable to undermining Darch's government in the hopes of getting a faster-moving leader.

- So is this Carmichael related to MP Joseph Carmichael IV from the fine city of London? The one with the reputed Human Nation connection?
- Pistons



- Yes—they're brothers. Not close, though, as you might imagine from their competing politics. If you need dirt on one, it's not a bad idea to go to the other.
- Kay St. Irregular

SIR ADAM DASHWOOD

Surviving Because He Can

It wasn't long ago that Adam Dashwood was the boogeyman of the LPO, the nightmare shadowrunners warned their children about to get them to behave. He was talented, relentless, and effective. He also made a whole lot of shadowrunners—and other undesirables—disappear.

Then the Pendragon appeared. For a time, people at Dashwood's level ignored the upstart, but eventually he was assigned to investigate who this newcomer was, who was supporting him, and what his endgame was. And he failed, totally and completely. He brought back exabytes worth of rumors, but none of them were conclusive, and many of them were contradictory. He was sent out again, and he continued to get nothing, right up until the moment that the Lord Protector resigned and the Pendragon disappeared.

With the Pendragon gone, the government was controlled by the people that Dashwood had previously been exercising his powers against, and he read the writing on the wall with little difficulty. He left the country, hoping that people would be too busy with affairs within the UK borders to worry about him.

- Dashwood didn't just go into hiding—he's spending his time covering his tracks. One by one, he's going after people that might be moved to act against him, or who might have evidence that could prove to be inconvenient someday.
- Thorn

The important thing to remember is that Dashwood didn't resign—technically, he is on leave. He's not collecting a paycheck, of course, but he remains in the service of the Queen, which means that should the Queen desire, he could be recalled to service. To many people, this is a non-issue. They feel significant relief that they don't have to worry about Dashwood, and they are not at all interested in having him back.

Prime Minister Darch, though, is starting to realize that he could use exactly the kind of help that Dashwood can provide. He faces significant internal objections, but I would not be surprised in the least to find Dashwood back in the service of his government within a year. That means that cultivating relationships with Dashwood's allies in London would be a good idea, because once he comes back, the man is likely to be overflowing with work.

- If you are looking for Dashwood's allies, you could start with Ewan McGowan, a former Templar (in the o-three sense, not Knight Templar sense). He might not be easy to find—he's reputed to be travelling with Dashwood on many occasions—but he's in London more than Dashwood, and he's less likely to be surrounded by people trying to kill him.
- 2XL

- I still say that no one really wants Dashwood back, and that all of these rumors are just pretext to get him to *think* they want him back, so that he won't be suspicious when an invitation comes, and he'll come back, and the Queen will have him arrested and executed.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

MARTIN KENNEDY

Trying to Derive Power from People Who Don't Have Any

Populist political parties often find themselves in tricky spots. They have as an article of faith the fact that power should come from the people they serve, and those same people should give them their marching orders. Every now and then, a particularly charismatic populist will ride a wave of voter discontent, building anger and passion until they seem poised to bring down an archaic power structure and replace it with something new and better. But then the wave crashes against the structure and just kind of dissolves. As it turns out, the power of the people is all fine and good, but it doesn't hold a candle to the power of the powerful.

Martin Kennedy is unusual in his staying power. Most populists only last as long as the particular wave that they catch; once the wave fades, so do they. Kennedy, though, has been at the head of the People's Party for years, and now he has somehow managed to outlast the Lord Protector. Through it all, he remains what he has always been—an agitator who is forever outside the true halls of power, seeking to make a meal out of whatever crumbs those at the top drop his way.

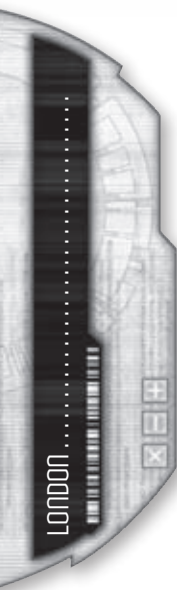
Now in his early 40s, Kennedy has joined the growing chorus of voices trying to push Prime Minister Darch into more rapid action. Political observers have noticed a change in his rhetoric of late—there seems to be an edge of desperation that was not there before. It's as if Kennedy recognizes perhaps his best opportunity for change in a decade, and after a year of relative stasis he is worried that it will slip through his fingers.

- Desperate men do two things: They make mistakes, and they look for new allies who might be able to help them. It's this second one that concerns us. Kennedy is ripe for manipulation right now, so if you can convince him that you can help him get what he wants, you might be able to get him to do some pretty interesting things. Remember that he has an army of volunteers spread out across London. Just think of what you could do with a few thousand people willing to hit AROs with your custom-designed AR spray-paint message.
- Kay St. Irregular

RAMONA CUBBINS

Getting the Word Out, If It's Crazy Enough

There are historical archives that talk about a species of journalist that had two main criteria used in deciding what they reported: accuracy and importance. They would only publish stories for which they had substantial evidence, and they would not waste their time in trivialities. For example, while divorces of celebrities are verifiable, they are not truly important to the world at large, and they don't need to be reported. Or at least, not on the front page.



It's not clear when this species of journalist became extinct, but most experts believed it occurred in the mid- to late-twentieth century. This led to the current situation, where accuracy and importance are viewed as luxuries.

Ramona Cubbins is a product of the current journalistic culture. She has a token dedication to accuracy—she won't print anything unless she has a source for it. Her verification of information from any given source is quite limited. The primary question she asks is not whether the information her source told her is true, it's whether it's interesting. If it is, she runs with it.

None of this makes her a good journalist, but Cubbins has two particular gifts. First is a clear, direct writing style that gets right to the heart of the story she is telling. Second is a definition of the word "interesting" that lines up very well with the things the public wants to hear about. Thus, her publication, *The All-Seeing Eye*, has become rather popular (at least within the limited realm of independent news sources). Currently, the public has a decent interest in conspiracies, which means that *The All-Seeing Eye* is even more full of conspiracy theories than normal (as you might guess by the title, conspiracies are never fully absent from the publication).

- They've really been on a roll over there. The latest issue managed to link every major political assassination of the modern age, from the Archduke Franz Ferdinand to JFK to Prince Jingqi of Shaanxi. It was a stunning work, combining an impressive knowledge of history with a willingness to build connections on the most tenuous of data. If you took a step back, it made no sense whatsoever, but while you were enmeshed in it, it took you on a hell of a ride.
- Sunshine

If you want to get information out, then, *The All-Seeing Eye* is your ideal vehicle. Just make sure you sell Cubbins on your story. There are lots of people clamoring for her attention, so she doesn't have much patience for a story that doesn't get to its point. Present your story like you're a journalist—pack the critical, attention-grabbing information right at the beginning, then spool it out once she's on the hook.

- Don't go to her with Pendragon rumors. They were quite popular a year ago, but both Cubbins and the public seem to feel they're played out. Information on adventures in toxic zones has become popular. The stories are like monster movies, giving people a pleasurable shudder as they read about a place that they can convince themselves is far distant.
- Fianchetto

SHEILA BENNETT

Scrapping with Politicians and Devil Rats

Sheila Bennett wants a better life for her people, even if she has to mail out a few devil rat corpses to make a point. She's not a politician, she's not trying to make nice or get the approval of the general populace. She is going to fight for the generally ignored people of the LCZ, and she'll use any technique that she thinks will bring results.

She's doomed to failure, of course. The Lambeth People's Congress is a nice organization and all, but should anyone in power decide that it has become too annoying, it will be swept away like leaves on a sudden gust of wind. The fact that it still exists means that it hasn't succeeded in getting the attention of the people it is trying to bother.

- Not necessarily. Prime Minister Darch has spent enough time worrying about the LCZ that I'm certain he's aware that the Lambeth People's Congress exists, and I would assume the group has gained the attention of corporations wishing to use the currently walled-up real estate for themselves. The reason they are letting the organization survive is that they may find a way to make it useful in the future. One possibility is to co-opt it—finding a way to give Bennett enough so that she agrees with a corporation's larger agenda is a good way to sway a large portion of the populace to a particular point of view. For example, if a corporation uses Bennett as a liaison to make cash offers for their property instead of making the offers themselves, they might be better received.

Conversely, they could be waiting for the right time to destroy the organization. Doing so now would be pointless; doing so later, when large-scale redevelopment is poised to move in, could break the spirits of the populace at an important time and make them disorganized and easy to push out. It's best to keep these kinds of options open for when you need them.

- Kay St. Irregular
- That was a cold-blooded and cold-hearted analysis. Berlin shows that people power can work. I hope the residents of Lambeth stay strong.
- Aufheben

Bennett, a strong-willed ork, employs the time-honored tools of a community organizer, including rallies and protests, but she is also willing to take harsher action. Most LCZ residents, along with government representatives, believe that Bennett played a role in organizing the attacks on the government construction sites. Whether this is the case or not, Bennett is a vital contact in the LCZ, because she knows most of it, or she knows someone who knows the parts she doesn't. You'll have to earn her trust, but bringing the heads of a few devil rats or the scalps of an outside developer is a good start.

- Bennett knows that there are bugs in the Angel Towers Arcology. With the information network she has, she'd have to be an idiot not to know that something was going on. I'm sure she'd like to get rid of them, but she's not about to ask the government or corps for help, because she's well aware of the collateral damage they leave on their bug hunts. She'd be quite grateful to anyone who cleared out the bugs; conversely, revealing to the Powers That Be that she had been hiding knowledge about a bug nest would generate enough public outrage to justify her and her organization being swept away quite promptly. If that's what you wanted.
- Stone



- And if you're the type of person who has no soul and sees a conflict between insect spirits and downtrodden city residents as a political opportunity.
- Aufheben

JACKIE CRUMB

Raw and Ready To Be Cooked

There's something exhilarating about unshaped talent, both to the possessor and to those around him or her. The first time a young talent realizes he can do something others cannot, he is filled with a sense of limitless possibility. Eventually, of course, he will slam his head into the ceiling of his own limitations, but until that time he will feel like he could very well become the greatest in the world at whatever it is he has learned he can do well.

There is a similar exhilaration among the people that know the individual. Some of them are just plain happy for him, while others are suddenly filled with ideas about how they can take advantage of this new talent.

This is where the dwarf named Jackie Crumb finds himself. He joined the Anti-Papists out of a sense of duty, but after six months in the organization he was considering leaving. The work he was doing, which was mainly spamming public officials and filling public AR streams with anti-Catholic propaganda, was not fulfilling to him, and while he remained a dedicated Protestant, he did not feel the same zeal that other members seemed to have.

Then he was caught vandalizing a police station's AR. As a bobby led him into the station, Crumb spoke faster than he ever had in his life, trying to explain that it was all just a misunderstanding. To his surprise, the bobby stopped before he reached the doors of the station, nodded slowly, and let Crumb go. Crumb felt a high better than any drug he had ever taken.

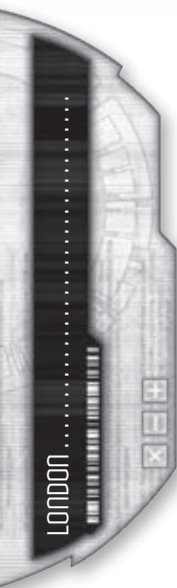
- That first moment of Awakening is quite a rush. For some people it's a slow trickle, but others get overwhelmed by a flood of sensation as real mana flows through them for the first time. It's easy to get hooked on it.
- Haze

He told Anti-Papist leader Howard Becker about the incident, and Becker quickly recognized it for what it was. He sent Crumb on a few missions to confirm that this new ability existed, and then he thrust Crumb into a role designed just for him. Crumb, with the help of his gift, is now in the organization to get people to talk. Becker sends him to talk to all varieties of people, looking for evidence of New Knights Templar activity in the city.

Crumb has discovered that it's easy to get people to talk to him. With his hangdog expression and disheveled appearance, people find him unthreatening and even pathetic, so they often start talking to him to make him feel better. Once they start, Crumb's gift encourages them to keep going, and they often say far more than they had intended to, spilling all sorts of information on Crumb.

Before Crumb hits the ceiling of his talent, he'll probably reach the limit of what he can do for the Anti-Papists. Getting people to talk is a valuable skill, and someone of more prominence (and wealth) than the A-Ps is bound to track down Crumb to bring him to bigger and better things. Becker does not want to lose him, so this might very well have to be a hostile extraction. If you take Crumb, or even if you just encounter him, make sure he does more talking than listening. That will help make sure that he doesn't catch you saying something you're not supposed to say.

- Crumb was tested recently by an encounter with a former o-three operative, and he might have to continue stretching himself since neither the operative nor Becker was left happy with the encounter. The operative was upset that Becker had been annoying an MP, and Becker was unhappy that the government was tampering with his data. He wants Crumb to do a better job forestalling such investigations, and Crumb is working to expand his abilities to help him do more than listen.
- Traveler Jones
- Becker's lucky that Crumb met the operative; if things hadn't gotten more interesting with the Anti-Papists, he might have already left in search of new challenges. The challenge of facing down a former o-three has invigorated him.
- Thorn





DeeCee was built from contradictions. Sleepy bedroom communities and most of the Government Zone shut down by dusk while adjacent neighborhood ran nonstop, 24/7. Powerful outsiders cross those boundaries every few years, descending like locusts to gorge themselves while the powerless masses kept the city, and the country, running. The city was infused with magic and yet magophobia ran rampant. Perhaps the biggest contradiction was that it was supposed to be the American's people city, the seat of the republic, and yet it was unelected conspirators who carried out the important business out of sight and out of mind.

Pistons didn't think about any of this as she walked through the Waterfront Fish Market. People from all over the sprawl congregated here on Sundays. In Kansai Village, SINners and SINless, powerful and those scraping by all mixed together. She had her digital hunters helping her search for signs of her prey. After the incident with the Speaker and the rest of the Black Lodge, Pistons had to watch her back. She was searching for Jason Hobbs, a SpiriTech researcher who survived the assault on their Albuquerque headquarters earlier in the summer.

She passed a pair of smiling Desert Storm officers and smirked to herself that perception could be managed so well in a city that knew it was all nonsense, all manipulation. She thought about Kay and his talk about The Big Lie.

Suddenly, an AR window appeared in her field of vision with a mental ping. Her agents found him as he walked towards one of the vendors. Most of the stalls sold the same basic package of seafood with slight distinctions. It was often an exercise in customer service and preparation. Though the methods didn't vary much, they mattered to connoisseurs.

"Jason," she called out as he turned around with a crab cake in his hand. Mr. Hobbs was lucky. He didn't look Amerind. If he had more distinctive features, those friendly patrolmen may have calmly suggested that he not delay his purchase and exit as soon as possible.

"Mr. Gage told me to speak to you." Hobbs nodded. A palpable sense of relief washed over him.

"Sure. What's this about?"

"I'm looking into the events of the past summer. All of them. Anyway, Gage told me that you've been looking into the source of the data SpiriTech was given." As they spoke, her agents penetrated his commlink and began to search for the keyword Kay and his contact in Denver gave her, leaving AR updates in her field of vision. "They keep hitting a wall at Denver, but I think it's a smokescreen."

"It is. And you can stop searching my commlink. I'm willing to share what I know."

Pistons curled a smile as she closed an ARO with the flick of her hand. "Aren't you a clever one?"

"The data the Toxic Hunter found on Friday is the same data my group was given. Shadows and myths are being pitted against each other, and it all leads back here. We're deep in the muck now. All of us."

FACTS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Posted by: Pistons

Welcome to DeeCee. I know many of you have come through the sprawl before, but things are very different now. Ever since the Watergate Incident this summer, the city has been changing as things that no one wanted to discuss became hot topics, and all of the shadowy players who have made DeeCee their playground have become more overt in the actions as they attempt to grab power for themselves.

The sprawl is not just the Federal District of Columbia, but also most of the state of North Virginia, along with the areas around the Baltimore sprawl to the north. There is plenty of business to focus on, however, just in the FDC. It's home to over five million people, and possibly more if you count the enclaves who don't allow census takers, the SINless, and others who aren't exactly easy to pin down. Most of that population has historically been limited to the outer counties, but Washington is now home to a permanent population of over one million people who have filled the massive Kansai Village enclave in the ever-growing section of the city known as Compville. Out in the counties, there are small bedroom communities and massive corporate parks abutting as everyone builds and rebuild wherever they are able to do so.

Things have been changing a great deal. Even before the Rift closed and the government began to considering reopening that section of Foggy Bottom, we saw the completion of Kansai Village and the various works projects that have rebuilt the nine (yes, nine) military installations within the FDC thanks to Colloton's neo-Keynesian military recovery initiative. Bethesda has seen a complete overhaul of the regional biomedical business, and folks like Picador can attest that within and just beyond the district borders there is an active solicitation for independent mercenary and intelligence business. It's the magic, though. That's changed everything. Before, business was clandestine and private. Now everything's come out in the open, and that scene is changing the face of the city.

LIFE IN THE SWAMP

DeeCee has long been perceived as a company town. The District of Columbia was established to be the seat of government in the 18th century, but it was not really until the latter half of the twentieth century that it became the sprawl we know now. The economy of the area is built on a foundation of the public sector. There would not be a biomedical nexus in Bethesda with the federal government. Nor would there be the military industry, with Ares Arms an hour away in Baltimore. Magic is big in this city in part because the government threw money at researchers and mercs until it couldn't, but the infrastructure remained.

People in DeeCee do not give a damn about others because they have their own concerns. The political-minded classes come in and leave every few years, only to be replaced by new folks who look and act just like them. There has long been a Beltway culture within the government, the media, and the educational/research institutions where the people in each sector believe the world revolves around them, and the rest of the world can take a backseat. It's very insular in many ways, even among the transient populations who rotate through the city on their way

to new ventures. Meanwhile, the people who live in the sprawl year-round have their own lives to live, and they are so used to being marginalized and ignored that they, like everyone else in the sprawl, don't care who you think you are.

Some of you on JackPoint might have noticed that this city has effectively been on a war footing for almost a century with occasional outbreaks of sheer pandemonium. It takes a unique kind of person to live in a city that has seen nothing but conflict, violence, and threats of annihilation almost without end for this long. The people who stay are proud to be here, but pride burns into resentment. The government people look at the corporate citizens with a mixture of envy and contempt, and in turn the corps look at the politicians with a mixture of disdain and pity.

- We're all used to the corps not caring anything for governments and being able to disregard them at their whim. DeeCee, though, hosts one of the more powerful governments on Earth, and while they're still no match for one of the megas, they are powerful enough that they cannot be completely ignored. Which, of course, annoys the corps even more.
- Cosmo

THE REGION

DeeCee is made up of several counties and the cities of Washington and Alexandria. These former counties and cities sit at least partially along the Potomac River, except for Howard County, which is in the forests between Washington and Baltimore. The district has remained relatively lush and green compared to much of the UCAS. Back in the Resource Rush days, Congress was cognizant enough to realize that they liked having things like Rock Creek Park and other natural space around the areas where they, their staff, and their close political friends lived. As a result, there are still parks and forests in and around DeeCee and beyond in North Virginia and Maryland until you approach the border between the Philadelphia sprawl and the greater Baltimore-DeeCee sprawls. Then it just turns into a hellhole.

As a result, the region is hilly and has a fairly moderate climate (much like Seattle) without a great deal of pollution (unlike Seattle). Washington actually wasn't a swamp, per se, but it is a basin where air pollution can and does collect from sources inside and beyond the sprawl. Shiawase Energy produces power for the sprawl. It is one of the many recurring jokes about how this sprawl works that the corporation most identifiable with breaking the power of the U.S. government and leading the rise of the megacorps is one of the largest and most popular corporations in DeeCee. Their plants, including the one in Kansai Village, are considered to be the pinnacle of clean Shiawase tech, and this is in no way related to the fact that President Colloton took control of Renraku's Seattle arcology in 2059 because of the threat its nuclear reactors posed to the city. The counties rise and fall, but overall they gently slope toward the Potomac shorelines. The most significant signs of this topography are in northwest Washington, where the decline from Friendship Heights to the river is especially pronounced. There are rises in the city, however, in that area. One is Cathedral Heights, where the National Cathedral is located. The other is Mt. Alto, a spot the U.S. government foolishly allowed the Soviets to purchase to build the embassy of the current Russian Republic. A century ago, no one in the State Department noticed



that it gave the Soviets/Russians lines-of-sight to many national security installations like the Pentagon.

- It's still a coveted spot, especially by Awakened spies. Thankfully, the Russians are eminently corruptible, so you can often buy access to this building.
- Frosty

Back before the United States government sold off most of itself in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the region was dotted with countless offices, installations, facilities, and so forth. Many of those areas were for military use or for government agencies that were later privatized. Those sites attracted satellite offices from contractors and vendors. Ever since then, many of those locations have been sold, resold, and otherwise renovated into much more efficient spaces. Some have simply been forgotten. The military locations often had associated environmental cleanup costs that made them unappealing to commercial investors, which means that the edges of wealthy suburbs like Potomac, in Montgomery County, contain dead spots inhabited by SINless, runners, or worse.

As I mentioned, magicians were drawn to the area for government money, but the area has always had a bit of a unique flavor to it. Part of that is tied to the natural space of the region. It's the only safe place for some creatures, and invariably those include paranormal critters. The symbolism and design of Washington also exerts a powerful pull. Most people consider it to have been designed with a mystic pattern that would attract and gather power to the new and important national capitol. For those who study the correlation between magic as a metaphor and magic and symbolism, Washington is a goldmine. The Masonic background and designs, the importance of the city as a gathering site for national and global powers, and the high number of important, intense events have made DeeCee a rich area for magical activity. Like everything else here, the best stuff is hidden from most eyes behind secrecy and deception. Magician friends have said that there is a palpable sense of magic in the air. And now that air is changed—something is different with the Rift gone. One mage has said that the area feels like a place that has been Cleansed. When magicians capitalize mundane words like that, I take notice. I can't say for sure, but it seems like they are certainly more confident.

- I haven't had a chance to investigate it as closely as I'd like, but there definitely is change in the air. It's almost as if a certain liveliness and vitality has been added to the mana flow of the area as a whole. Laws of physics being what they are, a gain here means a loss somewhere else. The question is, who lost in this transaction?
- Winterhawk

GETTING IN

If you want to do business in the sprawl, it helps to know how to get in. The conventional methods are well maintained by UCAS standards since politicos (excepting President Colloton) and their staffs have to use them unless some special reason exists for them to use special means.

AIR

Eisenhower International

Dwight D. Eisenhower (formerly Dulles) International Aerospaceport sits on the FDC-North Virginia border, with part of the airport in Dulles, Fairfax County, and part in Loudoun County, NV. The entire airport has long since been privatized and expanded, but it maintains the iconic main terminal with its curved roof. Since the area was re-incorporated as the AresSpace corporate base named Eisenhower City, everything is under the protection of Knight Errant and AresSpace security. This whole process was the price the region and the feds paid for AresSpace expanding and upgrading it to a proper aerospaceport with semiballistic and suborbital services. It also handles some low-earth orbital traffic, which was an especially important necessity for both AresSpace and the National Reconnaissance Office, which is now a subsidiary of Ares in all but name.

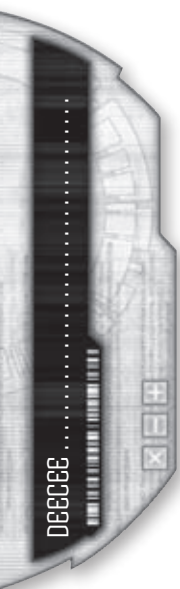
Access to the entire area is controlled. Toll and special access roads lead into and out of Ike and are monitored exclusively by Knight Errant and AresSpace. There is also a commuter rail station to Ike and a dedicated Metro line, Silver, between Ike and Falls Church station. Security is intense, but given who controls it that security relies on technology, with magic as an afterthought.

- It also means, though, that security is pretty quick on the trigger. Double-check your plan before you go through so you can spot any holes; you don't want to give these guys any excuse to shoot.
- Hard Exit

Thomas Jefferson International

Thomas Jefferson International, aka "Tommy," was constructed in 2040 just south of the Federal District boundaries of Alexandria. It sits just off I-95 north of the Quantico Marine Base, and it was designed to handle suborbital and semiballistic traffic for the DeeCee Sprawl. The main terminal is designed in a neo-classical homage to Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home. It is a massive, dark grey building with columns and a short dome above the atrium behind the main entrance where all traffic is directed. There is one controlled toll road from I-95 into Tommy, which is where security begins. Knight Errant protects the airport along with the surrounding area since they hold the policing contract for all of North Virginia. A memorandum of understanding with the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Federal Capitol Police Force, gives Knight Errant (along with Lone Star and Desert Storm) policing powers throughout the Federal District, which allows them to continue pursuits into FDC itself.

Security is tight at the airport. Only ticket holders are allowed at the terminals, and they must pass through some high-end chemsniffers and MADs while their SINs and tickets are checked by the security system. Things only got tougher after



some fools decided that they'd get into a running battle that began on the toll road and ended down by the river. Because of that, Army patrols from nearby Ft. Belvoir or Marines from Quantico now make random appearances in the name of enhanced WMD anti-terrorist sweeps.

- They are serious about the randomness. This isn't just some half-assed "we'll wait two hours, then wait three hours" sort of randomness. They have an algorithm that determines where each patrol should go, when they should leave, how long they should be out, and how many people should be in it. Naturally, the algorithm is a closely guarded secret.
- Glitch

Baltimore Washington International

BWI is actually outside of Baltimore, adjacent to the Baltimore Washington Parkway and about forty-five minutes from downtown Washington by car. Charm City is utterly dominated by Ares Arms, and Ares Arms Security protects the airport as part of the greater Baltimore sprawl. Since BWI handles a considerable amount of cargo traffic in addition to metahuman passengers, it is much easier to smuggle materials into the sprawl by air through BWI than through Ike or Tommy. Ares Arms runs the city, but each of the Big Ten and many larger AA corps, including Monobe and Yakashima, have their own extraterritorial satellite terminals and hangars. Also, since many shipping corporations are owned by them outright, if you can find someone in Luthansa or Mærsk Sealand (Mærsk), Swift Wind (Wuxing), or Mercury Express (Ares) to move a package, then BWI is the place to have it delivered. Mercury, specifically, has a thriving side business since they have the relationship with Ares to move materials for runners, mercs, and the Mafia. The UCAS looks the other way most of the time anyway thanks to a deal brokered by Vanessa Marconi. Of course, you can't talk to her, but Salvatore DeVito of the Mueller Family will be happy to speak with potential clients.

RAIL

UCASTrak uses Washington's Union Station as a main hub, which means it hosts plenty of traffic. It is also the first major stop where people coming from the CAS can exit into the UCAS after a nice conversation with the HEADmen. Like the I-95 corridor, the rail transportation line from Miami to Newfoundland passes through DeeCee, with depots in Alexandria and some services in Washington at Union Station, though most cargo is moved through Baltimore. Union Station did not have sufficient capacity for a long time, mainly because no one wanted to sacrifice the land for trains even though it wasn't being put to efficient use. Alexandria leapt at the chance, and there is now a major cargo depot in that city. HEADmen in Alexandria perform inspections on every train entering from the CAS, and there is a large HEAD barracks at the depot.

AUTOMOBILE

Traffic in DeeCee is horrendous. The Interstate 495 Beltway cuts through the heart of the FDC and bisects Montgomery, Fairfax, and Prince George's Counties, and Alexandria. There are several other highways throughout the sprawl, including

I-95. That interstate connects every major city along the eastern seaboard from Miami to Halifax. Federal regulations allow HEAD patrols to stop any vehicle for border control inspections up to 150 kilometers north of the Rappahannock River (the CAS border), and impromptu checkpoints can and do pop up on any highway within the sprawl. So this and all of the other reasons they can stop you (which, given their homeland security and anti-smuggling jurisdiction, is pretty much anything they can think of) can make road travel especially obnoxious.

GETTING AROUND

Pedestrian

The heart of the Dee Cee sprawl contains a relatively small and easily walkable city. The rest of the sprawl, however, is not that convenient. Sure, you can walk down a single road from Falls Church to Rosslyn, but these days you'd be better off eating a bullet than risking your life that way. The counties are dotted with bedroom communities and subdivisions, all of which scream "GO AWAY!" to people like us.

Automobile

As much of a hassle as driving is, it is also obviously very popular. There are six bridges crossing the Potomac, and they can become chokepoints. The highways are congested, but they are manageable and fairly safe. Driving in the cities is not too hard, with GridGuide and the layouts being pretty well administrated. At night, though, many of the highways become dangerous as smugglers, go-gangs, and the military all prowl the highways. There are enclaves that never shut down, like the Pentagon, and others that clear out at dusk, such as most of western Washington. There's also the matter of having to watch out for motorcades, unless you are not trying to avoid them. They can cause significant delays, and major security headaches.

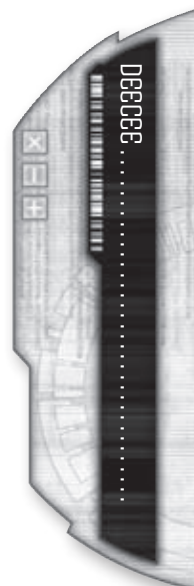
- If you don't know when and where big motorcades will be passing through the city, you're not doing your due diligence. You need to know when you should avoid them—or when you can use the confusion and delays they cause to your advantage.
- Stone

Metro and Commuter Rail

Washington Area Metro

The Metro has expanded considerably under privatization, though not without government assistance. For example, it literally took an Act of Congress to finally construct a Metro station in Georgetown. After the Compensation Army took over several stations during the riots in 2055, security of the Metro became an important issue. It's one of the main ways government employees get to work, and so like elsewhere FedPol patrols and security measures have been upgraded immensely. Given the critical infrastructure needs of the federal government, HEAD also has concurrent jurisdiction and their personnel patrol the stations, cars, and areas around the stations.

The Pentagon station is a security nightmare. It is a hub, but it is also attached to the Pentagon, and so the military patrols it. I don't mean DSA patrol officers or even military police. I mean



military patrols in milgrade armor and weaponry. If something goes down, duck and try not to die.

Metropolitan Regional Commuter

Built on the back of the old Maryland and Virginia commuter lines that were within the newly-created Federal District, the MRC trains have expanded over the years under the private management of Ressha Corporation. One can now travel from North Virginia all the way to Baltimore on the same train. This system has supplanted or duplicated some of the commuter routes of the Metro, such as those from Union Station in Washington to Ike or Tommy. It also now connects Quantico and Ft. Belvoir as well as stopping at Ft. Meade and the National Technical Center. Of course, those stations are also heavily guarded by military police.

Air

In spite of the countless air defense systems scattered throughout the sprawl, especially within Washington, and the fact that those systems are all manned by kids with itchy trigger fingers and virtually no capacity for rational judgment, the VIPs in this city would die if they had to suffer through ground travel with the common folks. It's amazing to think at one time the only aircraft you'd see over the city would be a news helicopter and maybe Marine One. Then came the Air Force combat air patrols that still loiter overhead like buzzards. As the failed Winternight attack showed, perhaps it wasn't a good idea to allow ad blimps over the Potomac and the outer counties. Then again, the CAPs didn't stop Senator Braddock and Alamos 20K from taking over the Government Zone, nor did they stop the JTF-Seattle forces as they jammed t-birds over the Jefferson Memorial to drop soldiers on the White House south lawn, like a scene out of a war sim.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Federal Capitol Police Force

The FedPols, as they are known, are the district-wide police force that was created during the chaos following Crash 1.0. The Metropolitan Police Department's inability to control the city and eventual collapse drove the feds to nationalize the remnants of the MPD and the DC National Guard. Congress created the Department of Homeland Security following Crash 2.0, and the FedPols were placed within the new department under the control of the Secret Service.

Other Federal Law Enforcement

DecCee is distinct in that every federal law agency in the UCAS is headquartered in or otherwise maintains a presence in the sprawl, and it is hard not to notice. Even though there aren't the dozens of agencies that there used to be before the wave of privatizations that started in the 1990s, there are still numerous police forces patrolling the sprawl, and all of them are out to justify their continued existence; everyone from the FBI to Resources Protection (the agency that patrols the national parks, monuments, and other areas under the jurisdiction of the Department of Resources).

Puzzle Palace Search...

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Investigation
Marshals Service
Drug Enforcement Agency

Department of Homeland Security

Secret Service
Homeland Enforcement And Defense

Department of Defense

Defense Security Agency

IRS Enforcement Division (Treasury)

National Resources Protection Service (Resources)

Private Security

The FedPols provide District-wide law enforcement, and are especially concentrated in Washington. Outside of the city, the communities have turned to Knight Errant and Lone Star. Within the city, Desert Storm provides security for Kansai Village and is expanding into "forgotten" areas in an effort to further improve Shiawase PR in the sprawl. It also provides security for Shiawase Biotech's campus in Montgomery County. There are also several smaller outfits in the sprawl that are even smaller than Desert Storm, but it's still important to know about them. One of these is Pueblo Security Enterprises. When the Sovereign Tribal Council formalized relations with the UCAS, PSE came in with them.

Military, Foreign and Domestic

The military situation is an interesting one in DecCee. The Pentagon remains the headquarters of the Defense Department, and there are several military bases in the sprawl: Forts Belvoir, McNair, Meade, Myer; Andrews and Bolling AFB; the Marine Corps Barracks in Washington; and Washington Navy Yard. Quantico Marine Base is just south of the border in North Virginia. The actual presence, however, is much smaller than one might expect in a sprawl with nine military installations. Even with the Military Recovery Act in effect, the UCAS military is restarting from almost zero. These installations are not nearly as large as they were decades earlier, and various corporate or independent military units now occupy some of that former space. The United Nations Armed Forces are expanding from DC National Airport as Interpol and UN agencies have been invited to enjoy the hospitality of the American capital. No one asked me, of course. Some of the larger diplomatic enclaves also maintain token (or not-so-token) military forces for security or ceremonial purposes. The ones of most concern to the UCAS are the CAS Marines and the Sioux Wildcats in the Cooperative Council Defense Force unit assigned to the STC embassy.

- Where else is the UN to go? Geneva is only getting worse. The blue helmets get hospitality now, and Washington gets the UN headquarters later.
- Clockwork

With a professional soldier in the White House, it's no surprise that the military has a major presence in the sprawl. Of course, there are the branch law enforcement agencies, but the paramilitary nature of the FedPols and recent events has created a situation where DeeCee is effectively under a state of martial law. Major General Jerrell Jones, Commanding General of the Military District of Washington, oversees day-to-day military operations. It's not enough when the FedPols will roll up in a pack of MPUVs at an intersection in the Government Zone, Foggy Bottom, or somewhere "respectable" as a show of force. Sometimes soldiers from Ft. Myers or Ft. McNair will roll up to do the exact same thing.

- It's good that we're about to talk about cultural norms, because what the military is doing is one—the show of force, the display of power. The exercise you go through to demonstrate how much power you have in order to avoid actually having to use it.
- Dr. Spin

NORMS IN THE BELTWAY

Law

In the capital of the Land of the Free, you would expect that even if you get arrested that you would have all of those protections under the Bill of Rights or whatever. Even if you're SINless, provisional citizens and foreign/corporate citizens have some limited rights. No?

No.

Because of past events and a certain provision in the UCAS Constitution, there are fewer rights for those in the DeeCee sprawl. There is no right to a writ of habeas corpus, which even SINless have a right to elsewhere in the UCAS, because that was suspended as soon as the ink was dry on the Constitution. This city feels like it's a perpetual war zone, and so rights are restricted under the law and in various interpretations of the Constitution, because DeeCee is a special exception as a critical security region.

Language and Bias

English! Speak it. I suggest you do, because the city is not entirely welcoming for those with certain accents, especially Native Indian accents. While the power brokers prefer English, though, there are in fact a lot of other languages and accents heard throughout the area. There are so many Russian, Eastern European, and African immigrants that the language you're hearing can switch on you in an instant in some areas (such as Adams-Morgan, Falls Church, and scattered parts of Howard County). The same goes for Spanish, especially in Prince George's County.

Kay St. goes into this in some detail later, but DeeCee carries a lot of bias. Most of the locals are of African or African-American descent, though there are also significant Eurasian and Central American populations made up of 21st century refugees. And then there are the Compers, the Treaty of Denver refugees who've stayed long enough to make DeeCee their home, like it or not. Most of those people are Caucasian, and many of them are racist. So you get some interesting conflicts, such as in Prince George's County where people who've been fleeing since the 1980s are looked at askew by Compers for not even being that similar to the Native Americans who took over the western U.S. and Canada.

Currency

The Almighty Dollar. So what if the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank's terrestrial headquarters is two blocks from the White House Exclusion Zone? Everyone in DeeCee takes dollars, and if you try to pay with nuyen some people will look at you like you're trying to pay them in 19th century Prussian marks. Metro fares, cab fares, and things of that nature are only listed in dollars. The further you get from the Government Zone or the Pentagon, the less of a hassle this will be. It is a point of pride with a lot of people in this sprawl, however, and it's not that big a deal when making electronic transfers. Like Seattle, hard currency is quite common because it is, again, a matter of pride to have actual bills or coins, even if the denominations reflect that the UCAS dollar trades five to the nuyen.

Security Theater

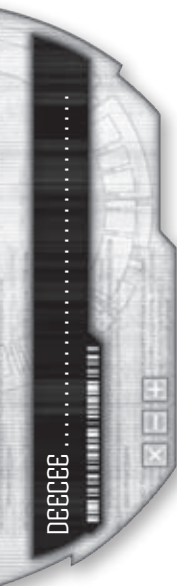
Security in DeeCee is not based on actual overwhelming force or competence—it is based on the perception of a reality where the government is capable of protecting itself in spite of

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CONTRACT COURT

The Thirteenth Amendment to the UCAS Constitution recognized the right of corporations to demand the repatriation of their citizens under the Business Recognition Accords. The Contract Court was created to adjudicate any disagreements between corporations and the individuals they are attempting to recover, but also adjudicates on other matters of dispute between the UCAS and the corporations under the terms of the accords. Procedurally, the Court is similar to other adjudicatory bodies such as immigration and Social Security tribunals in that judges are appointed for fixed terms and do not possess the same privileges as full federal judges. The DOJ Office of Contract Counsel represents the UCAS, or when the government has an interest in a case's outcome. All appeals are made to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, and those are appealed to the Supreme Court. Decisions made in the government's favor are enforced by a special unit of the Marshals Service, the Special Enforcement Unit, which is allowed to breach extraterritorial corporate property upon service of a Contract Warrant to the offending corporation. There have been three instances of the UCAS Army being used instead of SEU when the penalty issued by the Court required overt violence of action, and the Corporate Court gave permission for the action to be carried out.

- This article has been tagged by someone in your network.
- Accessing Tag ...
- Ironically, the Thirteenth Amendment of the old United States Constitution ended slavery. Someone had a sick sense of humor when they passed this one.
- Kay St. Irregular



numerous instances where the opposite has been proven true. Yes, the FedPols do stop-and-frisks. But they tend to do it in the northeast part of the sprawl, and they focus on orks and trolls. Yes, the military is a police presence in the city. But that does not mean they're good at it, because that role is not what the military is for.

MEDICAL CARE

If you get yourself hurt, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that DeeCee is a major site for biomedical and biosciences research and development. Since it is a company town catering to the federal government and dozens of VIPs, there are excellent health care providers. The bad news is that most of them won't give a fuck about you, or if they do it's so that once you've been patched up JHIH, DocWagon, or Phoenix Biotechnologies can inject, implant, or "modify" you with Ghost only know what.

- Just make sure that whatever job you're doing pays enough to buy DocWagon coverage while you're in town and you'll be fine. And if you have to get in an ambulance, be sure to tip your driver in advance.
- Riser

MEDIA

News

As a national capital, DeeCee has no shortage of news media. All of the major networks, newsfeeds, and actual newspapers in the UCAS (and some other nations) have full-time bureaus in Washington to cover the daily political machinery. It is also the home of the Washington Post Group, which controls the eponymous newspaper as well as several popular newsfeeds geared toward political and global current events. The city also has a thriving local media machine filled with every manner of publication imaginable ranging from small-town news feeds and special-interest Matrix sites to the venerable pamphleteers and, of course, good old-fashioned broadcast-media pirates.

Arts and Leisure

DeeCee is not lacking for high culture. Between the Smithsonian Institutions and various private entities, there are numerous museums and galleries in which to enlighten yourself. Educating yourself in these establishments is simple; making off with the treasures they contain is less so, as their security tends to be solid.

If you want rowdier forms of entertainment, you can check out the city's club scene. Hip-hop, goblin rock, anarcho-punk, wizpunk, and fractal phase are all played in local spots. The sheer number of mathematicians and engineers in the city have made fractal phase quite popular, and Turing Station is one of the hottest venues in town, filled with people who usually could never expect to get into a club that popular. Likewise, the number and variety of magicians has made the sprawl vibrant with coffin clubs and other entertainment venues where magicians and spirits can show off or just mingle with likeminded individuals.

Washingtonians love their sports. The football team may have a different name than last century, but Chieftains fans are still some of the most loyal in North America. However, DeeCee has truly come to embrace combat biking. The 2073 season champion

Shurikens took over RFK when the Chieftains abandoned it for a sprawling stadium outside Silver Spring, and they have made their new home the premiere venue for the sport. There is also a significant urban brawl fanbase in town. The Mountain Dragons' friendship with the Draco Foundation brings them to DeeCee to play in the Anacostia Barrens at least three times a year, but the ISSV has not shown any intention of a team making DeeCee its permanent home. Court sports like basketball (Washington Bullets, Georgetown, GWU) are all played in the Shiawase Area in the heart of Kansai Village.

HOW IT GOT THIS WAY

Posted by: Kay St. Irregular

It all started about a century ago. The District of Columbia has existed for nearly three centuries, with some communities much older than that. Today's history lesson, however, begins and ends at the same place: The Watergate. In a city both immersed and afraid of magic and teeming with hidden secrets and immense symbolism, it seems like everything comes back to this one location. In a briefing on secrets and lies, those told about this place brought down one president and may eventually claim another.

SLOUCHING TOWARD GOMORRAH

It started with an unlocked door. Pursued by Congress and the press, in 1974 President Richard Nixon resigned rather than face looming impeachment and removal hearings. He'd approved of a plan to break into the offices of the Democratic National Committee in 1972 during his re-election campaign to ensure that he knew what the Democrats were planning going into the election. It was in many ways a classic shadowrun, with ex-CIA men committing crimes, paid by one party who was acting on behalf of a third, and all in all it was for dubious value. The whole incident was seen as a blow to the integrity of the office, and yet one more reason for people who had lost faith in the government to just give up completely. Nixon left office, new President Gerald Ford pardoned Nixon for any crimes he may have committed, and once more it became clear that the game was rigged.

Ford lost the election in 1976 after nearly losing to Governor Ronald Reagan in the Republican primaries. The new president, Jimmy Carter, was supposed to be something different, a southern Democratic governor (from Georgia) in a time when Democrats were becoming an endangered species in the south. He increased defense spending and tried to be business-friendly, but he was an ineffective leader in crisis, and the thinking was that no one was going to be friendlier to business than Ronald Reagan, who was elected in 1980. The economy experienced significant growth in the '80s, but Washington (and the rest of the nation) still saw plenty of tumult. AIDS appeared and quickly became, as one person described it, "the Black Plague of the eighties." The Drug War was declared late in Reagan's first term, but that did not prevent an epidemic of drug violence in neighborhoods like Trinidad from turning Washington, D.C. into the Murder Capital of the United States. The federal government expanded, and the law enforcement response was virtually militarized. Economic growth (and other factors)

A TIMELINE OF DEECEE

- 1992:** Jeffrey Lynch elected President. He oversees massive budget cuts and the privatization of several federal agencies.
- 1994:** President Lynch appoints Terrence Ordell succeed Chief Justice Warren Burger upon his retirement.
- 1999:** The Ordell Court announces the Seretech decision liberalizing the scope and use of private security forces.
- 2001:** The Supreme Court's second Shiawase decision formally establishes corporate extraterritoriality.
- 2003:** Congress rescinds "home rule" in the District of Columbia, citing corruption and incompetence.
- 2012:** The Sovereign American Indian Movement (SAIM) begins a series of terrorist acts throughout the D.C. region.
- 2024:** The Federal Capitol District Act creates the Federal District of Columbia, uniting the District of Columbia and counties in Virginia and Maryland under the control of the Federal District Commission.
- 2029:** Crash of '29. FDC is placed under martial law when civilian law enforcement is unable to contain the damage, and ensuing riots and civil disturbances from the breakdown of communications.
- 2030:** October 15, "Union Day." FDC becomes the seat of government for the UCAS.
- 2031:** Federal Capital Police Service is created from the remnants of the Metropolitan Police Department, D.C. National Guard, and some smaller agencies as a component of the UCAS Department of Justice. It eventually becomes the police force for all of the FDC.
- 2034:** The Treaty of Richmond creates the CAS. The state of North Virginia, defined as that part of Virginia north of the Rappahannock River, is created as a buffer between the CAS and FDC. Fredericksburg is made the capital of the new state.
- 2035:** Washington's Union Station is attacked in a series of bombings.
- 2048:** The first blood dust incident in Arlington County is recorded.
- 2052:** Blood dust returns to Arlington County, driving people out of the community.
- 2053:** Shortly after he is inaugurated to his second term, President Alan Adams suffers a fatal stroke. Thomas Steele succeeds him as president, and Secretary of State Booth becomes his vice president.
- 2055:** In August, Compensation Army protests grow violent, and the FedPols struggle to control the situation as the government contends with the simultaneous insect spirit crisis in Chicago and threats from North Virginia to secede to the CAS. The Army begins limited operations to protect government assets before the government and Compensation Army come to a peaceful resolution.
- 2057:** In January, President Thomas Steele and Vice President James Booth are impeached and removed from office for committing election fraud in the 2056 election. Speaker of the House Betty Jo Pritchard becomes President of the UCAS and schedules new elections for August 7.
- 2057:** On August 7, Dunkelzahn is elected President.
- 2057:** On August 9, after Dunkelzahn's inauguration, the great dragon's limo explodes as he leaves the Mrs. Grundland's Peanut Butter Cookie Inaugural Ball at the Watergate hotel. An astral rift appears over the site of the explosion. Vice President Haeffner becomes president.
- 2057:** On August 12, President Haeffner speaks before a joint session of Congress to nominate Nadja Daviar, Dunkelzahn's translator and campaign manager, as his vice president. Both houses confirm her after she appears before the Scott Commission.
- 2060:** The Haeffner/Daviar ticket wins the election.
- 2064:** November 2, Crash 2.0. Winternight attempts to detonate an EMP bomb over Washington, but they are stopped by the Air Force. On November 3, the New Revolution attempts a coup d'état that results in the deaths of the president, Defense Secretary, and Speaker of the House. Vice President Daviar disappears shortly after ordering JTF-Seattle to lead a successful counterattack. The rules of succession lead to Senate President Pro Tempore Gene Simone becoming the ninth UCAS President.
- 2065:** Elections are held after being postponed for months following the failed coup. President Gene Simone is elected to serve the term from May 1, 2065 to January 21, 2069.
- 2068:** Angela Colloton is elected President of the UCAS.
- 2070:** After thirty-four years without single-party majorities in either house of Congress, the Republicans win the overall majority of seats in the House of Representatives.
- 2072:** Angela Colloton is re-elected.
- 2073:** On July 18, after an increasing number of magical disturbances, the Watergate Rift Bunker collapses, revealing that the Watergate Rift has disappeared. President Colloton announces that several government agencies were successful in closing the rift.



LAUBENSTEIN 2011



helped Reagan breeze into a second term, which was when he engaged with the Soviet Union. The Soviets finally had stable leadership for the first time in years, and they went about negotiating for virtually full disarmament among all the nuclear powers. Helsinki came close to being where all nuclear weapons would have been eliminated, but instead they had to settle for a ninety percent reduction.

Reagan and Soviet head of state Mikhail Gorbachev shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987, but that was an isolated high point. Reagan had to sacrifice several of his top officials, including Vice President Bush, to appease Congress for acts of high treason committed by members of his National Security Council team and staff in arming a sworn enemy, Iran, to help finance U.S. backed rebels in Nicaragua in contravention of federal law. Bush's successor, James Baker III, couldn't erase the taint of Iran-Contra or other things. The country said thank you for virtually eliminating the scourge of Armageddon, but went with Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis in the next election.

- 1986 was dubbed "The Year of the Spy" due to the capture of several Soviet spies and the escape of Ed Howard, who eluded the FBI and CIA surveillance on him in Santa Fe only to re-emerge in the Soviet Union. Howard was spying on the nuclear labs in New Mexico at the same time the disarmament talks were going on, and that nearly sank the deal when he ran. The FBI did catch an important one, though, in Aldrich Ames. Apparently it was stupid luck, but as counterintelligence chief for the CIA's Soviet section he could have done immeasurable damage.
- Fianchetto

Most people look back at Dukakis' term as a placeholder between Reagan, the anticommunist and tax-cutter, and Jeffery Lynch, the antigovernment paragon. To his credit, Dukakis got one shot at changing the Supreme Court when Thurgood Marshall retired, and he appointed Archibald Sessenbrunner. Lynch, though, left an even stronger mark on the Court. He appointed Terrence Ordell to succeed Chief Justice Burger in 1994, and appointed three more men to the Court before his term ended in 2001. Those five justices gave the world the *Serotech* decision, and later, the two *Shiawase* decisions. I don't need to tell you all what kind of effect those decisions had on the world. It is also important to remember that Lynch significantly reduced the size of the military. He cut the budget by nearly half, most of which were short-term cuts in personnel and operations, but also long-term reductions in R&D and capital, everything from aircraft carriers to body armor. Lynch sold off AMTRAK and the United States Postal Service—that latter one went to the Supreme Court, in *Lynch v. O'Neill*, and the decision in the president's favor was heavily cited in the majority opinions for *Shiawase I* and *II*.

RUSH 'N ATTACK

Following Lynch's lead, Congress and the Supreme Court continued to reduce the size of the government considerably. At the beginning of the century, the massive unemployment, civil unrest, and violence that pervaded the final decades of the 20th century continued. The military and intelligence community were decimated, and some of those professionals found employment in the burgeoning private security industry while others found themselves on the outside battling those same corporate security personnel. With the *Seretech* decision as settled law, DeeCee was primary territory to train corporate security and military personnel. As their security assets grew, and with government agencies being privatized, professional government operatives and managers were remaining in the Beltway region to help facilitate the continuing erosion of government power for their own ends.

When Philip Bester became president in 2005, he ushered in the Resource Rush. Congress had the presence of mind, or gall, to exclude many areas around the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area from the rapacious exploitation that it unleashed on most of the country. This included Native American lands, which again prompted numerous lawsuits. Just as was the case in all courts before and since, Native American rights did not carry much weight. They weren't a protected class, because Natives were

identified as a political group, not a race, under the law. Subsequent laws superseded treaty rights unless exceptions had been made in those laws, and the companies that wanted their land made certain that those exceptions were kept out of the Resource Rush laws.

The Lone Eagle Incident scared the government to its core. There were questions about security, and especially about loyalty. The *Northcloud* challenges to the Re-Education And Relocation Act of 2009 put the matter to rest on what rights Native Americans had in the United States: none. They were herded into camps. Schisms erupted in what is now the Pueblo Corporate Council, but VITAS shortly made those disputes irrelevant. The government nearly shut down as unrest grew, and the sprawl was caught in a fight between those in government and corps who would get treatments, and everyone else. The Anacostia River became the line of demarcation that many would not cross. During the outbreak, it was virtually militarized so that those on the east side, in the southeast and in the northeast (where military cordons were also established), were pretty much left to die. No one gave heed to cries of racism as predominantly black neighborhoods were effectively sentenced to death. The same thing happened along the borders between Howard and parts of Prince George's Counties. Those with guns killed those without, and a lot of people on both sides had guns. Whole cities in the DC area became free-fire zones.

UGE and the Awakening just made the government close in tighter. Immigrants from Africa and Asia who brought some resources with them, along with residents of Latin America fleeing the new Aztlaner government, made their way to DeeCee. If they had the means, they could afford the security and make themselves valuable. Some people came over as the previous individuals' soldiers, acting as unofficial reinforcements to the beleaguered cops and soldiers. People were bracing for attacks from the SAIM, but no one knew what form they would take. Some conventional methods, such as bombings of the Fashion Centre in Pentagon City could be fought. Magic, though, was a huge unknown, and while people worried about how it could be used in attacks, Awakened individuals also turned out to be useful partners. The UCAS government was somewhat slow in figuring out how to put spellslingers to use, so most of their efforts focused on military and scientific means. The foreigners, though, were quicker to adapt to magic, and they became part of the now-permanent magical class in the sprawl as they served to protect the city from Native American enemies and "enemy supporters."

Fear of terrorism was not the only thing shaping the Awakened population in DeeCee. The Roman Catholic Church has long held a significant presence in the region, especially given Maryland's history as the Catholic colony. Georgetown University, founded by Jesuits in 1789, has been a longstanding anchor of the city. This Catholic presence made itself more felt after Pope John Paul IV's condemnation of the Awakened. The proclamation deeply divided American Catholics, and these days there are basically two divisions of the Church in DeeCee: The Jesuits at Georgetown, and the Benedictines at the Catholic University of America across the city in Brookland. The Jesuits have long been considered the more liberal, evidenced in part by Georgetown's establishment of an Occult Studies program in 2026. With the publication of *In Imago Dei* and the formation of the Order of St. Sylvester, the Archdiocese based at CUA has mostly moderated,

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PRIVATE GOVERNMENT

President Lynch took a hatchet to the United States government, and nothing was spared. Government agencies and corporations like AMTRAK and the U.S. Postal Service were privatized. This created a whole industry of former government employees who knew how to manage governmental functions. The smart ones prospered, and as megacorporations took on more government-like responsibilities they turned to this new industry of Private Government Services.

Eventually these industries simply became just another part of the overall service industry. Assistance for government contracting became significant in replicating those mundane aspects of running businesses such as Lone Star or Franklin Associates' continental firefighting business. In many cases, these grew into large logistical and data-aggregation services, which in turn were incorporated into businesses like Maersk and Renrakru's information services systems. DeeCee remained important because it was an existing site where physical assets were already collected, and there were significant information technology systems in place.

DeeCee's status as a hub for the Internet and, later, the Matrix are what has made it so attractive to many hackers, deckers, otaku, technomancers, and so on over the century. It is also what made it a key Winternight target in 2064. It is one of the five most important Matrix hubs on Earth, and it contains much of the talent, metahuman and electronic, that keeps a good portion of the world running.



but it still holds some people who would stand by or actively condemn the Awakened as they appeared. This has affected the Catholic community in DeeCee, and it also colors relations between certain Church organizations and other magical groups.

NECK DEEP

William Jarman signed the Treaty of Denver in 2018, effectively killing the United States of America. He made a statement about a final peace and security, but pictures from the event tell the tale of a broken man. No one has much sympathy for him now, but millions of Americans did then. No further proof is needed than his landslide election in 2020. Meanwhile in DeeCee, the security situation had stabilized. Congress had an obligation to finance the ten-year relocation plan under the treaty, but it also had a country crippled by disease, war, and utter chaos. It continued to rely on the private sector to act. As then-Speaker Corbin said, “The free market will not be undermined by Congress. Government is not in the business of telling people how to run their business.”

VITAS 2 and Goblinization came along just as the sprawl was righting itself and conflict had settled into something “manageable.” In the end, VITAS and VITAS 2 killed a third of the North American population. In what is now the DeeCee sprawl, the mortality rate was just over fifty percent. If you were on the “inside,” with a government or corporation, then you lived. If you were not, then you died. After these deaths, there were plenty of people who would have been very happy to just see eastern Washington overgrown with vegetation. Those areas would be forgotten by what was left of the government services and the corporations except for the fact that in times of crisis, people seem to flock to DeeCee. They’re doing so again now, which is one of the things that makes this whole story so important.

As westerners moved east, many came to DeeCee. They demanded political and physical protection in return for their “sacrifices,” and none were more avaricious than those politicians who would be losing their power: governors, state legislators, and especially members of Congress whose districts or states ceased to exist. More foreigners came as well after they heard tales of how some newcomers were welcomed into government service. Others came because an influx of wealth brings an increased need for cheap labor to serve them (lawns don’t mow themselves). So Anacostia was not reclaimed by nature. It became the home to lower-level workers who were priced (or simply pushed) out of their homes in the suburbs. The same thing happened elsewhere, and DeeCee became an enclave of the ultra-rich and their servant underclass. Now their children and grandchildren live among each other, and the lines have blurred considerably between those who adapted and those who did not. Magic was one significant factor in shaping this; another was the Crash.

The Federal District was created in 2024 due to a confluence of factors. The counties’ economies relied on Washington, and the government felt strongly that it needed to be able to control the entire region for security purposes. FDC was established with the federal government providing offset tax revenues to those states, which were considerable as FDC’s counties were some of the richest in the United States. The creation of the UCAS eliminated that provision, which angered Virginia immensely.

... AND UPSIDE-DOWN

To many people, April 9, 2029 was the Apocalypse. There were twenty-seven major air accidents in DeeCee-area airspace. No planes crashed on the White House lawn, but the Mall was not so fortunate—seven planes came to rest on the Mall as a way of avoiding a crash in the city. None of them landed intact, and several ended up missing the Mall entirely. Everything shut down, and communications weren't just crippled; they simply did not exist. Chaos erupted mostly because the government believed it was an attack and they had no way of determining the facts. Within the sprawl, the response was to crack down and try to maintain order. Without clear chains of command, that became a piecemeal effort, and as the effects lingered people became unable to cope. They needed food, medicine, or other

necessities. So did everyone else, and again it became a matter of those with guns (or magic) dictating the response to those who were unarmed.

Over time, order emerged from the chaos. Everyone had an interest in things settling down, and having money didn't mean quite as much anymore when money couldn't buy anything. There was the promise of future payments for loyalty, but as Echo Mirage did its thing and databases and accounts were discovered to be worthless, the power dynamic shifted in DeeCee. One thing that remained is that those who know how to make other people money, through skill or connections, remained secure. That is the ultimate lesson of the Crash of '29—it doesn't matter who you are, but whether you can make other people rich or powerful. Or ideally, both.

THE TAX MAN RISES

- Kay St. and I were discussing the IRS, and I figured the easiest way to get the story would be to reach out to someone who was there. Some of you may remember my old friend, The Chromed Accountant. He was an IRS company man before he started running the shadows. He has since retired to his own Caribbean island, but he still knows more about the black heart of the IRS than anyone I know.
- FastJack

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So, you want the dirt on the old days. Well, let me start at Echo Mirage and then go back a bit. The IRS was one of the keystone agencies involved in the Echo Mirage program for several reasons. First, the U.S. considers revenue collection to be an existential function. Without the Internet, that capability was crippled. Second, after NSA they had the best hackers in the government; men and women who hunted tax evaders, money launderers, and let's face it, cracked into megacorporate systems. There had been people in the government since the Shiawase Decisions were being argued who were determined to wage an unholy war on the megas after achieving extraterritoriality, and more than one old-timer admitted that the only reason the U.S. (and later UCAS) maintained a corporate income tax was as an excuse to go after the megacorporations.

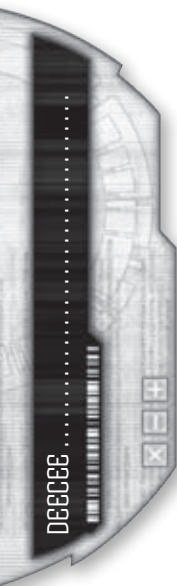
Echo Mirage made the IRS what it is today: the only real force inside Treasury, a member of the intelligence community that also had a law enforcement authority, and a permanent political force within the DeeCee government. After getting a taste of what cyberdeckers were able to accomplish, the IRS wanted to continue pushing that. They shifted and expanded the Criminal Investigation Division and other programs within IRS and the rest of Treasury into the IRS Enforcement Division. ED also runs all criminal intelligence operations assessing financial criminals, terrorists, and so on while liaising with other domestic and foreign agencies. Along with all this, they have their very secretive "black" intelligence operations. That is what I did in the

'40s. I was a Marine for a short time before going to college where I studied forensic accounting—analyzing financial and accounting materials for discrepancies and wrongdoing. The IRS recruited heavily from military intelligence, looking for soldiers who were no longer needed with the military having no foreign presence, and as it happened I drew their attention. Those MI folks trained me, and others like me, in the art of covert operations, and they created a group of operatives who could and would work against foreign governments, terrorists, megacorps, and political enemies.

The SEC no longer exists. It was one of the many law enforcement agencies that got eliminated in the waves of privatization and outsourcing. Many of its functions were turned over to the East Coast Stock Exchange, which supposedly policed itself. The entire SEC was eventually eliminated and outsourced to the Corporate Court SEC and Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank when Z-OG took over the World Bank and made its presence permanent in DeeCee. In the unlikely event the feds get involved in financial regulation, the FBI is the organization that steps in. They are quite ineffective in this area, as it is not one to which they are either suited or inclined. In many ways the IRS sees itself as the first and last line of defense, and they take that role very seriously, even zealously. They secretly back and provide intelligence for the career investigators in the Office of Fair Trade and the DOJ Antitrust Division, for whatever that is worth depending. One other thing to note is that the IRS Enforcement Division was never successfully infiltrated by the New Revolution, at least not as far as I know.

IRS and NSA still maintain a cozy friendship from the Echo Mirage days, much closer than other agencies. As I understand it, Aegis Cognito has spent much of the last decade hunting for "black" communications lines that fell off the grid after Crash 1.0 and 2.0. Considering their mutual interest in SIGINT and their particular interest in Aegis' own datastores, the IRS has been running tons of field ops around DeeCee to stop them, or at least find anything useful before they do.

// end attachment //



As far as wealth itself, however, DeeCee was no longer on top. Businesses went under. The government was on the verge of collapse, which meant that no new government contracts were being issued, and contractors and their lobbyists fled. On top of this, the Euro Wars undermined the sprawl's usefulness as a prime location to recruit and train security, intelligence, and mercenary personnel. The supply and demand was all in Europe, and the people from DeeCee who went to Europe ended up with firms like MET2000 and Aegis Cognito. The United States couldn't even make war anymore, and it pulled out of NATO and recalled all overseas units. The U.S. and Canada didn't care about Europe; President MacAlister and Prime Minister Frazier were too busy meeting in secret, making the plans that would create the UCAS.

The formation of the UCAS seemed like it would save the sprawl, but then differences broke out among the states over the extent of social welfare programs that were included in the Constitution at Canada's insistence. The sprawl welcomed Canadian politicians and powerbrokers, and so that process began again. Tensions in the nation rose to the point where a second Civil War seemed like a very real possibility. DeeCee was already an armed camp surrounded by soldiers, but now there was a question of where their loyalties rested. Some in the UCAS government were afraid that it would have to turn to the corporations for help. Others eagerly welcomed such a move. Eventually, the Treaty of Richmond settled the matter in 2033 with the creation of North Virginia and the separation of UCAS and CAS.

The creation of the CAS and the secession of California and Hawai'i changed things in DeeCee. Many people left to go build the new government in Atlanta, or they went home to California. Some people from those areas emigrated back to DeeCee. As the Confederates left, people generally expected the sprawl and the country to become more liberal, and possibly less corporate-friendly. That didn't quite happen, as the UCAS continued on the middle-of-the-road course that defined much of the United States' history. It did not become a liberal enclave, but at the same time it was not very conservative. What it remains is a country whose voters continue to have divergent interests that often create chaos in public, leaving room for countless deals to be made behind the scenes.

- The thing is, some people are interested in policy, others are interested in broad moral themes, and the overlap between the two is rare. What's worse, people who hold to a certain moral theme are often inconsistent in the way they want that theme carried out in law. This leads to the lurching nature of UCAS politics. The important thing from our point of view is that you don't necessarily need to know any policy to manipulate voters. You just have to know how to hit the right themes.
- Dr. Spin

URBAN WARZONES

In the '40s, many of the simmering conflicts in DeeCee began to come to a head. The Night of Rage in 2039 demonstrated exactly how much hate there was in the world, and racial conflicts continued into the next decade. Gang violence also increased, and it became apparent that the proliferation of military weapons was not the best idea because eventually they made their way into the hands of gangs, terrorists, and shadowrunners. Similarly, combat

Puzzle Palace Search...

COMPENSATION ARMY

In 2055, a group of UCAS citizens went on the march to reclaim what was felt was theirs. The terms of the Treaty of Denver required the U.S. government to assist in the relocation of people who lived in states that had been ceded to the Native American Nations. Following the creation of the UCAS and the secession of the CAS and California, the UCAS refused to provide compensation to anyone who lived south of the 38th Parallel or in California. People who were directly affected by this decision came to march, protest, and petition the government for redress. Relatives, friends, and supporters accompanied them as they camped out on the Mall and the Government Zone in an attempt to draw attention to their cause. The conditions grew worse in the tents and shantytowns that emerged while the federal government debated the issue.

In August, a group called Conscience of the Country became a significant presence in the group. As General Randolph, the self-proclaimed leader of the Compensation Army, struggled to contain the growing unrest, the CoC began to incite aggressive action against the FedPols and the government itself. The FedPols were caught unprepared, and the Army was called in to support the FedPols as the Compensation Army took over several Metro stations in Southwest Washington and other locations in the city. This was ongoing while the Chicago Containment Zone was being established after it was overrun by what is now known to be insect spirits. The whole incident was a collusion of conflicting circumstances between the military being forced to blockade an American city from an unknown threat, and the head of Southeast Military Command, Gen. Trahn attempting to use the incident in DeeCee to strengthen the role of the Army after the CoC, who were accused of being agents provocateurs of the CAS government, incited armed conflict.

When the smoke cleared, Gen. Trahn was killed after trying to incite a military *coup d'état*, and General Randolph died trying to stop the violence in the streets. The Conscience leaders were killed or taken into custody, and UCAS-CAS relations suffered a significant blow. Meanwhile, the demands of the Compensation Army were negotiated down, and Congress passed the Gorchakov-Drinkwater Act that would pay them ten percent of their demands to be administered by the Compensation and Relocation Services Administration.

CRSA is still administering payments and overseeing services to members of the Compensation Army.

augmentations that were first perfected in the Euro Wars trickled down to the streets, and the FedPols started encountering “one-man armies.” Throw magic into the mix, and the sprawl became very dangerous indeed.

Everyone was outgunned, and the few times the FBI or FedPols worked their way up the food chain, it ended up being a corporate or government official who was making a fortune off of weapons sales. The corporations were standing firm behind extraterritoriality, and the world’s governments got the message in 2047 following Operation: Reciprocity. In a series of decisions, the Contract Court authorized the government to act against a group of smaller AA corporations, and the Court approved the UCAS’s as a gesture of good faith. UCAS Marshals tactical teams carried out enforcement actions against several corporations and a couple of governments. The Army, however, was ordered to take more aggressive measures against Monobe and IFMU, and they would later be used against Telestrian in 2056.

Publicly, of course, none of this ever happened. Any repercussions were felt secretly, and often the burden fell on the weakest person that could be found. That’s another thing about how DeeCee works—generally speaking, the person who suffers the most is the one with the least to offer. Look at Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Resource Rush scandals, and you’ll see the same pattern—people farther down the chain of command taking the fall to protect people at the top. Every good conspiracy needs three people: Two to plot, and one to take the blame.

That’s how the crime wave and violence slowly fell under control. Public actions were taken to assuage the public fear, some private actions were taken to let people know that both sides would use violence if they were not satisfied, and someone else took the blame. The Compensation Army crisis is a great example. The powerful were given easy, profitable exits. Some little people were sacrificed. Others were elevated to deflect attention, and things keep rolling along.

- This ain’t just DeeCee, it’s everywhere. You keep working for the corps instead of going to business for yourself, you one day going to find yourself as that sacrificial lamb the higher-ups may need. You’re useful to them until you’re not.
- Kane

THE DRAGON

It still seems remarkable that the UCAS elected a great dragon as President of the UCAS. Dunkelzahn became a citizen by Act of Congress in 2056, and the photo of him shaking hands with President Steele became iconic. Then Steele and his VP, James Booth, won what turned out to be a stolen election. The irony is, the theft may not have been necessary, as the opposition was not exactly invigorating the opposition. It was widely described as the most boring election in the world, and few people can even remember the opponents’ names. Many people, however, remember the impeachment and removal hearings that followed the revelation of the theft. The House and Senate chambers were packed for the event, and even with the vastly technical evidence presented, it was a show that mesmerized viewers. Booth was the lead counsel for himself and Steele, and to his credit he was (and still is) a hell of a lawyer. It didn’t matter, though; Congress had it in for the both of them. The evidence seems shakier on review,

and there are still plenty of conspiracy theories about how they were framed. For a country with dismal turnout rates, it’s amazing how many people turned out to be experts in election law and the technical aspects of the Remote Vote system. Regardless of the actual merits of the evidence, Steele and Booth were removed in early 2057. History books have regularly reprinted the famous picture of Steele despondent after Chief Justice Scott ordered the trial to a close in the Senate chamber while Booth furiously argues for reconsideration with his fist in the air.

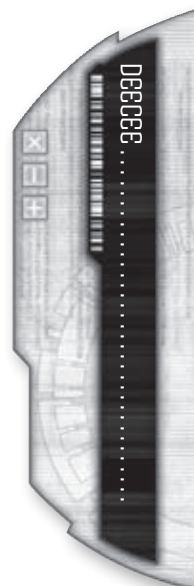
Then a wide-open race for the next election began, and Dunkelzahn joined the fray. He ran an impressive campaign. Or, more accurately, his running mate, Nadja Daviar, did. She had the most unique candidate imaginable, and she and her staff packaged him with a message of hope and optimism, of self-reliance and faith in the institution of government and the UCAS. They wanted to look forward and move past the old U.S. His more conservative opponents were not eager to see the reforms Dunkelzahn proposed, but then Yeats was killed by insect spirits, and people realized Brackhaven was and is a dangerous racist. Dunkelzahn won with just under forty-eight million voters, and 37 percent of the vote. Still, Brackhaven came in second with almost thirty-nine million votes. (It’s no surprise that this man eventually won the gubernatorial race in Seattle three years ago, and seems like a shoo-in for next year. Though it remains to be seen how he reacts if Proposition 23 passes. But I digress.)

And then Dunkelzahn exploded. I hate to be glib, but that is what happened, and sixteen years later we still don’t know how or why.

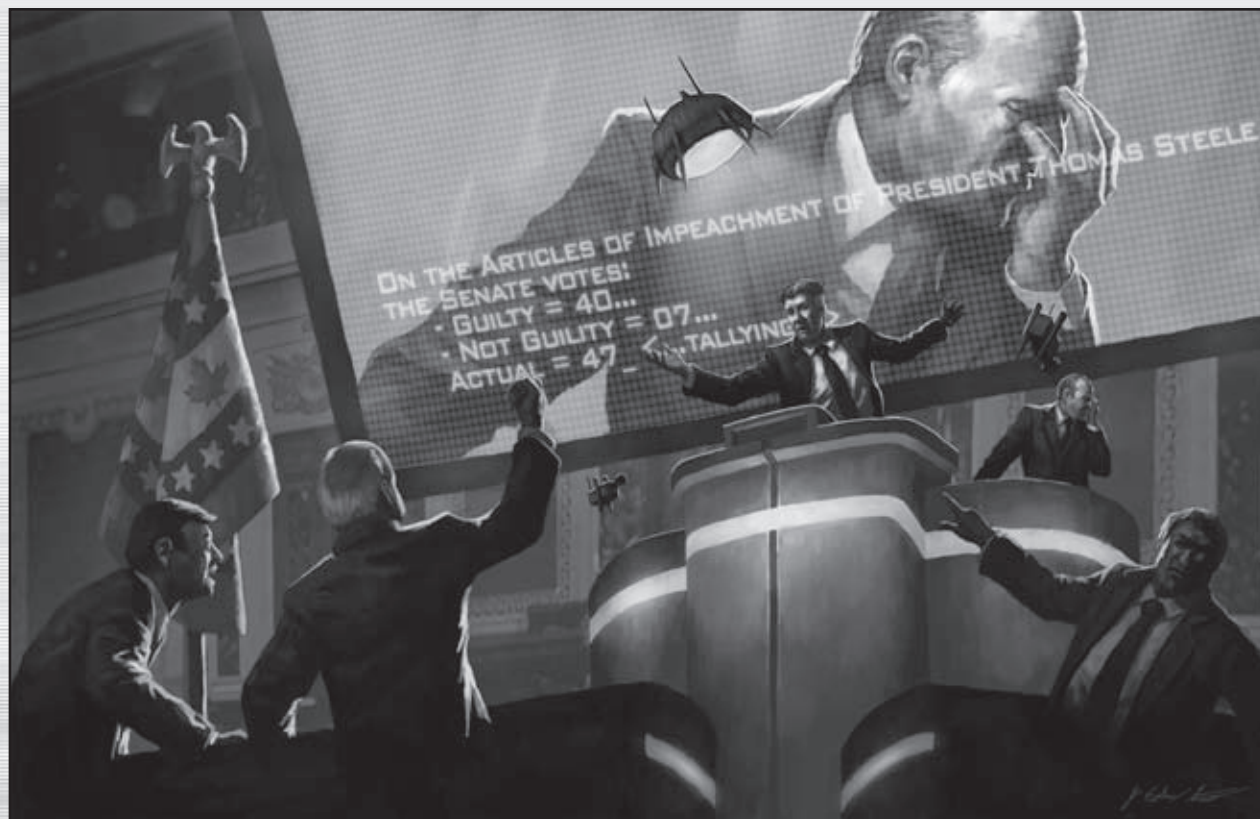
- That’s not true. If we look at the accumulated evidence, along with more recent data recovered when </data deleted by sysop>
- You’ve had plenty of fun in this posting, Plan 9, but let’s give it a rest here, okay?
- FastJack

A FADED GOLDEN ERA

Dunkelzahn’s campaign promised, “A New Golden Age.” While many people had trouble believing that he would treat metahumans as anything but snacks, tens of millions of people bought into his message to some degree or another. For many, his death dashed those dreams. Haeffner and Daviar did their best to keep the dream alive and follow through with the message and proposals he offered. They changed the Constitution to make it easier for the SINless to become citizens, then they changed it again to give DeeCee some freedom in its own affairs, including congressional representation. Despite their efforts, the world remained obsessed with Dunkelzahn’s death, and DeeCee residents became even more obsessed with the intrigue of local FDC politics. The corporate war saw an outbreak of violence throughout the sprawl as runners and company men were less inclined to observe the niceties of stealth and other behavior. The feds and private security were exploiting the chaos themselves, so how could they claim superiority? It’s been long suspected that Daviar was using Draco Foundation resources to carve out her own niche in the government, and colluding with government personnel to further DF business. There were constant accusations that Haeffner and Daviar were using Draco Foundation company



DEECCE



INCOMING FEED.....

men to perform covert operations while creating plausible deniability. Given the influence Ares has in Baltimore and DeeCee, the Seraphim were busy and were possibly supported by the local Church.

Then Ghostwalker appeared, and things went from bad to worse. Money and people poured into the sprawl. Everyone wanted access to the Rift, and the Army worked to control the site and perform studies of their own as the bunker was being built. They also had the shedim to worry about, and again they did not have unlimited resources—there were only so many mages in the Thaumaturgical Corps. Compromises had to be made to protect the sanctity of Arlington National Cemetery and other burial grounds. The Apep Consortium made out like bandits early on, and then things got weird. When it came to dealing with the devil they knew, it seemed that the Army would rather deal with the insect spirits than stop the shedim.

Locally, Shiawase has always tried to put a friendly face on their presence even though putting the headquarters of then-Shiawase Atomics in Washington was twisting the wound to everyone who rues the *Shiawase* decisions and their impact. After the Seattle Renraku arcology went offline, Shiawase became decent corporate citizens. They were still trying to finish Kansai Village, which includes underground fusion reactors similar to those in Renraku arcology has, and that meant they needed EPA and NRC approval, especially since the reactors are only a few kilometers from the Capitol. They got their approval, and Shiawase has effectively become the most familiar and well-known, if not liked, corporation in DeeCee.

THE END OF THE WORLD

We all know the general facts of Crash 2.0. The EMP bomb that Winternight tried to set off over DeeCee was destroyed by the Air Force when the UCAS learned of the threat from the Corporate Court. It was the chaos of the next day that lingers. Early on the morning of the November 3, the military forces that were supposed to protect the sprawl turned on the government. To its credit, some of the forces were actually fifth columnists—mercenaries and militiamen who had infiltrated the deployed forces. Those soldiers and insurrectionists struck across the continent. In DeeCee, they struck at the Capitol, the residences of several government leaders, the Pentagon, and the White House. They also took the opportunity to lash out at various corporate sites and some foreign enclaves. This would not earn them much sympathy later on. As it happens, the assaults on the Pentagon and the White House left significant damage and bloodshed. There were hundreds of people in each site, and the New Revolution killed many of them. It's remarkable to think that these insurrectionists had the military weapons and magic to defeat the initial military and Secret Service defenses, but they did. To their credit, they fought to the end.

The government response was a mess. The chain of command had been disrupted, and key figures were unavailable. They killed Stratta and Haeffner, and tried to kill Daviar and the JTF-Seattle command element. What still lingers, and one of the reasons Colloton still resents Damien Knight and Ares, is that Knight Errant stood by and did nothing. The "American Megacorp" let DeeCee burn and left the upper echelons of the government die.



THE TREE OF LIBERTY

One of the first things that people latch onto in tying President Colloton with the New Revolution conspiracy is the famous speech she made from the East Room of the White House upon retaking it from Senator Braddock and his supporters. Towards the end of her speech, she quoted Thomas Jefferson, saying "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." Those are stirring words, except that they are most commonly seen as code words and talking points for groups like Alamos 20,000 and neo-fascist insurrection and terrorist movements across North America.

There has never been a legitimate connection made linking her to the insurrection after years of official government and media investigations, as well as work performed by countless amateurs. Her spin-doctors have claimed that the emphasis was on the blood of patriots, and that those who fought against the insurrection across North America sacrificed their blood and lives in defense of liberty. Aside from that, the statement was made in haste and without much understanding of or regard for the context, given that parts of the executive mansion were still smoldering when she gave the speech. That said, the last decade has seen no shortage of attacks against her, despite of her clear popularity with the UCASan public.

Ironically, one of her biggest defenders that she wasn't involved is her former intelligence commander for JTF-Seattle: Col. Samantha Roth, who has long been rumored to be deeply involved with the New Revolution. Roth's most quotable *bon mot* on the subject is, "She was always seen as a threat to them. If I had obeyed and killed her during the operation to stop Winternight, I'd be president now."

Desert Storm mobilized. Lone Star moved. As then-General Colloton led two thousand combined service members across North America to retake DeeCee, they fell in line under her command. Ares stood by and did nothing.

The counteroffensive was brutal. People forget that JTF-Seattle contained of the best of the best of the UCAS military, and they knew a brutal warfare that no other force really does. After that fighting, though, no one rioted. Everyone in DeeCee just took cover and waited. It was controlled chaos, and the conflict was over rather quickly. Once things were organized, the New Revolution didn't stand a chance. I know a lot of people breathed a sigh of relief when they saw Colloton on the trid. It seemed that, no matter what had happened, everything would now be all right.

Of course, it took years to root out everyone that the UCAS and other countries were able to identify. There are still lingering elements just by the nature of imperfect information. President Simone was not a leader. He was well-liked in the Senate, but he

went along. That's how he stuck around long enough to become President Pro Tempore. When the corporations came calling, and expressing their support for the sovereignty of the UCAS, he fell into line. By the time election season came along, the UCAS did not want a likable compromiser. They wanted a leader.

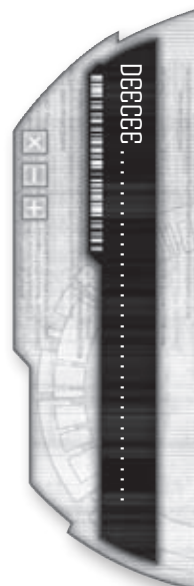
THE GENERAL RETURNS

Angela Colloton became the Army Chief of Staff because that position afforded her the most power to reform the Army, which is still the backbone of the UCAS military. By mid-2067, the public was feeling dissatisfied with the candidates planning to run in 2068, and a Draft Colloton group began to pitch the idea in her home state of Iowa just before the election. She couldn't run, though, because she was an active-duty officer. That didn't stop the group from becoming a movement, and it grew from there to New Hampshire and other states. She was and remains very popular even if no one knew her stance on the issues. Several media figures became very vocal in their support, and finally a week before the deadline to register as a candidate in Iowa, she retired from the Army. She became a candidate the very next day, and it turns out that she actually had a lot of ideas about where the country should go.

Colloton hired David Nevsky to run her campaign, and that man is a genius. They mounted a strong, positive campaign. She showed vision and forward thinking, and the voters ate it up. She brought on Michaela Martin, the governor of Ontario and one of Betty Jo Pritchard's protégés, as her running mate and they not only won, but they carried dozens of new Republicans into office with them, giving them single-party majority over the House of Representatives for the first time in decades. That is an impressive feat in a nation with six major parties.

President Colloton is a much cannier politician than most people ever expected her to be, but she also has a darkly vindictive streak. In 2070, we were discussing Federated-Boeing's sales to the Tir and Colloton's possible retaliation for being unpatriotic. Portland/Cara'Sir inked the deal, and then six months later Federated-Boeing was awarded a major contract with the Navy. The retaliation threat was a feint. She did it because F-B's biggest competitor was Telestrian, and so a UCAS firm got the Tir contract, which benefited Seattle and other areas of the UCAS. More importantly (at least from Colloton's perspective), she got Telestrian good. Everyone, including me, forgot how much she still resents Telestrian for their dirty dealings during the Compensation Riots in 2055.

The Colloton/Martin ticket sailed through re-election last year, with their success boosting Republican wins in congressional and state elections across the UCAS. Recent events in DeeCee have also changed things, with people actually thinking that the UCAS has a more significant magical edge than they have ever had in the past. The Watergate Rift was a literal and figurative wound on the city and country, and now it's gone. The whole thing has raised people's suspicions, and it's generally believed that the Corporate Court is in on whatever happened to bring an end to the Rift. The fact that people want to know what's happening means (at least to some people) that it's time to break out a Big Lie to help explain things. A Big Lie is often easier to sell than the truth; while a Big Lie may require some logical leaps, it generally follows a direction that confirms people's existing



MILITARY RECOVERY ACT

President Colloton's signature first-term legislation is actually a series of laws enacted between 2069 and 2071, all of which sought to modernize and reorganize the UCAS national security system. Ever since the early 1990s when the Cold War-era U.S. military was slashed by a third, the Canadian-American military has become a shadow of the days when millions of government soldiers faced off around the globe. The UCAS has never come close to matching the United States even with the incorporation of Canadian forces. Today, Defense Secretary Ronald Despain oversees a military of 275,000 active personnel; roughly one third the *civilian* manpower Secretary of the Army Scalito supervised in 1993.

What the UCAS has instead on January 20, 2069 was more generals than divisions and more admirals than ships, a professional military compromised at every level by insurrectionists, one battle-hardened cadre in Seattle, and a career soldier-turned-President with a chip on her shoulder against Ares and other defense contractors. In the last twenty five years the UCAS has decentralized and outsourced its military, having been forced to rely on reserves, the National Guard, the metroplex guard, state defense forces, urban militias, and, most often, corporate military forces such as Ares Arms and Knight Errant personnel who patrolled most of the Chicago Containment Zone security cordon for three years.

The MRA forced out a large number of the "Old Army," including uniformed and civilian personnel. It also created numerous opportunities because it concurrently expanded the size of the military branches and agencies, such as NSA and DARPA. The influx of money, personnel, and interest from everyone in DeeCee has also created a rather competitive spirit among the agencies more than in previous decades as everyone attempts to justify their new or improved fiefdoms.

In the defense industry, Keruba, Federated-Boeing, and Esprit were the big winners, while Ares was very obviously the biggest loser. One of the notable non-UCAS beneficiaries was the UN Armed Forces following the re-constitution of the Defense Cooperation and Assistance Agency, which coordinates security cooperation and assistance between the UCAS and foreign militaries. Turning Washington National Airport into a de facto UN garrison only sweetened the deal.

beliefs. If the Lie tells people what they want to hear and then offers some psychological reinforcements to them, it becomes easy to swallow. If the Big Ten decides on a story they want to sell about the Rift, there are plenty of people who will help them push it. If they spread a story that makes this issue go away, the question is what Colloton will eventually owe them for their services. It could just be support for megacorporate representation on the Denver Council, or it could be something more.

- FastJack, I was re-reading some old JackPoint and Shadowland archives, and I have a question. Why do you seem to carry a torch for Colloton? You've never shown any such inclination before.
- /dev/grrl

- I was born before the Seretech Decision, and I briefly lived in a time before ubiquitous corporate extraterritoriality. When I was young, when shit was raining down on America (most of it of its own making) people still had hope that things would get better. Older people than me would talk about the good old days, omitting the specter of nuclear annihilation and social inequality you probably couldn't fathom, but there was something real that people would not stop trying to be great. The day William Jarman signed the Treaty of Denver ... The look on his face ... I knew it was all over. So did everyone else.

Colloton gave her first speech as the de facto Republican nominee *fifty years to the day* after that, which came following a popular movement that drafted her to successfully usurp the nomination from her own president. America abandoned New York. It abandoned Korea and Japan (*that* turned out well), Europe, Israel, Hawaii, California, CAS, and Chicago—twice. It had completely withdrawn into itself. Most damning of all though, it gave up on the dream that tomorrow will be better. You'll never understand the evils Deus committed inside the SCIRE, but she came to Seattle and said, "We've got this." Her forces fought and died for every millimeter of that building that they recaptured, but they did it (yes, there's more to it than that, but that will do for now). In that speech, she made it clear those days were over.

My point is this: We finally have a president who's not going to run away. I don't care if she shot Kyle Haefner herself. That is the only thing that matters to me. At the end of my life, I don't want to be one more person who ever just gave up. When I see someone who won't do that no matter what, well, I stand with them.

- FastJack
- Oh my.
- Thorn
- I'd give the opposition point of view, but I think I've made my views clear often enough. Colloton is big government in bed with the Big Ten. No matter what you think, no matter what accidents occasionally line up her interests with yours, she is not on your side.
- Aufheben

WEIRD WASHINGTON

Posted by: Plan 9

Shedim. Treason. Great Dragons. Oh, my! There is no shortage of strange activities and conspiratorial intrigue in the city. The more mundane has already been covered; the secret governments, the magical masters of the universe, etc. However, there are still mysteries and theories that either don't fit into one mold, or may involve them all. Here's a short tour of them.

OCCULT AMERICA

Washington has never been lacking for mystic secrets and conspiracies. The Freemason conspiracy and the design of the city as a massive power site, White House astrologers and mysticism, and ghost stories abound. Since the Awakening, it has seen one great dragon die, one return, the emergence of shedim, and secret bug hives in the city. Even the comparatively tame, such as the appearance of the first adept, Francis Daniels Ph.D., occurred in the DeeCee sprawl.

Much has been discussed of the Black Lodge rituals exploiting the Masonic designs of the city of Washington. I will add that the final design of the lower part of the city was changed after L'Enfant walked away and Ellicot and Banneker took over. The tidal basin is supposed to be larger, extending north through what is now the reflecting pool with its northern edge being the Ellipse. The city has been redesigned and rebuilt several times over the years, with Kansai Village being a significant intrusion into the original plan. There are plans and deals being made to readjust the orientation and design elements of the city according to a master plan that resembles the manipulation of dragon or ley lines. Feng shui in DeeCee may not seem intuitive, but no one denies that symbols and metaphor have power in magic, and Washington is nothing if not symbolic, right down to the swamp it was built upon.

AFTER THE WATERGATE

Everyone knows that something happened in July that closed the Watergate Rift for good. Some associates have since dedicated almost every waking hour to learning what happened. Aside from the reports that both Hestaby and Ghostwalker were seen in the city that evening prior to the incident, both professional intelligence operatives and amateur sleuths have dug through everything they could. It's not easy, though. The response was led by the Army and also involved every UCAS and private security entity in the sprawl, and the corporate involvement was directed or at least overseen by the Corporate Court itself. I have gathered some interesting data, and I'll start off with this email I received.

//upload email :: user Plan 9 :: 10/01/73//

To: General Benjamin Miller

From: Commander Nadalya Smith

Subject: Summary of July 19 Debriefs

General, a compiled TS/SCI report is being made available in furtherance of your new assignment. Until then, I would like to update you about the debriefings conducted on the subjects recovered from the Rift Bunker. In conjunction with C5 and Thaumaturgical Corps personnel, on-site evaluations were

conducted on the subjects before they were relocated for secure medical treatment. Given the nature of some of the subjects, Saeder-Krupp took an especially active role in transportation and containment. Aztechnology assets on scene had to be reminded repeatedly that their assistance was at the discretion of the UCAS Army, and the situation was controlled upon order from Chief Justice Hino. Following the collection of information on the subjects, debriefings were conducted before the subjects were released due to circumstances beyond my pay grade.

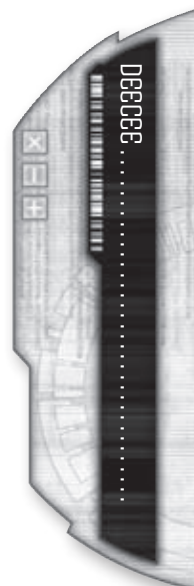
Please forgive the vague nature of this e-mail, but it is required given the highly classified subject matter. The consensus among the subjects was that their presence at the Rift Bunker involved matters beyond our understanding. The subjects were generally good-willed but adamant in their refusal to discuss the exact circumstances of what happened. Unfortunately, there are no recordings or readings that can support or refute the assertions that were made. Two of the subjects were insistent that they did not expect Ghostwalker's actions to result in the collapse of the Rift itself. One subject in particular indicated no knowledge of his ability to even do such a thing. The subjects indicated that there were other individuals present which has since been confirmed by outside intelligence sources. Those included at least two high-value subjects and a group of unknown freelance operatives.

All of the subjects were surprised to learn that there was only one casualty among them. As you are aware, she was far from alone. Reports indicate that the ultimate death toll within the sprawl is in the hundreds, between the magical disturbances associated with the event and the collateral effects from the event itself. Otherwise the reaction was mixed, with one subject in particular rendered virtually incommunicable upon being given this information.

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The email seems rather tame, but what I've gathered from other sources and public information is that those subjects are some pretty powerful figures, and the report names names. The two subjects that got away were Lugh Surehand and Jonathon Reed. There's evidence from nearby sources and surveillance of them fleeing the scene. Again, Hestaby and Ghostwalker were seen in the area, and Aina Dupree was apparently the casualty that the Smith refers to in the email. There are at least a half dozen other subjects referenced in other material, and it is suspected that Ehran the Scribe was among them. That is a suspicious number of former Tír princes in the middle of Washington in the middle of an event happens that could have destroyed the city.

- No insight from Frosty? She claimed to know what happened. I'd love to know who else we're talking about here besides Ehran, Surehand, Reed, and Hestaby. Under any other circumstances I'd be expecting the UCAS to park the Koontz off the Tír coast.
- Aufheben
- It doesn't matter anymore. Colloton and the Court have what they want.
- Frosty
- That is very selfish thinking. Perhaps it matters a great deal to those dealing with masquerading interlopers.
- Arete



- I honestly didn't believe Dupree was dead until I ran across Thais, the half-naga-half-something arcanoarchaeologist, during a business venture. We aren't on the best of terms, but he was adamant and furious when I brought up my disbelief. Something about that made me think this has to be real, which is a shame. I will miss seeing her appear at the oddest time to destroy someone, usually from the Atlantean Foundation, trying to pass off poor research and conclusions.
- Elijah

The growing consensus is that there had been some sort of conflict over a set of artifacts that have been bouncing back and forth among different private actors, and at the time were being moved across the world. At some point, several if not all of them ended up in Washington at the same time and place, and that unleashed all manner of magical chaos on the city. At some point the artifacts were taken to the Rift, maybe to be disposed of, and that's when Ghostwalker appeared to basically set off a bomb in the city that didn't go off, but instead collapsed the Rift.

The UCAS Army has taken full credit for its closure, and the Corporate Court and the Big Ten are going along with this lie, as is the media. It seems like the Army lying about the Rift is the biggest open secret on Earth right now, at least among those who don't just blindly accept what they are told. The government and the corps are in on the Big Lie, but the question remains about what happened. These are generally known to be powerful figures, and yet a dozen elves and great dragons were supposedly recovered from the remains of the bunker. That's the story that's being concealed. There must be levels deeper than that because in the end they all just walked away. Meanwhile, as everyone is trying to figure out what they did, this mysterious cabal is onto the next stage of their plots.

- Aside from Hestaby, has anyone really seen them since? Me and the mates who couldn't convince (bribe) me otherwise were crossing the Atlantic around that time when we got word that a Saeder-Krupp fleet was making haste south from Baltimore faster than I even knew was possible, and those fellas had enough firepower to make even me back way off and let them be. I followed up later, and last I heard whatever they were moving is somewhere at or under Lake Vostok in Antarctica.
- Kane
- Wow. The mighty Kane scared off of a target. Will wonders never cease?
- Traveler Jones
- I'm not afraid of S-K or even Lofwyr himself, but if there's nothing in it for me, I'd just as soon let the wyrm do his thing. I don't stay alive by being stupid.
- Kane

There is other fallout from the incident. Shortly afterwards, strange events were witnessed in Tír Tairngire, Vancouver, Denver, and Tehran. There are theoretical researchers from CalTech and DIMR who have suggested that it was a ritual intended to “reset” something in astral space. Perhaps there is

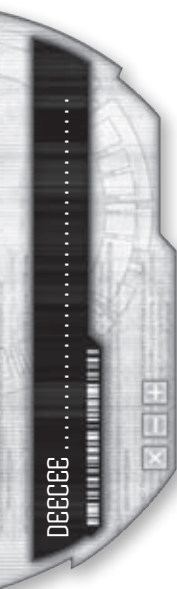
something to that. The rift was believed to be a direct connection to a metaplane, and that connection no longer exists. That might not mean much, but there are spirit hunter boards that have noticed an interesting trend: There are no more new shedim appearing. I know that Axis Mundi and some others have suggested the reason for the decrease in DeeCee-area shedim activity is because of a conspiracy between the government and the shedim (and you all call me a kook), but this is a reduction in actual numbers. Bodies in the Richmond Barrens of Vancouver are finally being left unmolested. Direct action in Prague is down. People feel safe that Najaf, site of the largest cemetery on the planet, is “shedim-proofed.”

THE HIDDEN VATICAN ARCHIVES

There has always been suspicion that the Roman Catholic Church placed, or moved, one of its two New World Aquinae vaults to America. It makes a certain amount of sense, especially as revolution and conflict began to spread in the Spanish-speaking nations of the Americas. America had expanded and once strongholds of Spanish, and thus Catholic, dominion was now within this new nation—a nation whose capital city lay within the one colony founded by Catholics. I know many people have looked to some of the holiest sites in the western hemisphere, but I have to ask: Would a library holding heretical, possibly demonic, artifacts be overwhelmed with good vibes? I might also add that it's easier to hide in plain sight than try to maintain a massive secret vault in the relative wilds of Luján or Chimayo.

- Let me cut to chase since I've had the chance to explore much of Georgetown's campus unmolested: P9 is saying that the Vigilia Evangelica's *Quartus* vault is located within or beneath Georgetown, which in case you all forgot, has been around much longer than the city of Washington.
- /dev/grrl
- And? Don't be such a tease.
- Haze
- There's nothing free in this world, especially for you.
- /dev/grrl
- In Kay's recording of Ellis and friends, Senator Sherman said their group, I guess the Black Lodge, had a vault at Georgetown. If the Lodge and the Catholics hate each other, wouldn't their secret cryptkeepers have bumped into each other by now?
- Sunshine
- That wasn't my recording!
- Kay St. Irregular

There have been rumors and legends that the Church possesses numerous prophetic or inspirational artifacts that might give direction to where things are hidden. If the Aquinae vaults do exist, there is a strong case to be made that *Quartus* is in the Washington-Maryland region, assuming that *Tertius* is in South America, as many believe. Just as a sidenote, some Church watchers maintain that the whole reason for the war in Bogotá, and why the Vatican is so involved in the conflict, is because Aztechnology



found the location of *Tertius* and is moving in to claim it. Chances are that they would have seen the fate of the colonies and the birth of what was for a long time a relatively safe and secure region where their most precious, and dangerous, secrets could be maintained. So they built their vault under the future seat of what was once the most powerful nation on Earth. The best part is that its role as the seat of postwar hegemony ensured that to this day it is still one of the few cities that people want to annihilate. If that ever happened, they'd be doing the Church a favor.

- Unfortunately, the cleansing fire of nuclear weaponry is no longer certain. If Plan 9 is right, and the stories of the Aquinae vaults are half true, such an attack could just make whatever's locked inside angry.
- Fianchetto

It makes sense if you look at it. Georgetown is a Jesuit institution that has maintained a permanent presence for five centuries. It's readily accessible from multiple directions over land and via waterways. As the city grew in importance, it only became easier to access while the government provided security. The arrangement has generally worked. Everything aside, Georgetown has remained safe even during the most calamitous riots and conflicts.

It is hard to argue that Washington has not seen its share of bad omens and conflict. It was razed in 1812. The American Civil War was fought on the opposite shores of the Potomac. And things got progressively worse from there. In the twentieth century the city was racked with race conflicts, violence, drugs, and overall a sweeping sense of impending doom. Since then it has been the site of pestilence, famine, war, and death. It is hard not to believe that all that baggage cursed Washington. Meanwhile, in a country crippled by magic, the capital has quietly become one of the most magically active and powerful cities, even more than the capitals of Awakened countries run by immortal elves, free spirits, dragons, or a combination of the three. The law of attraction says that magic draws more magic, and there is no shortage of that in Washington.

THE NEXT LOS ANGELES?

For as much magic as is wielded in the sprawl, DeeCee's astral space has been relatively tame. That changed this summer. The astral and magical disturbances have left echoes and impressions within astral space. There has also been an uptick in outright magical conflict among the different think tanks and practical research firms throughout Washington. There is also the feeling that since this summer, the gloves can come off between everyone from college students to the high-powered magicians of the Draco Foundation. Those disturbances may not be gone, or ever will go away. That's the belief among high-ranking officers in the Thaumaturgical Corps. Even before the Twins, Los Angeles' astral space was a mess just from the disturbances caused by a relative few and far between magical institutions. Washington, especially, is a fraction of the Los Angeles basin and has more people with far more at stake. If left unchecked or unheeded, DeeCee could become an even more interesting place to run than it already is with drakes, shedim, bugs, and mages with itchy trigger fingers.

- There is a lot of disagreement about just what will happen to DeeCee's astral space as a result of the closure of the Rift. Initial

signs seem positive—people say it feels cleaned up and refreshed. But as Plan 9 points out, people aren't done with the space, and their conflict could tear holes worse than the Rift ever was. Things may be better, but the raw material of chaos is still there, along with many people skilled in shaping such things.

- Winterhawk

REVOLUTION CAROUSEL

Posted by: Plan 9 and Riser

The failed New Revolution *coup d'état* remains a popular topic of DeeCee conspiracy theories for obvious reasons. How did it come to pass, what was the point of it all, and are the conspirators all gone? Since many of you are hesitant to believe me even when I'm right, I asked Riser to join me on this so we could have a corroborating witness.

Riser's Analysis

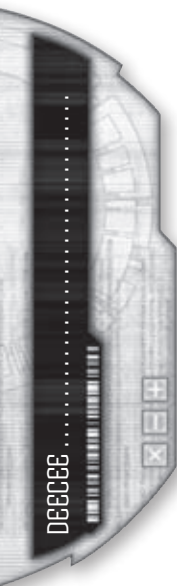
Someone once said that JFK's assassination gave the world generations of amateur ballistic experts, Lone Eagle turned many into nuclear physicists, and Dunkelzahn's death just proved that most people really are crazy. I am an assassin. I kill people, important people, for a living. Ever since the failed November Revolution I've known that the fix is in. I may not be as well versed as Kay St. or Fianchetto in geopolitics, but either the New Revolution fumbled at the one-yard line, or this is a long game. The selection of targets was not random, yet it was not optimal. There are also lingering doubts about Angela Colloton, who still has people parsing her every word for revolutionary code words and phrases.

What was the goal?

The stated goal of the movement is to reunite, rebuild, or otherwise bring back to United States of America. This is the crucial part—it is a movement. There are groups like the Unity Coalition, the Council to Rebuild America, and various other policlubs, militias, discussion groups, and so forth. Rebuild or Reunite America has been a core plank of the Republican Party platform since 2040. Backwards-looking nostalgia is always popular, especially when it's nostalgia for a time when one's particular nation was the most powerful empire on Earth. You can still find the same sentiments in Great Britain, Spain, Iran, and of course the Neo-Soviets in Russia. That sentiment is never going to go away, especially since the myth of American exceptionalism and the Shining City on a Hill is ground into the very foundation of the successor states. Horizon analysts linked Kay St. Irregular to the New Revolution last year, but what I've learned is that you don't achieve a modicum of power in DeeCee without having some ties. It's like water, and everyone in Washington must swim.

It's a useful tale for people to tell themselves, especially in politics. It's aspirational. The hitch is, the idea of forcefully overthrowing every government in North America with a secret fifth column presumes that the goal was achievable as a military and political measure. Maybe the megacorporations would have stood by and picked up the pieces when the smoke cleared, but generally speaking the corps acted out of character and did not act solely out of their own interests. The one notable exception is Knight Errant in Washington, which is of course one of many reasons why Ares is at the top of President Colloton's shit list.





Colloton and other officials have been active in hiding what really happened. The official reports from the government follow the narrative that the stated goals were really what was intended. It's a way to assuage fears that this can happen again, because it tells people that the New Revolution failed in what they wanted. The reports, though, are misleading.

What really happened?

Again, it depends on the country. As much as I'd love to get into Prince Thurston's background, I'll focus on the events in Washington. When the smoke cleared, Senator Braddock and a half-dozen other members of Congress were killed during the counter-assault on the White House, Defense Secretary Stratta was kidnapped and murdered, and the FBI Director killed President Haeffner before he was himself killed. There is also the matter of Vice President Daviar. The ensuing martial crackdown netted another three dozen major government and corporate figures and hundreds of their followers. Evidence from the resulting investigation indicated that Reynolds targeted Haeffner and Stratta because of their roles as the National Command Authority. He wasn't necessarily cooperating with other factions. He was intent on forcing one or both men to annihilate the other factions, especially those in Cheyenne and Santa Fe.

Braddock, on the other hand, was making statements fully intent on controlling all of the reunited nations, even the Sioux. As far as conspiracies go, this wasn't realistic. It was, as others have suggested, a purge. Reynolds was a powerful political figure. Braddock was identified as one of the leaders of Alamos 20,000, which corresponds to stories about both him and the organization that floated around Shadowland prior to the guns going off. It's hard to deny that the attempt on Daviar was real. There are hundreds of casualties that support that assertion, and recreations I've seen or done indicate that it was only a matter of luck and/or unforeseen interference that she survived.

I've been fortunate to see some of the most classified evidence. Reynolds was assassinated by one of the SF teams Colloton brought with her when half of JTF-Seattle crossed the continent to wreak vengeance on Braddock. Braddock was assassinated. If Angela Colloton was in on the conspiracy, it was to clean up loose ends because there could have been many more survivors.

What is the plan now?

It depends. One point of view says that the ultimate goal of control, overt or clandestine, benefits one individual: Ghostwalker. Denver was the only major city where nothing happened, and this is chalked up to fear of the great dragon himself. There is a reasonable argument that Daviar could also be behind it, and that it was one of the lasting legacies that came to pass when Dunkelzahn's posthumous Seven-Year Plan was completed in 2064. I know it's not a popular theory around here because certain JackPointers grew up with plush Dunky dolls, but he was a great dragon and a bastard at that. He may have been benevolent, but the fact remains that he engineered some remarkable conflicts. DF has engendered a lot of good will, but they are just as active in the shadows as any other organization. Mihoshi herself noted that Daviar's disappearance made their shadow ops harder-edged. Ghostwalker's actions speak for themselves.

The point remains that many of the people who are now dead or imprisoned are conventionally regarded as "villains." No one in the square community is missing the Alamos 20K thugs, the Black Sun hitters, and the Sons of Sauron killers. More importantly, no one is mourning the death of the Archconservative or other ultranationalist parties. The one exception is in the former Ute Nation. All the nutjobs are gone or hiding, and the General enters Santa Fe next month as a prelude to the actual Treaty of Denver meeting that would never happen if the political spectrum hadn't narrowed considerably in time. Who benefits the most? Ghostwalker. Pueblo. They are seen as potential allies. Colloton is spearheading the whole thing, which is intended to ultimately formalize the post-United States sovereign order for generations. Unless it's all for show.

What does President Colloton really know?

It is hard to say. Every media outlet in the world has investigated her thoroughly. The government investigated her intensely. She has a reasonable defense: She was a general, not a politician. Her command staff was not so thoroughly searched. Her last intelligence chief was running private wars "exploiting" the network. I am not going to trust the word of someone who has literally talked people to death. It is very possible that she knows nothing, and has nothing to do with the movement or the network of disparate groups that still exist. She gained the most in the short-term, but in the long-term the results are not in where she goes, but who benefits from her actions. Those will carry on long after she leaves the White House. The long-term result may be that in a generation the PCC has absorbed the Tir and rest of the NAN, and the UCAS reaches from Quebec to Miami.

THE DAVIAR CONSPIRACIES

Posted by: Plan 9

The recent re-appearance of Nadja Daviar has caused a considerable stir and raised a number of questions. Let's consider a few of them:

Where Was She?

No one knows how she even managed to disappear. Let me back up. The presumption is that she disappeared. For all anyone knows, she was hiding out in Lake Louise secretly controlling the Draco Foundation and the secret empire that was never revealed in Dunkelzahn's will. The DIMR and Draco Foundation both admitted that they could not find any trace of her using all of their magical resources. People scoff at the idea of Dunkelzahn walking the Earth, but it very well may have been what Daviar was doing. If she managed to hide from magical searches, the physical resemblance would not be an issue. She could have fled (back? See below) to the metaplanes. I've heard tales of a foreign white elf venturing to the Outback and having their Fate rewritten with blood magic. Maybe she was just holed up in Lake Louise watching the entire Neil the Ork Barbarian library and learning to knit.

What Came Back?

Nadja Daviar had fallen off the planet for almost nine years, and then suddenly reappears as if nothing had happened. The Draco Foundation has repeatedly asserted that they have

positively identified her, and that we should all just take their word for it. Even though she reappeared in late July, she has made very few personal appearances, and she has avoided discussing the missing years at all. In addition, some people who have assensed her have noticed that her aura is different. It could be a matter of time eroding their impressions, or indications of changes in her over the years. However, it could be that the aura signifies she isn't what she seems. Let's cut to the chase: Here are my favorite theories as to what this "Nadja Daviar" really is.

1. Doppelganger/Clone

This one is very popular for obvious reasons, namely that it has already come to pass. There were always fans of her, both men and women, who were appropriating her appearance to various degrees. Rumors and half-truths have spread for years about Bunraku parlors keeping sex slaves of simulacra of famous people from Daviar to Damien Knight. In the last few years there has been an increase in activity of women in the shadows who bear an exceptional resemblance to Daviar, including one in DeeCee. Various identities have been tracked and given names, but who knows for sure which one is which. Rumors have suggested that these doppelgangers, clones, or whatever you wish to call them imitate and stand in for each other. There is no reason not to believe that if they can imitate each other, then they can also pass themselves off as Daviar.

Look at the timing. Three days after Aina Dupree was declared dead, the DF is applying to have Daviar's SIN reinstated. The DF was in the midst of a leadership crisis, the city was reeling from magical chaos once again centered on Dunkelzahn, and someone needed to do something. They needed a leader, or a figurehead, and there happened to be at least one woman in DeeCee who could, with their help, pull it off. The added benefit for President Colloton is to help sell this UCAS Renaissance and add another layer of confirmation that she's a patriot and not a secret leader of the New Revolution.

2. E-Ghost/Clone

This is an especially potent idea as it combines e-ghosts, synthetic intelligence, SOTA cloning, possible cybermantic magic, and the possibility for what could be the answer for metahumanity to achieve something close to immortality. Stories of her disappearance are conflicting. The November Commission report narrative is riddled with inconsistencies, even in the official timeline. People have mentioned everything from the whitewashing of shadowrunners hired by the Secret Service to sightings of dracoforms and other strange events in Seattle on the day after Crash 2.0. Who is really to say that it wasn't possible for her to have become a ghost in the Matrix? Netcat wasn't plugged into the Matrix when she emerged as a technomancer, and the full scope and origin of those people have yet to be explained. So the running theory is that Daviar became an e-ghost, much like one of our recent visitors, and she has since returned in her old body, or maybe to a new cloned body. Perhaps it required a, um, victim of sorts for her to be imprinted upon. That goes back to Idea #1.

3. Ancestor Spirit

Simply put, she's a spirit. It could be a spirit that has taken on her appearance, or it could be one of the various spirits associated

with metahumanity, such as an ancestor spirits. These have been known to appear as echoes or shades (in the classical sense, not the shadow spirit type) of the deceased. This would suggest that Daviar did in fact die nine years ago, and has now returned as a free or bound spirit. There is no shortage of magical knowledge among the ranks of the Draco Foundation or the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research. If anyone could find her echo or spirit, it would probably be those groups. This would also explain her minimal appearances as the more contact people have with "Nadja," that there is more likelihood of someone recognizing that this thing is not what she says she is.

- I don't think this is the case, but it would be interesting. Several religious leaders would be tripping all over each other to prove that she is—or is not—the actual immortal soul of Nadja Daviar, not just some imitator. If the spirit was so inclined, she could play games with these people for years.
- Goat Foot

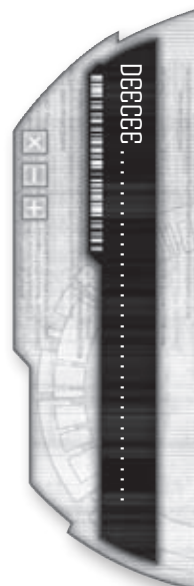
4. Ally Spirit

This is a twist on the previous entry. This goes back to when Daviar first appeared and became Dunkelzahn's translator in 2039. As far as anyone knows, dragons can summon ally spirits just as we can. Jurojin is notorious for being Ryumyo's ally spirit and was identified as such by Dunkelzahn in a preemptive briefing to the Draco Foundation. The fable FastJack uploaded to this group aside, there is not much if anything to back up much of that story. The story goes that she could have been Dunkelzahn's ally spirit. If she was not before, then she could be now. Familiars are supposed to be a special breed of spirit, and the possibility of this person being some kind of hybrid spirit or some unknown spirit brought to "life" to replace the original is not that hard to fathom compared to other ideas.

5. Mentor Spirit

Yet another twist on the spirit idea is that the Nadja Daviar who returned is a manifest avatar of any number of mentor spirits, but a leading contender is some aspect of the dragon totem or spirit that so many of the Children of the Dragon (even the mundanes) worship. It could even be an avatar of the Divine Dragon. One particular aspect that makes it relatively popular is that since she returned, Daviar has done a one-eighty and embraced the Children of the Dragon and even made overtures to the Church of the Dragon Reborn. The interesting result from this idea goes to the true nature of Ghostwalker. Dragon watchers have suggested that the Draco Foundation now has a sudden and potent antipathy for Ghostwalker, who is seen by Church members as the reincarnation of Dunkelzahn or some avatar of the Divine Dragon. This would be the most fun to watch if true.

- Some of these theories, like a lot of conspiracy theories, are overly cumbersome. Is this really the best way for the Children of the Dragon to get ahead? Through a mentor spirit imitating Nadja Daviar? How would you rope a spirit into the whole scheme anyway?
- Picador



- Spirits may not be physical, but they have wants, and anything that wants can be manipulated.
- Man-of-Many-Names

6. Spirit Possession

This is a pretty simple idea that a spirit possessed Daviar's body in some half-dead, half-alive situation, or that it is currently possessing her corpse. There are a number of ideas that rest upon the assumption that the real Nadjia Daviar is dead. She could have been successfully assassinated on November 3, 2064, or sometime later. There is the possibility that she survived and then was kidnapped or ran off, and later on she died of unknown causes only to be possessed or replaced by some spirit or astral creature. The simplest assumption is that she is a *serviteur* and is in fact possessed by a *loa* spirit summoned by a *houngan*. If not *loa*, then the possession is by some other type of spirit, such as a Qabbalist *elohim*.

- That's just a rehash of the tales that Juan Atzcapotzalco was a spirit puppet.
- Glasswalker

7. Insect Spirit

It is an amazing world where the idea of Nadjia Daviar being converted into an insect spirit is the least controversial theory about her missing time. This rumor has been applied at one time or another to virtually every politician and corporate leader for almost twenty years now. Ever since the Chicago hive was discovered, there have been internal bughunts by every major institution and large military-scale operations to attack hives across the globe. As has been discussed elsewhere, the bugs aren't stupid. Like their real world counterparts, what doesn't kill them makes them stronger, and nothing will ever kill them all. Perhaps this new Daviar is the pinnacle of their magical abilities, the perfect merge, unidentifiable, and untraceable. She's the perfect candidate. There was no shortage of chaos even before Crash 2.0. Perhaps at some point when things went completely awry and assassins had already failed to kill her, the bugs made their move. The thinking is that it took a tremendous amount of time and energy to make sure she was perfect invested with an insect spirit, and they needed the right moment. Ghostwalker handed them that moment on a hot July night, and the most powerful woman on Earth is now one of them.

- Yeah, that makes sense. When you're a bug spirit experimenting with a new, unidentifiable merge, you experiment with someone that will draw a ton of attention everywhere she goes.
- Hard Exit
- She may not be the latest, just the most recent.
- Sticks

8. Master Shedim

It should be mentioned that this is not DeeCee-specific, but there are a lot of shedim in DeeCee. If the shedim came out of the Rift when it opened, who knows what got out before it closed. This is a strong idea much for the same reasons as the insect spirit theory, except that as Ibn Eisa proved a decade ago, they did not need to find Daviar alive. In fact, her being dead is practically a

necessity. This one allows for her assassins to succeed in Seattle, and then at some point her body was recovered and possessed by a powerful shedim spirit. Given their natural hostility, and the power and resources at her possible disposal, one would hope that this idea is not true.

9. Ghost/Specter

Once again, we have an idea that requires the real Nadjia to die at some point. The entity that people have been experiencing since then is some kind of ghost or other manifest impression of her. It's possible, but to be perfectly it seems ridiculous even by my liberal standards.

10. Banshee

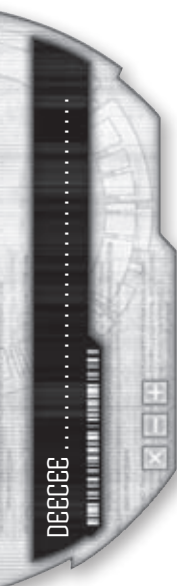
Perhaps we can ask Martin De Vries what he thinks about this theory. It would certainly explain some of her more antisocial behavior since returning. Nadjia Daviar always sort of fit the profile of what people think vampires and other HMMVV-I Infected should be. She has the alabaster skin with dark features, unnatural eyes (though hers are green), and a Russian/Eastern European heritage. The Draco Foundation certainly has the resources to keep this sort of thing quiet and her nourished. This theory is intrinsically tied to the belief that there is some vampiric cabal, such as the *Ordo Maximus*, seeking to control the world, an idea Mr. De Vries has been pitching to those of us in the shadows for almost twenty years.

- And an idea we have regularly rejected, for good reason.
- Snopes
- They're not to a global-domination level yet, but there are some Infected plots going on. Keep your eyes on Denver.
- Icarus

11. Magically Resurrected

This goes full circle to the idea of cybermantic magic, ancient (draconic) magic, and rituals that Man Was Not Meant To Know, and it's all part of someone's plan, possibly Daviar's. Cybermancy and the secret, esoteric rituals have been discussed among this group before. This idea suggests that, again, she was killed years ago, but someone was able to recover and bind her spirit back to her restored body. "Someone" is presumed to be the Draco Foundation or DIMR, which has access to magic that we mere mortals are not privy to, or simply allowed to know. However, DIMR is run by Ebran the Scribe, who is thought to be one of the preeminent magical scholars alive. Combined with whatever knowledge Dunkelzahn left behind, while they may not be able to resurrect Dunkelzahn (yet), they have managed bring back his legacy at a time when it all could have fallen apart.

- This would have to be some special magic indeed, what with it going against everything most of us understand magic can do.
- Elijah
- Isn't that the point of magic? Doing what is supposed to be impossible?
- Sunshine



DIGITAL DISTRICT

One last thing that connects to everything else is the DeeCee Matrix. DeeCee is why the Internet, and thus the Matrix, even exists. For over a century the networks and processing power in the city has grown more intense. It was one of the reasons Winternight and Ex Pacis targeted the sprawl in 2064. The government LTG, is abuzz with connections to all manner of PLTGs and dark networks that have been built, forgotten, and reconstituted for decades. It's barely worth mentioning that the NSA node is virtually ultraviolet. There are already spooks from Aegis and other shops digging up whatever digital lore may remain. The sprawl also has a horrific divide between the haves and the have-nots, and so it was no surprise that otaku tribes arose or were drawn to the region back in the '50s and '60s. There were bloody conflicts among the tribes as things came to a head pre-Crash 2.0, and for years the technomancer community had to rebuild itself from zero.

Grow it did. Unlike many other regions, though, the tribes are generally of a very specific nature. They are fiercely devoted to the truth of the technomancer phenomena but reject the pseudo-mysticism that has been adapted by many technomancers and tribes for hard mathematics and science. Of course, their scientific ideas start to border on strange for most people, but I for one am onboard with them. They are searching for the missing step of the equation between the hyper-scientific "children of the Matrix" progenitors and technomancers. Once upon a time otaku could and would cram cybernetics into themselves, and they were well on the way to pursuing a transhumanist ideal. Instead of the humans becoming machines, the machines somehow became ... human. At least that is their thinking, which is why synthetic intelligence is so popular. The technomancers in DeeCee want to solve the step between otaku, technomancers, and pure Matrix intelligence.

Given the sheer number of mathematicians, biomedical researchers, and information specialists (of all sort) in the city, there are various methods being applied. Some tribes like 000 000 000 have seen value in the de facto UCAS information security approach, which is to bury itself in random, often useless, and conflicting data. The same processes that foreign intelligence technomancers have sought to apply to sort through the data are being applied to the analysis of origin research. It is a form of futures analysis, mapping patterns of analysis for trends. At the same time, the local technomancer community cannot help but notice the magical activity and intrigue, and one tribe in particular, the Electron Sorcerers, has been gathering information on the magical think tanks. It makes as much sense as sixteen dimensional string theory.

- You have some unusual partnerships going on here, such as corporate multi-billionaires interested in looking at data put together by technomancer tribes. The wealthy are pushing this because they see this as an even more sure path to immortality than leonization. A leonized person can still be hit by lightning or a car or something; a backed-up brain can be copied, giving the security of data that comes with redundancy.
- Glitch

THE BELTWAY SPRAWL

Posted by: Pistons

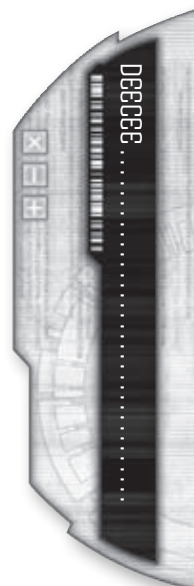
DeeCee is widely known for being "inside" the Beltway even though the highway actually bisects most of the counties by a fairly large margin. The entire district surrounds the city of Washington, which is where all of the government business happens. The counties is where the corporate business takes place. There is no one area where wealth or power is concentrated—each county has good and bad parts, often extending outward from a main hub, such as Ike City in Fairfax, or Bethesda in Montgomery. Most of the five million-plus people in DeeCee live in the counties, especially those on the southern, or Virginia, side of the Potomac. That area has seen far more growth in recent years and holds fewer concentrations of wealth and property. As it stands, there are generally smaller bedroom communities and one or two major cities in each county.

WASHINGTON

Washington is obviously the most important region in the district, which is why everything and everyone else is here. As Kay noted, the population fluctuations in the city have been dramatic, with whole neighborhood up and disappearing, only to be replaced and then abandoned again. While much of his discussion focused on Anacostia and Northeast, it should be noted that the same shakeups happened to lesser extents in other neighborhoods.

Washington is located on the northern shores of the Potomac River, occupying just over one hundred eighty square kilometers of prime real estate. The original District of Columbia used to include what is now Arlington County and part of Alexandria, but those parts of DC were returned long ago to Virginia before the FDC Act snatched them (and other areas) back. Washington is often described in lore as being built on a swamp, but that is not quite true. Many of the busiest areas, from Foggy Bottom and Dupont Circle to the Capitol and south to Arsenal Point were built on relatively flat land. There are still rises and falls throughout the extended downtown region, such as in Foggy Bottom.

And **Foggy Bottom** is probably where we should begin. The neighborhood's name dates back to when it was an early industrial area where pollutants would hang in the air and create a shroud of smog in the lower parts of the neighborhood below Virginia Avenue. The neighborhood itself is a bit of an anachronism. Thanks to the upheavals and demographic shifts Kay mentioned, many of the condos and large dwellings that came to define the neighborhood were torn down one way or another to make way for a neo-Georgian revival. Those large houses and dwellings have been replaced with single-family homes where powerful government and corporate figures live. After the Watergate Complex was razed and the Arabians moved out, those areas were \ given to high-security housing. The other major reason for interest in the area is the location of the *Illuminates of the New Dawn Grand Lodge* on New Hampshire Avenue and 24th Street. It has been the prime location for private magical study of the *Rift Bunker*, which is twenty-five meters away with direct line-of-sight. With the bunker structure gone, the lodge has become busier. The old Arabian Caliphate embassy was taken over by the Thaumaturgical Corps, and *Forward Base Reilly* is bustling with



THE WATERGATE COMPLEX

One of the most iconic and notorious locations in the sprawl, the Watergate is actually three buildings that comprise a mixed-use complex of apartments, offices, retail space, and a hotel. It carried the notoriety of the break-in and ensuing scandal which has forever memorialized the name in U.S./UCAS history for decades, serving as a high-profile residence for DeeCee powerbrokers as Foggy Bottom returned to a more classical neighborhood with the removal of area condominiums and a long-term land-use agreement with The George Washington University, the neighborhood's largest and most prominent resident.

It was not until 2057 that the Watergate would once again play a major role in the UCAS consciousness. As it had for decades, the hotel was the site of one the many inaugural balls held to celebrate Dunkelzahn becoming the seventh President of the UCAS. It is well known what happened next. He suddenly departed, alone, after receiving a phone call. His limousine had just started heading east on Virginia Avenue toward the White House when the car exploded. There is no video or electronic footage of the assassination, but multiple reports indicate there were two massive explosions that are now believed to have been contained by President Dunkelzahn himself to protect bystanders in and outside the Watergate as well as another hotel across the street from the Watergate. Witnesses reported seeing an ethereal vision of a dragon, and then the appearance of the astral rift that appeared twenty meters above the blast site.

Over the next four years, Army Thaumaturgical Corps and other government personnel maintained a loose physical cordon beneath the eight-meter wide Rift, and a much tighter spiritual/magical perimeter in physical and astral space while personnel occupied the Virginia Avenue-facing sides of the two buildings that flanked the rift. Army mages began to observe changes in the nature and appearance of the rift beginning in September 2061, which included the early appearances of what are now known to have been

shedim as well as several instances of increased agitation culminating in riots near the Rift and an increase in the local magical background count.

On December 24, 2061 the activity increased significantly within the Rift when the astral form of what is now known to have been Ghostwalker suddenly emerged from the rift, preceded by the emergence of even more shedim. After that incident, any protests to the Army's desire to shut down the area were immediately quelled. Virginia Avenue was shut down between New Hampshire Avenue and 27th Street, and the Army Thaumaturgical Corps and Corps of Engineers erected the massive Rift Bunker, razing two of the three Watergate buildings and the half of the third that abutted Virginia Avenue. Only a direct order from President Haeffner kept the nearby stretches of Rock Creek Parkway and I-66 open.

The Army watched over the rift for the next decade, weathering the travails of the city due to the sheer terror within DeeCee of weakening the defenses and compromising the bunker, and possibly the entire sprawl. It was the one site that was always off-limits. That changed, however, within the last few months. A rash of activity in the local magical community culminated on July 18, 2073.

Several individuals are suspected of coming together for some sort of ritual, having been given access through connections with the Thaumaturgical Corps. This drew the appearance of both Hestaby and Ghostwalker. Just about every armed and magical person in the sprawl was mobilized upon Ghostwalker's ungracious return, which apparently caused the physical destruction of much of the Rift Bunker as he seemingly vanished back into the rift in a massive display of magical energy that was somehow contained to the immediate area of the bunker. Within moments, Foggy Bottom turned into an armed camp as the Army and its local allies swarmed the site to discover that the Rift apparently ceased to exist. Since then, the area has been a hotbed of activity as thaumaturgical researchers from across the globe seek to study the phenomenon.

activity as Army, FBI, corporate, and independent magicians and researchers gather to study and observe the bunker site under heavy guard.

Finally, Foggy Bottom is home to *The George Washington University*, which is the largest educational institution in DeeCee. The campus has expanded north to K Street since it is restricted in Foggy Bottom to the area from 19th Street to north of E Street and Virginia Avenue, and west of 23rd Street north to Washington Circle. The one exception is the GWU Medical Center on Washington Circle and New Hampshire. To accommodate the large student body in an urban environment, the campus has built up tremendously, pushing up against the height restrictions that continue to remain in Washington. Those are complicated regulations, but the short description is that the limit is generally twenty-seven (residential) or fifty (business) meters. GWU has various exceptions, such as Powell Hall, named for a former vice

president, which is sixty meters tall and looms over Washington Circle. *Café Serrano* on the seventh-floor terrace is a popular spot for students and local employees to gather for lunch over modern interpretations of Mediterranean cuisine. It's also a common spot for business since everyone visits, but no one cares about what else is going on. If you prefer more class, *Whiskey Sour*, the old-fashioned jazz club is now located at One Washington Circle, and is still teeming with politicians and lobbyists. It is part of that personal bunker mentality so many people in DeeCee have. More importantly, GWU is how Lofwyr keeps an eye on DeeCee. The school's educational and research interests coincide almost perfectly with Lofwyr's and Saeder-Krupp's, and the corporation has invested heavily, but with great subtlety, for the last three decades. S-K executives rotate through the schools different programs, and S-K is considered to have first choice of graduates for political, management and research assignments

throughout North America, Eurasia, and the Middle East. There is no shortage of tension as Aden is supposed to be backing the King Mohammed V Center for Islamic Studies, and AresSpace finances the Space Management Institute.

The old Georgetown club, *Aleister's*, was pushed out of its spot during the '60s and has since relocated to the unlikely spot of the old GSA building. It actually shares a wall with *Commerzbank*, one of the many financial institutions that surround the *Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank*, formerly World Bank, terrestrial headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue. There are actually two buildings: the main center, which has a neoclassical façade that looks more like an institutional bank than the Treasury building, and the *Corporate Court Annex* on 20th Street, across the street from the GWU Law School (guess what their legal specialty has become). The Annex is home to the Court's SEC, Crisis Coordination Committee, CCMA (including GOD), and other offices. Yes, they give tours. There is a lot riding on perception, and the Court and Z-OG have made themselves accommodating to their American hosts.

Traveling west is **Georgetown**, the oldest and one of the most iconic neighborhoods in Washington. The neighborhood is separated from the rest of the city by Rock Creek Park to the east. It is home to *Georgetown University*, which has one of the oldest and most respected Occult Studies programs in the world. The Jesuit institution has long held a reputation for its schools of Foreign Service and Management, and many of those programs overshadow the larger GWU in prestige. The school does not have quite the air of corporate sellout as GWU because of its relationship to the Roman Catholic Church, which also oversees two cross-town institutions. That has not, however, stopped corporations like Manadyne and T99 from investing into endowments to the Department of Occult Studies. Georgetown also has a deep political reputation given its historic ties to the city, and the presence of political figures like Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez, the High Magus of the IOND and Chair of the New Century Party, has done little to dampen that reputation. The neighborhood is mostly high-end residential and commercial property, and the locals have tried very hard to ensure that Georgetown maintains a certain look and feel to represent its history. The recent changes did not, however, leave Georgetown unaffected, and much of the neighborhood south and physically below M Street has been renovated over the years into a far more modern look. The C&O Canal was preserved, but skyways for law firms and corporate offices for T99 and Ressha cross over the canal. The area between Rock Creek Parkway and Key Bridge is now a virtually unbroken chain of waterfront mini-arcologies, including a Proteus-built Wuxing arkoblock that stretches out one hundred meters into the Potomac River.

There are several good places to visit for business or leisure, but one that is of special importance is Café Bonaparte. The Popals have owned this and two other locations since the dawn of the century, and they have become institutions on the level of the Tombs, which is also a popular meeting spot and Georgetown college bar. The café has grown, but it is like many other legacy institutions in Georgetown designed for humans, though most orks can make it through with minimal fuss. They have made efforts to be more accommodating to trolls, but I'm not going to lie, Georgetown can be an unpleasant place for anyone with

horns. I also recommend the location because the Popal family has a lot of political connections in DeeCee and abroad throughout Europe, Turkestan, and of course, Afghanistan.

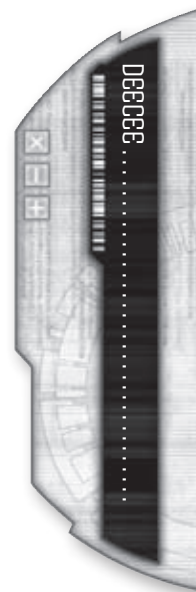
- It is hard not to love Rashid and the rest of the family. Pistons is right about their connections. In case anyone wondered how an elf girl like me made it to Karavan and back, it's in part because of them. That's the kind of influence they carry.
- /dev/grll

Dunkelzahn's, now Nadja Daviar's, estate is also located in Georgetown. The dragon bought the *Dumbarton Oaks* property from Harvard decades ago but left it and its programs virtually untouched until he took it as one of his UCAS residences when he ran for president. Since then, it has shared its old functions as an art museum and research library, but there is now a strong emphasis on the late president. Daviar does not reside here. In fact, no one knows where she lives. The Draco Foundation offers tours, and the Children of the Dragon have held a permanent vigil here for almost two decades. Rumor has it that part of Daviar's charm offensive to get the Children on her side is to hand them control of the estate. There are stories of strange magic in the building, and Draco Foundation and Knight Errant security both keep the site locked down rather tightly. There are stories of things gone missing from the building—or in one case, an item deposited.

- Considering that the deposited item is supposedly an ancient Celtic spear, I think that would narrow the list of suspects considerably. The Tír na nÓg embassy is almost next door to the estate.
- Ma'Fan

Upper Northwest neighborhoods like **Tenleytown** and **Friendship Heights** are in many ways similar to Georgetown, though there are several old media sites on what has become known as Radio Hill. Television and radio stations had offices and antennas here since it was the highest point in Washington, but after the advent of UMS 2.0 and associate wireless broadcast standards, most of the antennas are gone. It is still home to many media venues, though. It is also crawling with DeeCee media pirates like the Capitol Hill Watchers. Friendship Heights is also home to the *Draco Foundation* headquarters just north of the local Metro station. The building is relatively modest, and nothing important is stored there. The offices still open for one week on the third of each month to handle any outstanding claims, but the last time someone actually received something from the will was in 2071 when Morgan Leroy Hall took possession of the stock portfolio Dunkelzahn left him. He's currently a student at Georgetown.

The **Government Zone** and **Downtown** have become one and the same, as the government moved many of its offices from what is now Kansai Village north of Pennsylvania Avenue into areas like *Farragut North*, *Penn Quarter*, and *Chinatown*. *Judiciary Square* continues to earn its name as the site of virtually all of the courthouses in Washington, excepting the Supreme Court in the **Capitol Hill Enclosure**. Judiciary Square is also home to the FDC government, including the FedPol's headquarters. Reflecting the





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reality that the UCAS government is much smaller than the old U.S. government, there are very few large buildings. In fact, most government offices are now leased through other landowners like the United Bank of Panama and the unlikely duo of FBA and Bank of the UCAS, which split what was left of Legg Mason after the Crash of '29 crippled the Baltimore-based asset management company. This has made the government much more accessible to K Street. The two de facto ends of the zone are the **White House Exclusion Zone**, which now extends from 18th Street to 14th Street and north from the Ellipse to H Street. Access is strictly limited, and every control point is a small, armed camp. It's patrolled by the Secret Service, FedPol, HEAD, Resource officers, and every other goon with a gun and badge that you can imagine. There are military patrols along the Mall moving from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol and back, and spirits and drones back them up. President Colloton is paranoid as hell, and for good reason. Try to snag reservations for *Niccolo's* if possible. That is where everyone who is anyone, including President Colloton, has been known to do business. If you can't manage that, visit *Casablanca*, where Omar Said can hook you up with anything from street gear to political connections. Omar is a gregarious former linebacker for the Jets who made Washington his home when he was president of the NFL Players Association, and he knows everyone who matters.

The **Capitol Hill Enclosure** extends from 3rd St NW/SW to 3rd St NE/SE, and includes D St NW/NE to D St SW/SE. The Secret Service, FedPols, HEAD, and the military heavily patrol the area as well. The public is technically allowed to enter the enclosure, but the control points are quite secure. It is not simply a matter of dropping by to visit your senator

or representative anymore, and most people are escorted through the Visitors Center in groups unless they have prior appointment. Two interesting sights to see are *The Cube*, which is a plexsteel cube poured on top of the rubble of the old National Museum of the American Indian, which was destroyed in a massive bombing back in the teens. There are bodies and artifacts sealed inside, and for many magicians and even mundanes the Cube gives off a palpable energy and sense of sadness and foreboding. On the flip side, the neighborhoods to the east of Capitol Hill have become a residential enclave for congressional staffers, members, other officials, and lobbyists, making it a prime spot to seek out your prey or any useful allies. *The Rostrum* is a large but casual bar in the **Eastern Market**, where people can relax in relative peace. Vanessa Marconi owns it, and so the media and anyone thinking of trying any funny business there might want to avoid it. The drinks are great, though, the food is not soy crap, and if you appear like you belong or at least won't cause trouble, it is invaluable. *Eastern Market* itself is also good for business, but some people are less inclined to do business with their families around.

- The demon cat sightings in the Capitol crypt still continue. Actually, there is no shortage of ghost tales in Washington. The haunted stairs in Georgetown (belief powers magic, after all), sightings in the White House and throughout the Capitol, and the less-than-whimsical events at Arlington Cemetery have made it clear that these sightings are real. People take them very seriously. I know that the FedPols tried to banish the cat, especially after it was seen repeatedly in 2057. They just can't kill the damn thing,



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but they thought they could outsmart it when it seemed like Crash 2.0 had been averted.

- Kay St. Irregular

The **Anacostia Barrens** are, for the most part, that. They are barren. But there are still people trying to eke out a living, and since some neighborhoods have been abandoned the government put *Compville* in the heart of *Capitol Heights*. If you are on the run, then you could do much worse than hide among a breeding ground of anti-government activists, neo-Anarchists, and armed militiamen. The best place to look for work, or supplies, or to trade what you have is *The Old Republic*. It formerly was an old factory, but now it serves as a meeting hall, soup kitchen, and armory where the Compensation Army tries to maintain order in the slums where they were dumped.

At the mouth of the Anacostia River, south of Arsenal Point and **Ft. McNair**, is **Bolling Air Force Base**. The interesting thing of note about McNair is that the parade grounds where the conspirators who helped Boothe assassinate President Lincoln were hanged is also the site where the New Revolution plotters were hanged. Anyway, Bolling AFB is the site of the Defense Intelligence Agency headquarters, and also the site of the headquarters for the Department of Homeland Security, including Homeland Enforcement and Defense. Being a paramilitary force of officers, criminal investigators, and flat-out doorkickers, HEAD maintains a significant presence at Bolling including several VTOL-based Quick Response Team units. It is also the home of Marine One, the president's personal VTOL craft that is used for short-distance trips as far away as Camp David.

ARLINGTON

Arlington has some significant locations like the Pentagon and Arlington National Cemetery. **Arlington National Cemetery** is not, however, someplace you should go unless you are a grave robber. The shedim threat is a constant threat, and the Thaumaturgical Corps keeps astral and spirit patrols going non-stop, but it isn't a good site for doing business, and frankly any business one might have is too distasteful for my liking. **The Pentagon** is a great target if you have bulletproof credentials or forgeries. While there are nine military bases in the DeeCee (including Quantico), the UCAS military leadership and most leadership offices for all of the branches and most commands have been consolidated into the Pentagon. The entire military is somewhere around 275,000 uniformed members, and at least ten to fifteen percent of them are in DeeCee. The Purge has not stopped, however, and even with the Military Recovery Acts the UCAS military is probably weaker than one might appear. Sure, the UCAS won the Open Challenge in Desert Wars XXVII and Rad Wars III, but those were elite forces sent to make a statement. If the CAS or Sioux really pushed the UCAS, it is not clear that the UCAS military could stop them. That is why there is a UNAF garrison at **DC National Airport** made up of foreign soldiers and mercenaries. They are there in part to ensure that order is maintained in the National Capitol Region, domestically and internationally. Head on over to *Hoover's* and Blair Morris, the owner, might point you in the right direction of a Czech commander, British quartermaster, or Argus spyrunner willing to talk about business opportunities, paydata, or maybe the exact location of where a LAW fell off a truck.



KANSAI VILLAGE

Kansai Village is the massive Shiawase Enclave in southwest/southeast Washington that stretches from 14th Street SW to the South Capitol Street SE. Virginia Avenue serves as the northern boundary, and Fort McNair bounds it on the south. Much of the area was devastated in the riots that began in 2055 with the Compensation Army and continued sporadically through Dunkelzahn's dearth, Comet Fever, Crash 2.0, and the New Revolution. With much of the Government Zone moving north of Constitution to a more defensible position, Shiawase moved in to build a miniature city in the heart of Washington. They rerouted I-395 and constructed something that looks like a damn nightmare. It combines 1950s futurism, classical Japanese design, and hyper-modern construction. The Village descends below the Washington Channel in some locations, and pushes the boundaries of height restrictions mandated on land built within Washington (within enclaves they are established at a fixed height of sixty-five meters).

The area is designed for defensive containment but also for a measure of efficiency, at least as Shiawase sees it. Energy offices are all interconnected, but Biotech structures have their own web of skyways and access roads, and Logistics has another set. Despite that, and due to the heavy use of wired and wireless Matrix, Kansai Village is a model of the Yamana drive to streamline the efficiency of the enclave to the benefit of the corporation. They all run through smaller hubs, and the commercial areas of the Village are direct representations of streets in Kansai, especially Osaka. Many parts of the enclave are open and welcoming to local residents, such the malls, arcades, and open-air cultural venues like the *Waterfront Fish Market*. When Shiawase took over the area, they were careful to maintain access to the waterfront, especially the fish market. Shiawase Biofood has a presence in the market, but Envirotech controls the area. They expanded and reorganized the area to make it more accessible (relative to the rest of Kansai) for locals, providing direct access to the pedestrian path from the Waterfront, L'Enfant Plaza, and Smithsonian Metro stations.

Shrines adorn many public locations, and *Shiawase Damashii* is a huge deal in Kansai Village. The people of Shiawase know how many people still look at and feel about their corporation in this city, and the people go out of their way to be hospitable. Desert Storm Security personnel are friendly and efficient, and in many ways this charm offensive has worked wonders. The corp has been slowly expanding outwards, especially as Knight Errant has become less popular within the government (in part due to their parent corporation's recent struggles). The *kami* spirit situation is also notable in Kansai Village, but that is one area where Shiawase is quite cold to the many magicians and researchers who would love to study the enclave's spirits. That has not stopped many of them, however.



BLOOD DUST

In 2048 there was an incident where blood dust, a chemical bioweapon, was apparently unleashed in Arlington. It is not clear who released it, though odds-on favorites include Warpath or Alamos 20,000, both of which were very active at the time. It could even be the First Canadians. A competing theory is that it was stolen from one of the Bethesda-area biomedical labs and was accidentally released into Arlington. No matter the cause, the end results are the same: a fine red mist that, in even low concentrations, causes slow-acting respiratory distress, fatigue, and other minor symptoms. After incubating in the body for three days, the virus causes the victims to suffer from hemorrhagic fever and bleed to death from every orifice. The outbreak was contained to pockets of Arlington, especially west of the Pentagon area where military and security personnel resided, giving credence to the idea that it was a weapon specifically targeting certain UCAS security and military personnel.

In 2052, several more incidents again happened throughout Arlington County. Once again, neighborhoods were quarantined and decontaminated. This time, though, no one wanted to return to the afflicted areas, and swaths of Arlington became barrens. Eventually some squatters or gangs would settle, and shadowrunners would use the areas to take refuge in areas that the FedPols were reluctant to enter. It was a risk, and the new inhabitants paid for it—the area never decontaminated completely, and some of the residents became sick. Neighborhoods were razed, and for most of the 2050s those parts of Arlington were simply off-limits. The Haeffner Administration tried to get a revitalization project going in 2059, but when the project was set to open in January 2062 they had to call it off to handle the shedim crisis, which coincidentally was concentrated in Arlington, especially Arlington National Cemetery. The government never got back to it before Crash 2.0.

Three years ago, United Bank of Panama began its own private efforts to revitalize the area. They even encouraged the concentration of shedim in Arlington to reduce the threat throughout the rest of the district. It is unknown whether UBP will be successful, but so far no new incidences of blood dust have been reported.

Pentagon and Crystal Cities are home to many of the people who work at the Pentagon, DC National, and other military or security services. It's pretty tight-knit, and the folks here are extremely conservative and patriotic, including some who may be considered *too* patriotic. The area is a good place to find information or gear, and there is work to be had in extortion, manipulation, and bending people toward one view or another. All of the private security shops and the big mercenary and intelligence corporations have set up shop in **Rosslyn**, between the CIA in Langley and the DOD. There is a growing business of espionage and spy games being played in Rosslyn, while just



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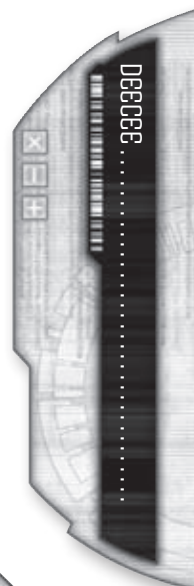
east of the downtown near the Fairfax border are desolated neighborhoods in **Clarendon** and **Ballston** where blood dust incidents happened. The United Bank of Panama is making a major push to renovate and draw people back to these areas in Arlington, but at the same time we have reason to suspect that Mr. Corcoran, the CEO of the North American subsidiary, has other interests in mind when dealing with Apep and shedim. The good news is that he may be responsible for the shedim attacks, and sightings having diminished significantly in DeeCee. The trouble is, they had to have gone somewhere, and no one wants to find out where that is.

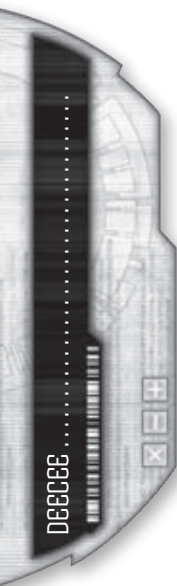
ALEXANDRIA

The city of Alexandria is the other independent city in DeeCee after Washington. It has a deep but subtle corporate presence thanks to the old-money environment that pervades much of the area. Many wealthy and powerful government and corporate figures live in Alexandria. The city is also home to Mount Vernon, which has a unique magical environment and was annexed into Alexandria after the first Crash. The city center, **Old Town**, is much like Georgetown in that it has maintained a historical ambience while hosting wealthy citizens in an upscale residential and commercial area. **Mount Vernon** and the **George Washington National Memorial** are both significant power sites thanks to the reverence held for George Washington. As was discovered recently, it seems that the Black Lodge owns and controls this site as well as others. The memorial is a Masonic temple, and would very likely be one of those other

sites. That brings up the interesting thing about Alexandria. Some institutes have offices here, but most keep life and business separate. Residents have to travel into Washington if they work for places such as T99, Manadyne, or MCT Magic. There is a thriving Awakened culture here, and recruiting is heavy between think tanks and organizations such as the Illuminates and the Black Lodge. There has also been a growing presence among the Sylvestrines or New Jesuits. The one interesting thing to note is that those people who live in Alexandria tend to be predominantly immigrants, especially Africans and Eurasians. Additionally, many of them are magically active and/or metahumans who were recruited or drawn to the city when it needed the resources. That has created an interesting dynamic in places where Humanis and other groups quietly seethe.

Some of those people live outside and work within **Fort Belvoir**, in Fairfax County, which happens to be the largest Army installation in DeeCee. It has long been expected to protect the sprawl from the CAS and domestic disturbances, but that turned out to be insufficient. Given the proximity to Fort Belvoir and the many locations in Arlington, Alexandria is also home to many defense contractors. These tend to be the upper echelon executives, not the actual mercenaries and specialists. Ares Arms is based in Baltimore and has an advantage in their DeeCee work, both due to their proximity and their status as UCAS's hometown mega. They have competition from the many firms with offices in Alexandria, such as Terracotta, Cavalier, and Vulcan Systems. They would rather be here than be squeezed in among the other firms and shops in Arlington. The Terracotta folks are good to know since Renraku has a close relationship with President Colloton,





and that affects deals made by Secretary of Defense Rio. **Sequoia** is actually the name of a pirate vessel captained by Zuri Adamson, a dwarf and former naval non-commissioned officer. She tends to dock near Old Town and knows more about smuggling than nearly anyone in the sprawl. She is one of the few people willing to pirate and smuggle through the Potomac patrols to move gear and people. Much of that smuggling activity goes through **Potomac Yard**, which is controlled by the Yamaguchi-rengo and transports millions of tons of cargo up and down the seaboard and east to both UCAS and CAS. The Yaks keep their presence at the yard minimal, and they stage most of their operations out of the nearby railroader bar called **The Lantern**.

FAIRFAX

Fairfax and **Loudoun County, NV** had been the area's technology core before Crash 2.0. Winternight destroyed the physical nexus for international internet and Matrix communication for the last century. It left parts of Fairfax deeply economically depressed. While some areas like **Ike City** have recovered and thrived, it has mostly been due to other industrial ventures. Crash 2.0 finally handed the megacorporations the chance to cut themselves loose from the legacy networks built around DeeCee. Crash 1.0 built the Matrix on the remains of the Internet, and given Echo Mirage's unique situation, Washington remained a major communications and technology nexus. Crash 2.0 and the New Revolution were the excuses that the corporations needed to move on. The Matrix corporations mostly uprooted themselves and scattered.

Currently, some wifi startups are moving into the void and pursuing work around Aegis' covert attempts to get into old systems and mine them for a century's worth of classified data. That means that Aegis Cognito, which made its reputation and business in data recovery, has been very busy in the last decade. They are pulling up "lost" fiber optic networks, trunks, and even whole data centers that were forgotten in the chaos of Crash 2.0. They are also going after data and material lost from Crash 1.0 as well, hoping to find information or reverse-engineer technology that was compromised by the Crash, or again, simply forgotten in the chaos and noise. If anyone could do it, it would be Aegis. Remember, there was a time when the DeeCee area was basically the hub of the entire internet, and over half of all data traffic was routed through northern Virginia. The stories of the Resonance Realms suggest that information does not just disappear. It may be a matter of knowing how to look for "ancient" secrets the way arcanoarchaeologists dig for old artifacts that may have come from an unknown era of advanced magic. However, other firms have figured out what Aegis is doing, and Horizon and NeoNET are right on top of the hunt. Of course, there are people in the UCAS government who may have the drop on everyone. At some point, this information had to create some sort of datatrail, and it may come down to the old techies who actually laid the fiber or set up the routers.

In North Virginia, Horizon has teamed with GWU (which will partner with anyone with money) to expand the Loudoun Campus. One of the major programs I forgot to mention is that GWU has a school of Planning, Policy, Politics, and Public Management. This includes a whole program on running political communications, advocacy, and lobbying. Naturally,

this is right up Charisma Associates' alley, and they are working with Singularity to develop a simulation center. The idea is how to replicate public policy and political communications and management activities in a controlled environment. The reason they are developing the practice center is that there is a stated goal of using memetics and less-than-ethical communications practices, and it would be unfortunate if a student's wild meme got loose. The fact that Horizon and GW are actually serious about this makes me concerned that it's not a hypothetical threat. If anyone knows more, please let me know.

- "Wild meme"? Memetics uses the language of viruses to describe how ideas spread, but that doesn't mean they get out of control like a runaway virus. They can't just take over our minds.
- Mika
- Tell that to anyone who has had "Lollipop Dreams" stuck in their heads for days on end.
- /dev/grll

HOWARD COUNTY

Howard County to the northeast is most notable as the spot where Ft. Meade and NSA employees live, as well as for the many people who work there. Ft. Meade is in Anne Arundel County, MD; since much of the county is closer to Baltimore than it is to Washington, there are quite a few Ares families living there. Every day Ares Arms employees commute to Baltimore while AresSpace and Knight Errant employees travel south. This county is actually quite sedate by DeeCee standards, especially since it is filled with households where no one can discuss what they do for a living. Given what happened to Fairfax, there are people in Fairfax who are trying to pick up the pieces and start up businesses in Howard rather than try to compete with the spooks and gangs in the desolated parts of Fairfax.

The area definitely attracts technomancers. Many seem to go out of their way to avoid parts of Fairfax and Loudoun County, while others have embraced it. There are certain types of people who live in Howard, and most of them are involved in hacking, cryptography, technomancy, and other esoteric technical measures. The tribes are all operating here under the relative safety of the DOD's watchful eyes as NSA counterintelligence and DSA law enforcement patrol the area. Of course, CID investigators from DSA have been tripping over Protective Intelligence Field Activity watchers because everyone keeps each other in the dark.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County is almost certainly the wealthiest district in DeeCee. Upper Northwest Washington simply rolls right into Bethesda, and neighborhoods like **Chevy Chase** exist on both sides of the city limits. That said, **Bethesda** is important because it is the largest concentration of biotech and bioscience programs in the UCAS. The CAS has the CDC, but the UCAS was left with the privatized remains of the NIH and the industry that had managed to make itself a permanent presence in the area. The NIH and NSF were sold off, and institutions like Johns Hopkins University (now Johns Hopkins Institute of Health), the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, and a murderer's row of pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms picked up the pieces.

Many already existed in the sprawl because of the NIH, and the industry consolidated its presence throughout the UCAS into one area. Every one of the Big Ten's biotech or bioscience subsidiaries is here. DocWagon, JHIH (which merged with HHMI after Hopkins lost its accreditation as a university and those assets were picked clean by corps and other schools), Phoenix Biotech, Proteus, Zeta-Imp Chem, AG Chemie (before S-K took control), and so forth all have offices in Bethesda, **Rockville**, **Gaithersburg**, or **Silver Spring**, where they study medicine and conduct experiments. There have been long stretches where the chaos in DeeCee and the rest of the UCAS made it very easy to find test subjects, and with extraterritoriality and no FDA there is virtually nothing to stop them from pursuing whatever experiments these corps wish. It has made the area dangerous, though, because that concentration of talent attracts shadowrunners for extractions and other activities, and there have been accidental releases. Because the **National Naval Medical Center** is across the highway from the NIH, now JHIH, center, the military personnel (or their remains) who were being brought to the center from the Renraku Arcology made studying the effects of Deus' weapons much easier than trying to break into the arcology themselves.

- JTF-Seattle also sent them recovered bodies of certain victims and some recovered Banded. Not all of those Banded were dead, however. There were a couple of incidents before that was dealt with.
- Icarus
- I thought you had all the answers about this stuff. I've been hearing stories about how there are sleeper Banded still roaming about, waiting to hear from the ones who escaped.
- Plan 9
- Since we've moved on to tall tales, I should mention that I "recovered" a nanotechnologist who was on the run from my employer recently. When I brought him back to my client, the Johnson took one look at him and fried the fugitive with a manabolt. I could have sworn I saw something flash in his eyes as he died, but it could have been the magic. I've never seen anything quite like that before.
- Sticks

There is one other thing. We mentioned that there are toxic sites all over DeeCee, including a couple around **Potomac**, which is an otherwise wealthy community where people like Rex Coll and David Atelier, the owner of the Shurikens and the Chieftains, live. It is also the home of **Riverside Hospital**, which some might recall is where the Army has been storing the bodies of all of those magicians who wandered too closely to the Watergate Rift and disappeared. There were rumors that Tanya Reilly, the first person to disappear into the Rift, had recovered, only to die of shock shortly thereafter. So, the question naturally arises now that the Rift is closed, what happened to the others?

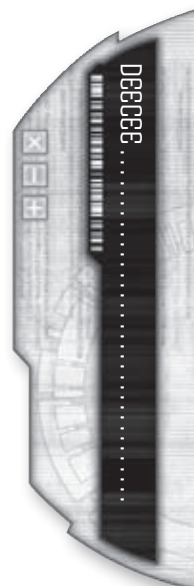
- Those who were once among the darkness now return to lead direct others towards a bright light.
- Man-of-Many-Names

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Prince George's County has the unfortunate luck of bordering parts of the Anacostia Barrens. The county did not fare well in the recent past, and places like **Landover** have virtually ceased to exist. There are some important locations, however, such as Greenbelt, College Park, and the National Technical Center. The **National Technical Center** was a joint federal-corporate venture to combine remaining assets into one centrally managed location. It includes the Goddard Space Flight Center, which is owned and operated by AresSpace, and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, overseen by the Department of Agriculture. Space and food seem like odd combinations, but much of the research into material being shot up into space from the Kilimanjaro Mass Driver was based on research conducted here. NeoNET, Saeder-Krupp, and Evo also maintain facilities to take advantage of this concentration of talent and ideas. Many of the people who work at the center are unaffiliated with any corporation, and that has created an interesting relationship of diverse technical talent in the biotech and engineering fields. Robotics, bioscience, Matrix tech, and so forth are all studied under the protection of the government. In return for use of the center, the corporations pay the UCAS a percentage for monies earned from research undertaken here. Given that **Fort Meade** is just across the border in Maryland, there are many locals who work for the military or NSA with technical and mathematical backgrounds. While this has given the sprawl **Turing Station**, the Fractal Phase club in College Park, it also makes recruitment, extraction, and other forms of coercion hugely popular sports. The Marshals oversee security, overruling the FedPol, and there is a Contract Court judge on-site because conflicts can quickly escalate.

College Park is home to the former University of Maryland, now the flagship campus of the University of FDC. Given the attraction of talent to NTC, Ft. Meade, and the bioscience industry in Bethesda, College Park has become an increasingly popular destination for UCAS citizens. As an FDC school with subsidized tuition, it also attracts corporate and foreign students who seek to study and find work in nearby industries when they graduate. This has naturally drawn the attention of recruiters of all sorts, from corporate headhunters to freelance poachers, and of course, syndicates hoping to grab their own piece of a promising student. A far more sedate location that everyone in College Park eventually visits is **Cho's**, which honors an old College Park alumnus with numerous prints and fan-made homages.

One of the other things to note is that there is a large Latin American population in PGC. Tens or even hundreds of thousands of Central Americans, especial Salvadorans, fled the wars of the 1980s and 1990s, and eventually others followed from as far south as Ecuador and as far north as Mexico when VITAS ravaged that country and helped usher in the wonderful nation of Aztlan. The community developed into one of the wealthiest, per capita, Hispanic communities in America. The economic divide hit them as hard as anyone, but many more survived than did not because they simply could afford the VITAS medicine. Following the aggressive expansions of Aztlan and Amazonia, people have continued to find their way to this area and settle in **Laurel** and **Greenbelt**. It is an interesting region, and there is rumored to be a pipeline of former Aztechnology hackers who now work with NSA, and NSA and/or New Jesuit-trained hackers who are repatriating Aztlan as double agents. Of course, Aztechnology



and the Amazonians are not stupid, and they have made their presence well known through overt means such as BANCOMEX and Stuffer Shacks (There are *so many* Stuffer Shacks in DeeCee, it's like Aztechnology is prepping for a clandestine invasion using them as intelligence outposts) while Soluciones Orbitales Integradas and Nat'at Tech run programs in the NTC.

BEYOND THE SPRAWL

Baltimore Sprawl

Baltimore is dominated by Ares Arms, but while everyone thinks about Knight Errant they don't see that Ares Arms and AresSpace are being fought over by the different factions on the Ares board of directors. While Damien Knight was consolidating his control of Knight Errant, Arthur Vogel made his grab for AresSpace. That is probably the second largest division after Ares Arms, and it also has a significant presence in the Baltimore-Washington region. This has led to a change in attitude among the personnel since Vogel seems intent on pushing the corporation into the realms where Evo tends to tread, namely the fringes of what it means to be human. Others, though, have been reminded of a more interesting corporation: Proteus. It's no secret that Ares has no love for Proteus. They nearly went to full-scale war ten years ago. War was averted, though, and something happened behind the scenes. These days, a lot of Proteus people seem to be popping up in and around Baltimore. Meanwhile, Ares Arms' stagnant performance has become a liability. If that division is going to move forward, perhaps someone new should move in. Moreover, as Ares keeps finding itself suffering setbacks and getting backed into a corner, it's only a matter of time before someone makes a move to wrest control of Ares Arms for itself. That hasn't affected many people on the ground in Baltimore yet, but give it time.

- Any buyers out there will be looking at ways to get the price of Ares Arms down. Investigate who is spreading stories about the troubles with the Excalibur test, and you'll have some idea of who might be interested in acquiring Ares Arms.
- Mr. Bonds
- It doesn't matter who is interested. Ares Arms is a centerpiece of the corporation. Knight won't let it go.
- Cosmo
- That's why people are trying to make it so he doesn't have a choice.
- Baka Dabora

Fort Meade is just outside DeeCee. It's home to the National Security Agency, Army intelligence, and elements of other members of the intelligence community, including the IRS. There are plenty of other activities at Meade, but NSA reigns supreme. Defense and civilian SIGINT, including Matrix intelligence gathering, have been consolidated here, but there are always reasons to need combat and other field operations hackers. I could advise not trying to hack NSA, but I will suggest that there are other ways to deal with them.

Urgent Message

UCAS INFORMATION SECURITY

Their information security, as a cornerstone of UCAS INFOSEC policy, has been that Resonance Realm and general information security should be managed through obscurity. A whole new set of languages, codes, ciphers, and dialects have been created or revived to discuss secrets. Anyone can collect data, but without the key it is useless. Disinformation is a strong NSA tool, but it also works against them. Like the Vatican, NSA has so much data to collect and information to secure that time becomes a problem, and people force the use of less-secure methods. Squeeze the person. The weakest link is always at the other end of the commlink. Meanwhile, the continued existence of the Intelligence Community forces competition of analysis and reporting using different sources and methods, some completely falsified, others simply incomplete. The UCAS government has learned how to hide its secrets from itself as it harnessed the power of personal ambition and politicking to maintain a competitive advantage when game-changing forms of espionage came along.

North Virginia

The state of North Virginia has always had much more in common with DeeCee than most of Virginia, but that hasn't kept people from trying to cause problems. Of course, the last politico to make serious noise about secession was Governor Thomas Jefferson III, and he had to fake his death and flee to Atlanta before President Steele really did have him assassinated. Most of the folks in **Fredericksburg** are too busy running a smuggler haven to want to ruin what is generally a good thing. The state capital is on the Rappahannock River, and Homeland Enforcement is more concerned about what may be coming in than leaving the UCAS. Meanwhile, the military and intelligence agencies are focused on CAS troop movements. The one type of contraband that draws attention is weaponry, but there are a lot of weapons manufactured and distributed around Baltimore and Washington. It is not the UCAS's problem if some guns slip through into the CAS on Mafia or Yakuza trucks.

There are increasing numbers of freelance mercenaries, spies, and shadowrunners who are taking advantage of the loose borders and lax weapon laws (relative to much of Europe, especially) to use wooded areas upstream from the Potomac and Rappahannock as training grounds, even making their way into West Virginia. It's a matter of time before shops like SIS take over, but it's interesting to think that there has always been this large community, but no major mercenary firm operates out of North America. The closest entity we have is Knight Errant.

- It's a matter of principle, or pride, or self-delusional nonsense. You Americans keep thinking that you're above the idea of a soldier for hire, so firms like Knight Errant do much of the work of mercenary firms like MET2000 and then say, "We only provide security and defensive measures." Yes, the nuclear weapon in Chicago was a defensive tool. Hypocrites.
- Aufheben

WHO DO YOU KNOW IN THIS TOWN?

Posted by: Kay St. Irregular

Everyone has their own agenda, own loyalties, and their own secrets. This is especially true in a city that was created with the specific purpose of governing a nation. There are millions of people in DeeCee, and most of them will probably need to work with a shadowrunner or some other professional at some point. If you're going to run in DeeCee, these are people that are worth knowing—either to work for or run from.

UCAS GOVERNMENT

DeeCee is still a company town, even if the company has been broken up and subdivided, and feeds on itself more than ever. There is, however, a considerable amount of business in the sprawl that has nothing to do with the federal government. That's for later. When it comes to dealing with the government as a resource, target, or obstacle, it is critical that you know who to speak with and who to avoid. The first thing to note is that there are two distinct classes of government employee: the career bureaucrats and the politicians. Generally speaking, the career folks work in the lower levels of power, but they are the ones who get things done. They are disproportionately lesser educated, born and raised in the area, and members of minority groups. I know that ethnicity isn't supposed to matter in the Sixth World, but it is hard to avoid the fact that most of these bureaucrats, especially the further down you go, are African-American, women, and more likely to be trolls, orks, or dwarves. Washington and the region has never been known for its racial tolerance in practice, and it still shows. The higher up you go, the whiter and "prettier" the metahumans are. Sure, the Attorney General is a troll, and Secretary Rio is an ork, but they are the exceptions and there aren't a whole lot of men and women in the appointed ranks that have tusks or horns.

That said, these are the people who get things done. They've seen congresses and presidents come and go, and they remain well entrenched in the government. The government privatized and outsourced itself into a corner decades ago, and the Government Integrity Act makes it difficult to go from the public to the private sector and back (though corps, especially the extraterritorial ones, are proficient in evading this restriction). Reduced traffic between the sectors has its downside, though. With the private government service corps based in the sprawl, or possessing a strong presence in the sprawl, they have largely superseded any need for the special skills of current civil servants. A career Justice Department lawyer no longer has the cache they once might have. The firms that work with (or against) the government have adapted only too well.

Puzzle Palace Search...

President Angela Colloton
Vice President Michaela Martin

Executive Cabinet

State: Avery Hathaway
Treasury: Brenda Ogawa
Defense: Ronald Despain (ork)
Justice: Attorney General Alexander Monaghan (troll)
Agriculture: Mario Sandoval
Business: Ellen Danquist
Resources: Martin Larson
Health and Metahuman Services: Jennifer McAuliffe (elf)
Information: Ivan Cavalcanti
Homeland Security: Roderick Jenkins (dwarf)

Cabinet-Level Advisors

National Security Advisor: Saúl Perez
Director of UCAS Intelligence: Rebecca Darby
Chief Economic Advisor: Connor McDonough (dwarf)
Director of the Office of Magical Security Policy: General Benjamin Miller

- There are still plenty who just do their job, and quite a few who won't talk to anyone for any reason. The White House butler started working there in 2013. There are others who've been there nearly as long. They do not talk about their work, or what they see, ever. Many have tried to sweet-talk or con them. Some tried brute force, but that often doesn't fly in this town. There are some people you don't muscle. Most of the career staff at the White House and the Capitol and folks like that are off-limits.
- Pistons

There are clearly reasons to keep both the public and private bureaucrats in mind. They know everything that is going on, and they are expected to maintain confidentiality. Politicos come and go and can take some blows to their reputations. Civil servants can't. They no longer possess the same protections that once made them such juicy targets for smaller-government advocates. In security services, and the entirety of the Departments of Justice and Defense, they are all vetted. This may not seem like a big deal, but new appointees have to be cleared for their positions and in the meantime those who are already cleared, the career underlings, perform their job functions. That goes especially true with positions that aren't filled. Colloton and the Republican Party have a firm majority in the House of Representatives, but they still don't control the Senate, at least not yet. We'll see what happens come next November, though, as Colloton tries to work with the Libertarians to gain a right-leaning majority.

- Snopes talked earlier about bureaucracies being risk-averse due to the CYA leanings of bureaucrats, and that's especially true in DeeCee. Any bureaucrat with any time in the establishment knows how to bury anything that comes their way in muck and red tape if they feel they need to. The person you need to get

to know is that one mid-level, non-political bureaucrat each department has who knows procedures inside and out so the he or she can accelerate or slow down procedures at their whim. Make friends with this person. They will be able to do interesting things for you someday.

- Kay St. Irregular

If there was any doubt about the level of intrigue and resentment that can develop within the permanent government presence, it was proven on November 3, 2064. The Old Army was long a bed of resentment and archconservative leanings. People had described it as being much like the United States military before World War II. People went in and stayed in. Regulations on seniority and promotions changed with things like UGE and the depletion of forces from the balkanization of the country. To be honest, those actually began long ago in the late 1980s. When communism imploded and START virtually annihilated global nuclear arsenals, President O'Neill began to slash the defense budget. Of course, no one expected at the time that Jeffrey Lynch would do him even better by reducing defense spending by forty percent and nearly securing the elimination of the Marine Corps. Swinging back under President Garrety, the military became a virtual political class unto itself as it grew smaller. The comparison to labor unions is apt here. When Presidents Steele and Haeffner began to call for and expect service from them of a kind no recent military had faced, they served but they seethed. The results of their actions are clear, buried at Arlington in Presidents Row.

- Haven't there been countless witch-hunts over the years in DeeCee? There was the commission that looked into the Compensation Riot, bug hunts, shedim hunts, magic crackdowns, the technomancer scare, and whatever political finger pointing accompanied them and others. How does this keep happening?
- Mika
- It's the same in DeeCee as it is everywhere. The commissions and hearings are all focused on providing narratives, not finding answers. No one in large institutions wants to be accountable, especially for a problem or mistake. At best, they have to deal with it and not even get credit because that's their job. No one gets credit, and it exposes flaws that shouldn't be there. Besides that, it's political. Everyone has an agenda, and often times those agendas just draw attention away from other matters. If it's not a priority, it's not an issue. The worst for this is at midlevel positions, just like in corporations. Once something gets buried, information doesn't just find a way out. It's not a thing. Those at the top can only act on what they know, and if access and information is restricted, then how is a decision to be made? So the machine keeps moving, and illegal and unethical things disappear back into the shadows.
- The Smiling Bandit

Some of the important people in government live in the cracks, like **Wendell Moore**. He's the Business Department Librarian. That might not seem like an important role, but outside of the glacier that is the Contract Court node, he is the only person who has access to all of the archives of actions taken by that court in addition to archives and backups of the department's

own datastores. He is also one of those people who others just like and trust, even people who might otherwise deal with orks, and so if there is anything involving the federal government and corporations in DeeCee, he probably knows about before most anyone else. As the proper and de facto institutional memory of the department, he is entrusted with copious amounts of information. He rarely shares what he personally knows about others, but he is very helpful and seems incapable of not trying to put people together to get things done.

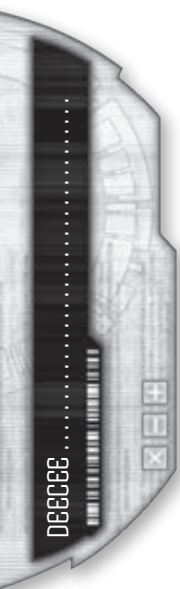
On the opposite end, helping is something that **Amanda Snyder** seems incapable of doing. This is probably why she's managed to hold onto her position in the State Department. She works in the office that manages diplomatic relations and keeps track of foreign offices and activities. That she often goes out of her way to make things difficult for them is why no one seems to like her, but they have to rely on her. She knows enough about foreign relations that she's made herself indispensable, if not stuck in career limbo.

Congress

Then there is the matter of Congress. It's important to have friends within the ranks of the professional and political executive, but it's even nicer to have a couple of congressmen in your pocket. Formally, everything runs on the seniority system; the longer you're in office, the more power you have. The reality is a bit trickier. With the explosion of political parties following the Crash of '29, the party hierarchies didn't survive intact, and in many ways it became every man or woman for themselves. With coalitions forming to define the majority and minority in each house, committee power became a matter partly of party seniority but also of inter-party politics. Of course, even that has now changed. For the first time in decades, one party holds a majority in the House of Representatives.

Following the unceremonious demise of the Archconservative Party in the mid-sixties, many people jumped ship for the Republican Party. Additionally, many pragmatic Libertarian voters jumped ship in 2068 to elect President Colloton, and they haven't looked back as long as she throws them the occasional bone in reduced or streamlined regulations. Even more followed on her coattails the next election, giving us the current majority—and Speaker Joseph Ellis. There is a definite irony in the fact that the Archconservatives helped put the Speaker of the House's gavel into the hands of a dwarf. He's been there a long time, but it's his gift for strategic thinking and a resolute dedication to expanding the majority that got him elected by his caucus. He stands in stark contrast to Speaker-turned-President Betty Jo Pritchard, who is a welcome guest at Republican caucus meetings. She was a consensus-builder. Ellis is a steamroller.

The Senate is another matter. Of the sixty-six seats, the Republicans now control twenty-six, and there are four Libertarians and two Independents who vote alongside them in a narrow minority. They are expecting to pick up the seats needed to take the majority next year, and Republican Caucus Chair Melissa Washington is already measuring for new curtains in the Majority Leader's office. The senior Senator from Maine is a close friend and ally of President Colloton, and her consistent stance on magical regulation and security is bound to matter in the coming year given what recently occurred at the Watergate.



The current Majority Leader, Jennifer Henry (T-NY) is intent on continuing to show Technocrat gains, especially in light of CAS President McMullin drawing a considerable amount of attention to her party.

- Don't forget about that little exposé that you, or rather some unknown person, released back in July. Senator Washington must have been told that Senator Henry is secretly a mage and has been for Ghost knows how long. Considering her son was killed by unregulated magic, I'm surprised she hasn't just tried to club Henry to death on the floor of the Senate.
- Sunshine

Political Appointees

Every president gets to appoint thousands of people within the executive branch, and then their successor gets to wipe the slate clean and do it all over again. That's the idea, anyway. The reality is that even with the relatively large and stable power bloc President Colloton enjoys in the Senate, she has to accede to the whims and power plays of people within her party as well as some movers and shakers from other parties. Political appointees are subject to far less stringent guidelines than career employees. They tend to turn over quickly, as many of them cannot or will not play the game for very long. For example, consider the series of businessmen who became President of the United States or the UCAS and subsequently brought in like-minded people with them. These people tried to change the culture, only to learn that the culture was far more deeply entrenched than they had suspected. They brought in big ideas, those ideas failed to take root, and after a few years they left, frustrated. On the other hand, there are men and women like **Martin Brofsky**, **Cameron Dunn**, and **Lesa Cohen** who have served in various appointed positions since Adams administration. They are not only effective at selling their aptitude, but manipulating Senate factions and power plays. They didn't change the culture, they immersed themselves in it. And they thrived.

Getting people in the spots where they want them is no small task for a chief executive. Sometimes it helps to nominate a political novice, someone who does not have a significant record their political opponents can use to oppose their nomination. There can be a lot of horse-trading at this level; for example, when President Colloton's administration got **Jenna Hicks** to run the National Technical Center in Greenbelt, she had to let **Fortune Relf** be imposed upon her Treasury Department by **Senator Ainsley Yamagata** (D-CT). Hicks and Relf have different outlooks and approaches to their work, but they share the one thing most people who reach that level have: an ambition that leads them to push their way into the halls of power how ever they can.

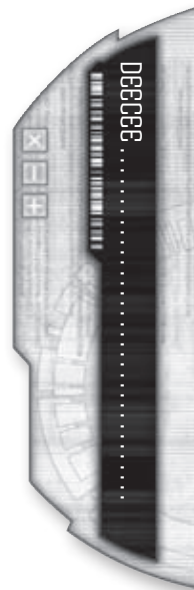
That ambition, access to relatively unchecked power, and the combination of political favors and baggage that got them the job makes these people very important to pursue when working in the sprawl. As we discuss the intersection of conspiracy and action, it is important to point out that it is easier to flip a mid-level official who can wield power and keep their bosses in check than it is to insert or convert someone like the Secretary of Defense. You also need to understand that all these different figures create an insatiable need for back channels. Everyone in DeeCee is

well aware of the fact that President Colloton has at least one clandestine representative acting on her behalf for the treaty negotiations in Denver because she loathes Iain Lesker. And she's not the only one doing so. Now, imagine a situation where she and others around her are not completely sure of what is being done in their name in Denver. As an example, let's take a look at **Mr. Dunn**, who is the Assistant Secretary of Business for North American Trade Cooperation. He oversees business involving UCAS corps operating across North America, as well as foreign businesses in the UCAS, and he is also a representative to the North American division heads of the megacorporations. His success rests in knowing how to say the right thing to the right person. Officially, he serves under **Secretary Danquist**, but both of them came to office with their own pre-existing networks, so they sometimes work on parallel lines. They have to work together, but neither one trusts the other to tell them everything their network is up to. Essentially, Secretary Danquist knows that she is withholding some info from Dunn, so she figures he's doing the same thing back. And she's right. Having administrators within the same department using their personnel to spy on each other is liable to look wasteful if anyone ever gets wind of it, so Dunn and Danquist instead both work through proxies. For example, Danquist has a good relationship with **Aubrey Couture**, a gentleman who is a very loyal Republican and a lobbyist for **Ellis & Adams**, a major lobbying firm. She uses him to keep an eye on Dunn.

- So that's why Ellen Danquist moved to DeeCee.
- Bull
- It seems that way. However, she does seem to have a serious agenda she's pursuing that carries on her experience in Auburn. Has she even been back to Seattle in the last year?
- Sticks
- I don't know.
- Bull
- I love this. This is where we belong, right at the intersection of power grabbing and distrust. These lobbying firms in particular are a gold mine—the big ones are well funded, have no public accountability, and have the ears of a wide variety of politicians. Ingratiate yourself with one of these firms and you'll not only get work, but you'll start to have access to all sorts of interesting information.
- Pistons

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Then there is the matter of Congress. It's important to have friends within the ranks of the professional and political executive, but it's even nicer to have a couple of congressmen in your pocket. Formally, everything runs on the seniority system; the longer you're in office, the more power you have. The reality is a bit trickier. With the explosion of political parties following the Crash of '29, the party hierarchies didn't survive intact, and in many ways it became every man or woman for themselves. With coalitions forming to define the majority and minority in each house, committee power became a matter partly of party seniority but also of inter-party politics. Of course, even that has now



changed. For the first time in decades, one party holds a majority in the House of Representatives.

Following the unceremonious demise of the Archconservative Party in the mid-sixties, many people jumped ship for the Republican Party. Additionally, many pragmatic Libertarian voters jumped ship in 2068 to elect President Colloton, and they haven't looked back as long as she throws them the occasional bone in reduced or streamlined regulations. Even more followed on her coattails the next election, giving us the current majority—and **Speaker Joseph Ellis**. There is a definite irony in the fact that the Archconservatives helped put the Speaker of the House's gavel into the hands of a dwarf. He's been there a long time, but it's his gift for strategic thinking and a resolute dedication to expanding the majority that got him elected by his caucus. He stands in stark contrast to **Speaker-turned-President Betty Jo Pritchard**, who is a welcome guest at Republican caucus meetings. She was a consensus-builder. Ellis is a steamroller.

The Senate is another matter. Of the sixty-six seats, the Republicans now control twenty-six, and there are four Libertarians and two Independents who vote alongside them in a narrow minority. They are expecting to pick up the seats needed to take the majority next year, and **Republican Caucus Chair Melissa Washington** is already measuring for new curtains in the Majority Leader's office. The senior Senator from Maine is a close friend and ally of President Colloton, and her consistent stance on magical regulation and security is bound to matter in the coming year given what recently occurred at the Watergate. The current Majority Leader, **Jennifer Henry** (T-NY) is intent on continuing to show Technocrat gains, especially in light of CAS President McMulkin drawing a considerable amount of attention to her party.

- Don't forget about that little exposé that you, or rather some unknown person, released back in July. Senator Washington must have been told that Senator Henry is secretly a mage and has been for Ghost knows how long. Considering her son was killed by unregulated magic, I'm surprised she hasn't just tried to club Henry to death on the floor of the Senate.
- Sunshine
- I would pay to see that.
- Slamm-O!
- You don't even pay for the Sonics Feed.
- Pistons

District Government

Including the various cities and other subdivisions, there are hundreds of elected officials in DeeCee, and not all of them are play second fiddle to the FDC Commission. The president appointed Chief Commissioner **Andrew Leuchtenburg**, but the other commissioners are elected from his or her region: the five counties, Washington, and Alexandria. Each city has a mayor and council of its own, as do towns and villages. Each county also has its own commission, and most have an appointed county manager who runs the executive branch. This is why the United States had more than 125,000 elected officials at the end of the 20th century. It used to be that the FDC commissioners ran their

respective counties or cities, but the 18th Amendment reduced their power, along with the power of congressional oversight. Haeffner and Daviar made it seem very clear that five million citizens in the nation's capital should not be less powerful than the average SINless person. The mayor and most of the city council in Washington carry more weight than Commissioner **Alvin Kelsey**, but he can make laws that affect the lives of everyone in the Federal District. Washington continues to have Advisory Neighborhood Committees as well, and those are hotbeds of petty Machiavellian intrigue and backstabbing at their finest—or worst, depending on your POV.

In Arlington, Commissioner **Theresa Legeis** has become an outspoken advocate for her county on the District Commission. She has had to confront all of the threats and challenges to the county from blood dust and shedim to relatively normal matters such as economic downturns and the fluctuations in defense-related business. Since the military is such an important part of her county, she knows more than most defense lobbyists about what is trending and how the political winds are more, which is rather useful. Contrast that with her Howard County counterpart, **Kathryn Rhoda**, who also has a significant defense constituency.

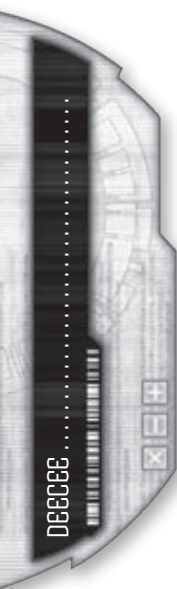
Probably the most important person that a runner would want to know or have access to is **Maurice Swedenburg**, the newly-appointed FedPol Corporate Security Coordinator. He is the direct contact between all of the private security firms and the FedPols. His position also puts him in a position where he is a liaison between the other federal law enforcement agencies and corporate security. This has given him access to people in the DOD, DOJ, DHS, and Departments of State and Business. His is a prime position, as evidenced by the fact that his predecessor, Frank Clarke, is now the Safety Director of Manhattan.

- I wonder if his leash is as short as the one Corinna kept around Clarke's neck.
- Riser

One of those people is **Thanos Coulson**, a senior manager at Pueblo Security Enterprises. Since PSE provides security for the STC embassy and personnel, he has the inside track to the small number of Native Americans who live and work in the sprawl. He also has ties back home to the PSF and other NAN law enforcement and security. Given the PCC's unique relationship with its home corporations, including Horizon and Phoenix Biotechnologies, which has offices out in Rockville, Captain Coulson also has intelligence and security contacts with those corporations, and even NeoNET through Iris Software. I admit sometimes my own patriotism blinds me to this fact, but the Cooperative Council Defense Force detachment has spies operating within DeeCee, mostly PCC and Sioux, and if you're so inclined he is a conduit to spyrunners.

President Angela Colloton

It's hard to discuss President Colloton given the perspective from which most of us see her. Most people don't realize the scope of what she faced as commanding general of JTF-Seattle. The public sees a no-nonsense leader with a clear vision of America and where it should be headed, and they agree. The fact that she was a general often creates an aura of uncompromising will, but the



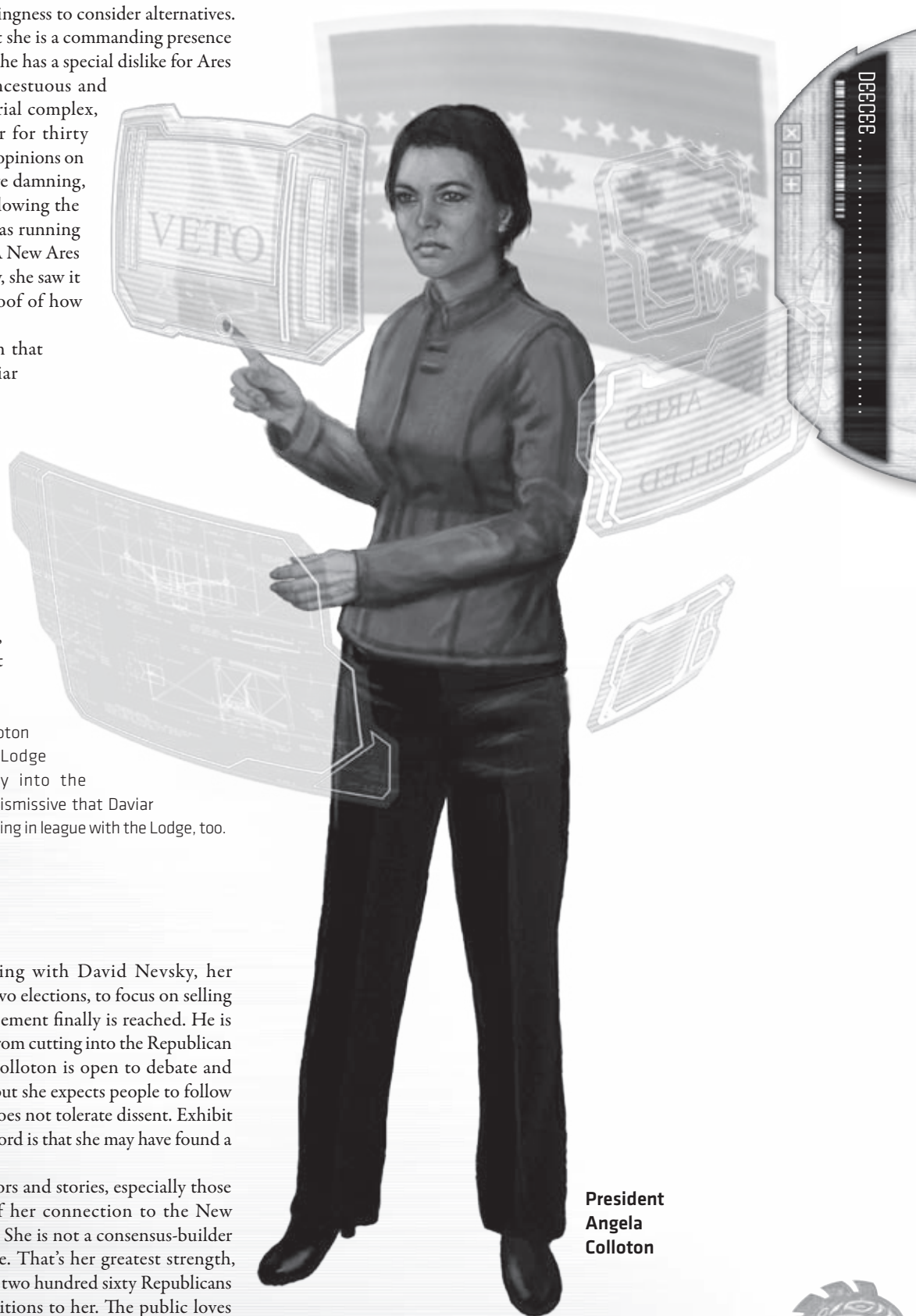
reality is that she is just as politically adept as anyone in the sprawl. She was on the fast track, and her command and strategic skills are evidenced in her military record. As a candidate, she showed an aversion to deflection and a willingness to consider alternatives. She's not quite an ideologue, but she is a commanding presence who goes after what she wants. She has a special dislike for Ares because it is the icon of the incestuous and double-dealing military-industrial complex, and as an infantry commander for thirty years she has developed her own opinions on Ares products and services. More damning, however, was their inaction following the Crash. For a corporation that was running the "A New Era for the UCAS, A New Ares for the UCAS" ad up to that day, she saw it as the ultimate betrayal and proof of how craven that marketing was.

Oh, I should also mention that she does not hold Nadja Daviar in high esteem. It took quite a bit of digging from folks I know in the White House, and it turns out that she and Daviar did in fact have those meetings that FastJack's source said they had. The source forgot to mention that at least one of them devolved into a shouting match in the residence. I had to pry that much from my sources, but I would love to know what that was about.

- Daviar was trying to warn Colloton about just how much Black Lodge influence had made its way into the government. Colloton was so dismissive that Daviar eventually accused Colloton of being in league with the Lodge, too.
- Plan 9
- Right. So, proof?
- Snopes

Colloton has been meeting with David Nevsky, her campaign manager for the last two elections, to focus on selling the Treaty of Denver when agreement finally is reached. He is hoping to prevent voter fatigue from cutting into the Republican caucus during the midterms. Colloton is open to debate and discussion from allies and staff, but she expects people to follow orders once they are made and does not tolerate dissent. Exhibit A clearly being Iain Lesker, but word is that she may have found a way to deal with him.

There are also still the rumors and stories, especially those propagated by her enemies, of her connection to the New Revolution and Alamos 20,000. She is not a consensus-builder because she does not have to be. That's her greatest strength, along with the fact that there are two hundred sixty Republicans in Congress who owe their positions to her. The public loves



**President
Angela
Colloton**

her even as the rumors swirl. God's honest truth, those rumors help in some demographics, and her supporters often point to the moderating influence of the uprising exposing and taking out a number of extremists on all sides. It's impossible to know for sure, but no one has found any ties in ten years, and not even Horizon is that good at information management. She also has a close relationship with Corporate Court Justice Marushige, which seems strange in theory, but his sense of honor and duty are traits the two share. He feels a debt is owed to her and the UCAS, and she has used that to her advantage more than once.

Vice President Michaela Martin

Vice President Martin was the governor of Ontario, a protégé of the political machine run by then-Speaker Pritchard. She's a fiscal hawk and is a strong supporter of business, especially the megacorporations. Since becoming VP, she has taken on the role of attack dog in the administration, pushing and whipping people into line. It's hard to argue with her since she led her home state the Crash and kept Ontario as the most livable and prosperous state in the UCAS. Unlike Colloton, who sells the image of Midwest Americana, Martin is a proud Canadian and is the second-most powerful supporter of the Canadian Heritage Foundation and Museum after President Pritchard.

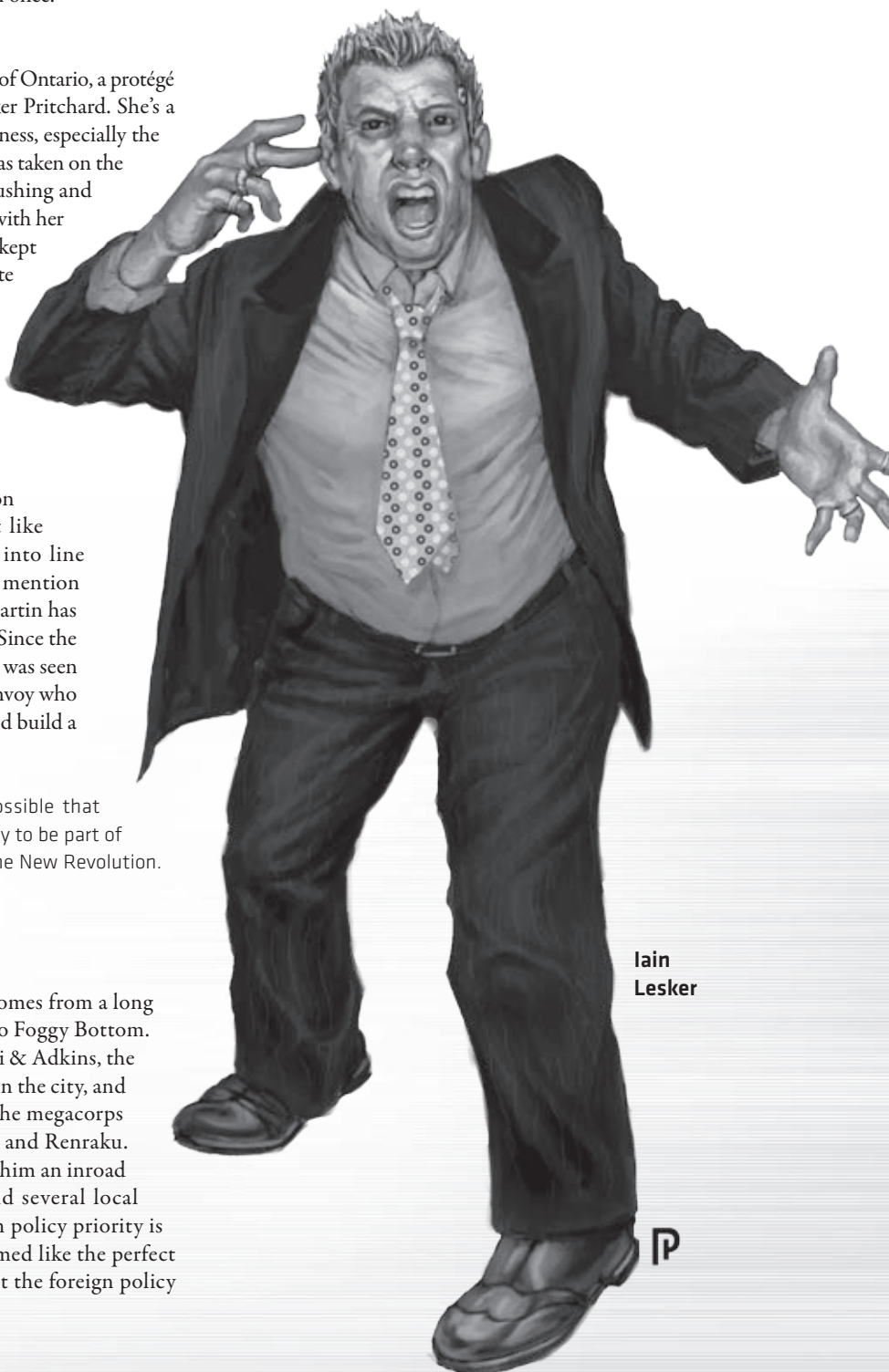
Martin is also deeply involved in the administration. She and President Colloton debate politics and policy regularly, but like most of the president's people, she falls into line when Colloton tells her to. I should also mention that being a very conservative Canadian, Martin has found herself tasked to deal with the CAS. Since the southern states split in part because of what was seen as the socialist Canadian agenda, she's the envoy who can sit down with many of the old-timers and build a bond over common principles.

- Before anyone asks—yes, it's entirely possible that Martin was appointed to her position solely to be part of Colloton's charm offensive on behalf of the New Revolution. And I said *possible*, not proven.
- Sunshine

Executive Cabinet

Secretary of State **Avery Hathaway** comes from a long line of political fixers who have moved into Foggy Bottom. He was a lobbyist and fixer at Roth, Capelli & Adkins, the most influence Republican lobbying shop in the city, and he has extensive relationships with all of the megacorps in the city, especially NeoNET, Shiawase, and Renraku. The connections to the Villiers camp gave him an inroad to become the lobbyist for the PCC and several local corporations. Since the President's foreign policy priority is to reset North American relations, he seemed like the perfect choice to lead the diplomatic corps and set the foreign policy agenda.

- He was able to juggle all three of Fuchi's old factions without getting burned? I don't believe it.
- Baka Dabora
- That's because he aligned himself with the fourth faction, Samantha Villiers.
- Fastjack



Iain
Lesker

IP

Given the fact that **Iain Lesker** is the face of the UCAS in Denver, this has been a setback to his efforts. But part of the plan to co-opt him has been to keep dragging Lesker in DeeCee and co-chairing the Treaty Working Group with Hathaway's Director of Policy Planning, **Gemma Andreone**. Andreone has been exploring the implications and realities of the various treaty models that are likely to result from the upcoming summit, and Lesker is relying on her to help secure a long-term diplomatic legacy. Of course, as the internal planning shop and think tank, she is a nexus of internal and outside actors who have their own agendas they want to impose on the UCAS. Director Andreone has made it her mission to bombard Lesker with information and face time with everyone from the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Policy to the Assistant Secretary of Information for Transglobal Communication Management.

- This could blow up in a bad way. Lesker may be less prone to ruining things with Ghostwalker or the others on the Council, but it also gives him more of a chance to shore up political support. This treaty will need to be ratified by two-thirds of the Senate, and many of those votes are going to have to come from members who can force Colloton to negotiate Lesker's way, or else the Treaty gets held up until doomsday. Then he can pin the blame on her for not letting him do his job and getting a better deal.
- Dr. Spin

Between the secretary's efforts and those of **Joseph Clark**, the Assistant Secretary for North American Affairs, they have worked on Colloton's behalf to circumvent the "racist scumbag" (their words). Of course, Secretary Hathaway has other priorities, such as engaging with Europe and trying to develop a multinational policy on engaging with internal African development programs. He is also still trying to develop long-term, positive relations with the current Emperor of Japan. It's been a long time since Japanese-American relations have been this positive, especially with Colloton being indifferent at best to the California situation, which was unexpected since her party has held California and North American reunification so high in their platform. Of course, her own experience is credited with why she and Hathaway have been so positive to letting the continent be.

Elsewhere in the cabinet, Treasury Secretary **Brenda Ogawa** comes from the corporate sector, having worked her way up from accounting to managing government securities for Silveril Investment until the Novatech IPO, where she made a fortune and was drawn into politics. Her initial public position was state treasurer in Illinois. She was an early supporter of Colloton's and was a member of the Council of Economic Advisors during her first term. When Secretary Burke retired, Ogawa was picked to replace him earlier this year. There are people in this city who tend to resent the fact that her father is Native American, but she has the support of the financial sector and the corps, and frankly that's all that matters when it comes to this department. She runs a tight ship, even with subordinates like Fortune Relf, who seems to go out of his way to make running the department difficult and has strong support from the corps for her other appointees in the Comptroller's office and IRS. Given that agency's special activities, along with the fact that the Secret Service provides security for historical and functional reasons, she and Homeland

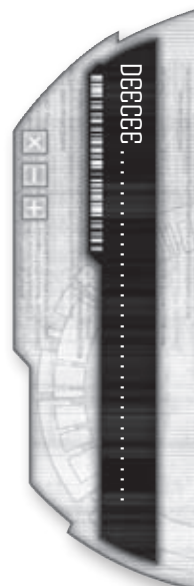
Secretary Jenkins, a dwarf, have a close working relationship. Along with Attorney General Monaghan, who is also an ally, they are sometimes snidely referred to as the three Tokens.

In the Department of Defense, **Ronald Despain**, also known as The Dragonslayer, tends to characterize his career as an illustration of why the military needs to change. He started out in the UCAS Army, but orks were not quite welcome back then. So after one tour, he left the military and joined MET2000, where he excelled and rose through the ranks. In the early '60s, he retired from MET2000 and took a management position at Microdeck DeeCee, overseeing their military applications division. His experience with the Old Army, mercenaries, corporate warfare, and the contracting side of the military are things he argues the DOD needs to confront and change. He and Colloton see eye-to-eye on the lessons learned from the arcology campaign and other conflicts from the last two decades.

He's been getting the usual pushback from members of Congress who are being pressured by local businesses that rely on the military. It's been mentioned that there are nine major bases in the DeeCee area, and several smaller ones. He looks at the creation of the Pentagon as an inspiration and has been concentrating functions within the building, which is probably capable of running every military command from within. The goodwill and capital Colloton and he have are finite, and he's making a push for some serious changes. The Pentagon is mostly his dominion, but there are folks like **Louis Benavidez** in his field activity who are pushing their own agendas. Meanwhile, there are dozens of appointees and career senior officials n working for the Under Secretaries of Acquisitions & Logistic and Policy who owe their positions to political connections beyond his control. There are factions and divisions tied to defense industries, policlubs, groups like the IOND, and whatever pieces of the New Revolution are left behind. That's not going away.

- Where did Despain's nickname come from?
- Mika
- As far as I know it refer to the Ares helos he brought down.
- Picador
- Nope. He took out a feathered serpent.
- Thorn
- So Lofwyr might be using him as Exhibit A to show why metahumans can't be trusted.
- Stone

Attorney General **Alexander Monaghan** is an old Boston politico, relatively speaking, and he rules the Kennedy building with an iron fist. I wish I could pretend he doesn't live up to some of the stereotypes of Boston pols, but he actively encourages it. He's responsible for all legal matters that involve the UCAS, including many of the Anglo reservations in the NAN, and he oversees prosecutions and investigations by the FBI, Marshals, and DEA. In addition to criminal matters, he has to oversee Contract Court business and civil law divisions like Antitrust and Civil Rights, which naturally is a matter of special interest to him. Monaghan strives to keep politics out



of the DOJ, and for the most part he's succeeded. There are units such as the Antitrust Division that receive significant attention from corporations trying to bludgeon each other with investigations and actions as business tools, but that's gone on for decades.

High-Level Advisors

Colloton's chief of staff, **Beatrice Chavez**, is the second-most powerful person in the White House and the rest of the government for the most part. She came from inside the government, which is not that common, and worked in all three branches of government over the course of a forty-year career. I can speak from personal experience that there are fewer people who know more about how the UCAS government works, and especially how to get things done, than she does. It's not clear who recommended her, but Colloton decided to rely on her even before learning that Chavez is a New Centurian. That didn't seem to matter, and she runs a tight ship inside the White House, overseeing hundreds of staffers as well as the daily operations of the rest of the Executive Branch. It is her management style and willingness to challenge and support the president based on their own dynamic that made her extremely powerful. She had no problem going from staff director of the Ways & Means Committee, serving and following instructions from members of congress, to being able to call in the same members to order them around on the president's orders.

National Security Advisor **Dr. Saúl Perez** is a veteran of the intelligence community, and he also served for several years with the UN Secretariat in Geneva carrying out oversight and policy of the Armed Forces as well as covert programs. People can crow all they want about President Colloton being business friendly, but she made her reputation putting the Seattle UCC and Renraku in their place, so it's not surprising that she gave a powerful position to someone who has often considered the megacorps to be "the enemy." He is the UN's biggest supporter, and he is critical of the administration's force-projection policy, with the UN and events like the Desert Wars. The corps, especially Knight Errant, don't necessarily like him, but his security policies have helped enrich them, and that often keeps them off his back. He was also directly responsible for letting the STC bring in military forces into DeeCee, so take from that what you will.

Rebecca Darby, Director of UCAS Intelligence, was plucked from running the IRS Enforcement Division to supervise and direct the intelligence community. Given its unique nature as a law enforcement and intelligence agency, it seems apt that she was chosen to coordinate between the intelligence agencies, especially the subdivisions like the FBI's National Security Section, which have to tread the fine line between intelligence activity and law enforcement. Some of her critics liken the Enforcement Division she left behind as more of a secret police unit than anything else, but Colloton trusts her, and she has a strong eye for seeing redundancies and conflicts. That is no small feat given how much of the conflicts in the IC are practically intentional, used as a means of information security and counterintelligence. Ever since he moved to the White House, General Miller has been courting her to put a rein on Louis Benavidez and his attempt to take over defense intelligence. She is the first Director of Intelligence to

actually have budgetary and policing control of the IC agencies, and she has been wielding it freely. This has made her no shortage of enemies, but no one has taken her on and won. At least, not yet.

- Coordinating the various intelligence operations has forever and always been complicated by the fact that they don't *want* to cooperate. They don't respect each other or trust each other, and they're also in the business of justifying the public dollars they receive. It's an easy lever to work on if you need it.
- Sunshine

General Benjamin Miller is the director of the Office of Magical Security Policy, and he is one of the most die-hard Colloton supporters in the world. He was plucked from commanding JSOC to oversee this new cabinet-level office in the White House. The bill to authorize was rammed through in less than a week, and it gives him almost unlimited budgetary and policy-making oversight over all magical security programs across the UCAS government, including the DOD, intelligence community, and law enforcement. He has spent over thirty years in special operations and combined tactics units, which has colored his agenda to eliminate the Army Thaumaturgical Corps and integrate magically active soldiers into the normal chain of command. He has been quite a presence in the sprawl since he took the position, and he has met with some interesting people (see below).

INDEPENDENT FIXERS

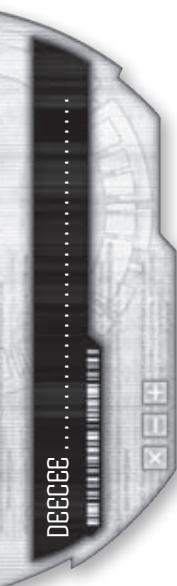
DeeCee is a large sprawl, and so there are quite a few indie fixers to go along with the political-lawyer fixers and the house fixers for the corps and syndicates. I should get these folks out of the way first so you know who to speak with once you arrive. These five are some of the most reliable in terms of competence and access.

Megan Amano

Ms. Amano is a former Novatech brat who would probably be a NeoNET fixer if she hadn't decided to walk away from the program in 2064 to find herself or some such thing. She reappeared in 2068 and was able to pay off her debt to NeoNET rather than be repatriated by the Contract Court. She's actually SINless, but she has various aliases attributed to her connections to the Vory. She definitely has hacking skills and many think that she is a technomancer, but there's no conclusive proof. She has her finger firmly on the pulse of the hacking business and can put runners in touch with the technomancer tribes, Aegis and Horizon data recovery teams, Howard County startups, or IRS/NSA/Matrix Marshals hackers looking for deniable assets.

Joe Burns

Joe looks and acts like your typical middle-aged human politician. He does the whole backslapping, glad-handing routine whenever he meets new people and does business with anyone. He got his political start as the mayor of Indianapolis, then became a lobbyist for the Municipal League. At some point he managed to make some enemies, but he found a niche and managed to survive any efforts to destroy him. He's a Democratic fundraiser and one of those people who can wrangle votes and influence back in Indiana, which makes him valuable to **Senator**



Donnell Miller, who currently heads the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee while also holding seats on the Armed Services, Finance, and Megacorporate Affairs Committees. He's an independent instead of a political fixer because his niche is being the bagman for the DSCC, and he knows a lot of the house fixers and intermediaries among the megacorporations in DeeCee.

Corinna

Corinna is an interesting case because everyone knows her face. She is one of the Nadja Daviar doppelgangers that formed a fixer network of about a dozen women. Ever since the real Daviar returned, she has been laying low. There is some question about what she was before she became a fixer, and many people think she endured forced labor in a bunraku parlor. It's said that she vividly remembers each and every one of her clients before she got out, however that happened. She's had to maintain a careful balance since then, with many people resenting her for being able to hold that sword over their heads, while others just see her as a whore. And then there are the people who love or hate her because she's a very convincing Daviar replica, which invites attention (unless you're in one of those spaces where people can't be bothered to pay attention to their surroundings). Even though she has a famous face, I've seen her walk through Foggy Bottom unmolested, but she cannot walk through Niccolo's without the entire restaurant noticing her.

- "Noticing" is a gross understatement. There are a lot of people who hate her. The reaction shown toward people who join her is even worse. I saw her with Senators Tillman and Royer the last time I was at Niccolo's, and others nearby were already talking about how they would hold this against them on the Hill the next day.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- And then you posted half a dozen images on your MeFeed that were taken of her and yourself. Stay classy, Kat.
- Turbo Bunny

Regardless of her pluses and minuses as a fixer, it's clear she is very well connected. She is a relentless networker who works in both political and less-legitimate fixing circles, so she deals with politicians, runners, and everything in between. With the real Daviar back, though, she has been maintaining a lower profile just, and there are questions about what her relationship with Daviar and the Draco Foundation really are.

Omar Said

Omar is a wonderful man to know because he has an immense network of government connections, and he also runs one of the best restaurants in the sprawl. He never ran the shadows himself like many fixers, but it makes sense that a former NFL Players Association leader and semi-famous restaurateur would have connections to a diverse cross-section of contacts. He can put runners into contact with nearly anyone, especially labor and liberal politicians. He has ties to Horizon and L.A. from his days as a Trojan, and also keeps contact with New York movers and shakers. He is rumored to have ties to the Cutters, but I've never seen anything conclusive. Omar also has ties to the African (he's Nigerian) and Islamic communities, which are valuable for their own reasons.

- The rumors of Cutters ties are true, but the relationship runs through a couple of intermediaries most people don't know exist between them.
- Riser

Zenith

Zenith is a middle-aged albino human who used to run the DeeCee shadows. He turned to fixing and collaborative mischief-making after he was crippled on a run in 2061. He doesn't have a base of operations per se, but he loves Whiskey Sour and is a permanent fixture there. He fancies himself a connoisseur of the finer things, and he has the assets and connections to back up those ambitions. He has no problem doing business while shopping in Georgetown because no one else would think he's talking about the shadows. He has some ties to the Vory, and his tastes and demeanor overlaps with many of the Embassy Row folks. He prefers to focus on high-value thefts, which in DeeCee often involves the magical firms, and so he has been making himself known among the upper echelons of DeeCee's Awakened society.

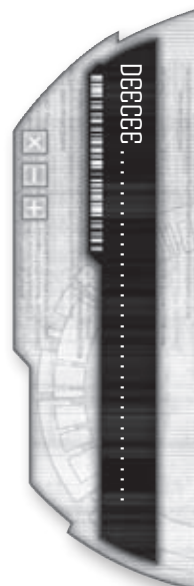
- My mentor told me stories about Zenith and what an amazing thief he was. It's said that he never had my Gift or relied on most of the toys and nonsense that some others love so dearly. He relied on skill, luck, and not giving a damn if he died pulling off a sneak. He tries not to deal with amateurs, having a richly deserved sense of entitlement that they are beneath his attention.
- Ma'fan

TRUE POWER

Nadja Daviar

It's impossible to discuss anything in DeeCee without mentioning Daviar. She's the chair of the largest private foundation in the world, and most of that, it turns out, is based around her benevolence to that foundation. In addition to that, she's also an ex-vice president, or even president, depending on whose interpretation of the Constitution you want to believe. Either way, that gives her special access. She can arrange a meeting with anyone in the sprawl. The Draco Foundation has seen conflicts with other Dunkelzahn legacy institutions, DIMR and ASPS, and she's been meeting with their directors and trying to smooth over relations from the Dupree Era. She's also had meetings with **David Dragonson**, the founder of the Children of the Dragon, and supposedly had dangled a board seat in front of him trying to get the Children on her side. Meanwhile, the new executive director, Rex Coll, has been pushing forward with a reorganization effort, though no one is quite sure what the end result is going to look like. Coll has been meeting with representatives of the corporations and groups that have received bequests from Dunkelzahn's will, and also looking into programs like the drake haven operation, which has led to several confrontations with **Azadeh**, who shuttles back and forth to DeeCee while Ryan Mercury stays at Lake Louise.

- Okay, 'Hawk, spill it. What are they planning to do with those drakes?
- Butch



- I have no idea, but they're planning something.
- Winterhawk
- I witnessed a meeting between Azadeh and Dr. Omar al-Masri, purely by accident, when I was visiting Georgetown. They were having a very animated discussion in Dari. I had no idea the doctor spoke that language. He was insistent that she was hiding something, but she continued to plead ignorance. It was strange to see her on the defensive from what I know of her.
- /dev/grrl

No one sees Daviar much outside of the foundation, and when she does go out in public, it's a spectacle. There is no shortage of motorcades, and while most Draco Foundation SUV convoys just blend in to sprawl traffic, hers rivals those of the most senior officials—namely, President Colloton, VP Martin, and Speaker Ellis. There may be people in the sprawl who have gone out of their way to adopt her appearance, but it's hard to deny who she is when her caravan pulls up. She sometimes visits Casablanca, Omar Said's restaurant, and Blackjack at the Willard. One recent visit to Blackjack, was notable, as she met with several ex-Princes there, and no one knows why. After that, she met with Ebran over DIMR business, Hestaby, and apparently one or two more. People are starting to ask questions about what her intentions are toward Tír Tairngire.

Betty Jo Pritchard

Former President Pritchard has her own ties to Daviar since she and former CAS President McCabe are overseeing the board search, but while President Colloton is the de facto head of the Republican Party, Pritchard is an indelible presence. The current vice president owes her career to Pritchard, as does Speaker Ellis and many other Republicans. Many people see her as the soul of the party, and given her position as an ex-Speaker and ex-president, she commands attention and has all the privileges of being in both offices. She has been seen holding court in the Republican cloakroom on the Hill, where only current and former members are allowed. She doesn't just talk to people while she's there—she sets the agenda of the conversations. This has, of course, made her the most desired lobbyist in DeeCee. She can afford to be selective, though, and she seems more interested in causes than specific organizations, such as fiscal policy, ethics reform, and community service.

The two exceptions are her membership on the board of trustees of the Canadian Heritage Foundation and Museum, located in the old Canadian Embassy, and the Federalist Society. She's responsible for **Ray Campbell** being chosen to be the executive director of the foundation. He's very outspoken about being Canadian, and there are rumors linking him to the True Canadians polyclub. He is quite clever and knows most Canadian players, and some Québécois, who want to do business in the sprawl and get Congress' attention. He can be vindictive and manipulative, and he is skilled at concealing the knife he uses to backstab people (well, Americans) who get in his way. Her other interest is the Federalist Society, which is a conservative-leaning legal organization. It's pretty influential, and her other politicians' membership helps considerably.

Evan Corcoran

I still don't know what to think about the revelations some members made that Corcoran is in fact a shedim. He's an immensely powerful man. He's well connected, serves on numerous boards, and has ties to pretty much everyone. That's what would make him so valuable, and so dangerous. As chairman and CEO of UBP, the United Bank of Panama's North American subsidiary, he oversees one of the largest independent banks in the Western Hemisphere and is a ubiquitous presence throughout the sprawl. The Chieftains stadium is named for the bank, as is UBP Arena. The UCAS government does business with that bank. Thanks to UBP's parent company, he has ties to the Apep Consortium, and that also means he has connections to most of the magical firms in the sprawl that do even minor business with Apep. There's nothing concrete, however, linking him to the shedim in the sprawl.

Given what I learned, I've been asking around trying to figure out if and when he may have become a shedim, because the man and his family are institutions in DeeCee. I decided to investigate these "shades" that have also been mentioned in rumors, and I found a link to some people in the military. One was **Joanna Krstic**, who was running Protective Intelligence Field Activity in the Middle East and Africa, but in early August was promoted and is now the activity's deputy director. They've been seen together, and some of her associates have mentioned that she has been spending time with a group of operators who don't seem to exist anywhere else. What is more interesting is that Corcoran has been spending a significant amount of time recently with **General Miller**, which would make sense if there is some kind of conspiracy going on between the shedim and the UCAS. Miller oversees magical and astral security policy, and the shedim are a huge security threat.

CORPORATE ASSETS

Corporate Court/Z-OG

The Corporate Court has maintained an "embassy" in DeeCee since the late forties, but it's been especially busy in the last decade. The embassy is technically a part of the independent Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank, but for all intents and purposes the Court and Z-OG are the same. **Philippa Neutra** is the Director of Terrestrial Operations, and he oversees bank business that is not considered important enough to bother the Habitat. That is still a significant business, including overseeing loans and investments in some of the largest corporations in the world. Court operations such as the SEC answer to Ambassador **Walter Ziegler**, who runs operations day-to-day and coordinates relations between the Court and the UCAS. There are two offices that are semi-autonomous. **William Carroll**, former President Thomas Steele's special advisor on megacorporations, is the Crisis Coordination Committee (C5) envoy to the UCAS. He's effectively one of two spy chiefs and has special authority to bypass Ziegler. The other is **Elizabeth Sorkin**, the CCMA and GOD liaison to the UCAS. With the presence of NSA, IRS, Matrix Marshals, and corporate security, DeeCee is teeming with combat deckers. Her job is to keep all the boats sailing in the same direction, and not fighting each other.

James Booth

The disgraced ex-VP is the Chairman and CEO of UOL, formerly UCAS Online, which continues to remain independent in spite of itself. It did make a significant compromise with Horizon to stay afloat, but they still provide Matrix service to many in DeeCee and provide other services in the UCAS and CAS. Some people may remember that Booth got himself into some trouble with their Matrix services about ten years ago when he was caught up in a sting. Well, being as good a lawyer as he is, and still having some influence, Booth fought that case vigorously and it dragged on until Crash 2.0 hit. Then, what do you know? All the evidence got fried in the Crash. So being the opportunist that he is, he kicked the wounded service provider when it was down and sued the company into bankruptcy. He also sued the FBI, and won that suit as well. When the smoke cleared, he took over the company, made his deal with Horizon, and UOL fights to live another day.

Ever since former Technocratic party chair McMulkin saw an opening and ran off to become the president of the CAS, he's been eyeing a comeback of his own. His ties to Horizon and base within that party helped direct them towards an AI-friendly platform and position, and to his credit the party would be doing quite well if Colloton and the Republicans weren't so popular. Part of his agenda is working with Charisma Associates to defend his honor. The imagery of him fighting his removal until the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms had to drag him out of the chamber is a sign of tenacity and dedication to "justice." Meanwhile, Booth has also tried to use his connections to President McMulkin to play freelance diplomat between CAS and UCAS, but if the two presidents want to speak to each other, they don't need intermediaries.

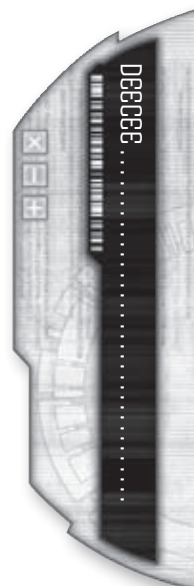
Majia Wright

After Majia was pushed out of IDEA, she became the Lone Star Drug Enforcement Division Director. DED seems like the perfect fit for her since they're paramilitary and have a great deal of freedom to operate as they wish in this hemisphere, without having to bend to the whims of Interpol and the many players that drive its agenda. Being run by people who despise anything Aztec doesn't hurt, especially since Lone Star has been entertaining her private agenda to pursue Graciela Riveros, Salazar, and Aztechnology itself in the aftermath of the tempo situation. It's not clear why she's working out of DeeCee, but she's taken over the local DED office and expanded it. All Lone Star operations in DeeCee go through her now, from contract policing to "Dips" and Military Liaison.

- She is still pursuing the tempo situation, and she has been fortunate to gain access to Lone Star and other deniable assets that can reach deeply into Aztechnology. If Graciela is still alive, however, they must have her buried under the Great Temple of Quetzalcóatl, because that's the only place they haven't looked.

Snopes had told me some news he picked up about tempo to pass onto Majia, some of which she knew already. The reports indicate that chronic tempo users have disappeared without a trace.

- Fianchetto





Below are plot hooks that can help you use the material in this book in your campaign.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Fixers appropriate SINS for runners from a variety of sources. Dead people are born again. Felons are freed. Fictitious characters are made real. Many runners don't worry about their SIN unless it stops working or it brings them to the attention of their enemies.

In this plot, one runner gets a brand-new SIN and ends up under scrutiny from enemies of the previous owner. The SIN in question belonged to Ted Kriofske, one of the developers of the Kriofske-Mainella program (pg. XX). In the case of a female runner, the SIN belongs to Allison Mainella.

Both have been presumed missing for a few years, so a hacker by the name of Faust Bunny plucked them out of the Matrix, scrubbed them as best he could, and sold them to a fixer. Faust Bunny was not as thorough as he thought, because the activity sent a red flag to one of the organizations on the lookout for the rogue programmers. A team of professionals was dispatched to Faust Bunny's location where he was executed after giving up the runner's fixer. The runners are brought in when they hear about Faust Bunny's death, and they may have to intervene if the company men come for their fixer.

Tracking down the original owner of the SIN leads them to Denver. Ted (or Allison) is alive and has been on the run for a few years. He is aware the runners have brought some heat with them, and he is willing to make a deal. He will trade his copy of the algorithm for a ticket to someplace warm. He apologizes to the runner tagged with his SIN. Ted sold it in the hopes of throwing off his pursuers, and he did not expect them to track him. He also needed the money to continue life on the run.

The question for the runners is, do they give up an innocent man, or do they help him fight off his persecutors long enough to break free once and for all?

The rival team is led by a troll bounty hunter named Redtusk. Whether Redtusk agrees to Ted's deal is left up to the individual gamemaster. Such negotiations would let a face or other social

character shine. But a big action set piece brought on by Redtusk's ambush might scratch the itch for a team looking for a fight after all the legwork. Ted is also an excellent source of conflict. He is not built for life on the run. Would he be willing to sell out the runners to make a break for it? Does he even have a working copy of the program anymore?

If the team eliminates Redtusk, they may get a clue about the conspiracy hunting Ted. It could be a likely suspect like Aztechnology, but an unlikely organization like the Draco Foundation could add a mind-bending twist. If the runners interfere, the organization might put a bounty on them as well. If they don't, they may find themselves work in the future tracking down other folks that no too much about the program. What about Allison Mainella? Is she still on the run after she and Ted parted ways three years ago? Or did she join the conspiracy behind Redtusk's efforts to track Ted down?

PLAYING CUPID

Claudia Romanov knows how to stay in the headlines. She draws attention to herself to keep people from focusing on other agents working for Saeder-Krupp. Her most recent coup is revealing her affair with Johnny Spinrad and the product of their rendezvous. Queen Caroline cut off all contact with Spinrad because of the revelation, but Johnny never got a chance to explain his side of things. That's why he needs the runners help. Usually runners are hired to steal things from the rich and famous. This time, they need to get something in the hands of a Queen.

The package is a small handwritten letter from Spinrad to Caroline. The letter declares his innocence of a dalliance with Claudia and claims she extracted some DNA from him. Johnny doesn't care if the runners read the letter or not. What's important is that it gets to Caroline, and they need to make sure she reads it. He offers a bonus if they bring something back to him that proves she read it. The tricky part is, of course, finding a way for SINless punks like the shadowrunners get next to a Queen.

Luckily, Queen Caroline loves football (soccer for some of us) and will be attending a qualifying game for the World Cup in



London. Even here, security is top notch and tight. But it's better than trying to break into Buckingham Palace, and it will test the runners' infiltration skills to the max. The Queen spends most of the game in her luxury box surrounded by top-shelf security, royal advisors, and ambassadors. It will take a top-notch face to get inside to make the handoff. Another option might be to funnel the Queen to the letter, which would take crackerjack timing.

Claudia is not naive enough to leave the Queen unmonitored. One of the Queen's staff members is on Claudia's payroll and will do their best to intercept the letter. The runners might also try to ply their contacts for a minute alone with the Queen. This requires at least a Connection Rating of 5 and runs the risk of lowering that Rating once the Queen discovers who the letter is from. She is furious about the whole affair, but if she reads the letter, she lowers her guard. If the runners ask for proof to show this meeting took place, Caroline suggests they take back something from the luxury box as proof. She will not consent to being photographed. Her reputation is already damaged from her relationship with Johnny.

This run could have many repercussions. Relations between Caroline and Johnny could thaw just a little. They will never be together, but Johnny has at least said his piece. A successful run could mean using him as a contact in the future, which may balance out the loss of a contact during the run to get to the Queen in the first place. Runners will also make a likely enemy in Claudia Romanov, which means that her patron Lofwyr will know who they are and how they interfered with his plans.

THE THREE-FIVE

The runners are hired to empty a dead drop. Dead drops are locations where couriers leave physical evidence they want to get back to their handlers. The drop itself is pretty simple—it's a public trash bin on a quiet section of a city park. The emptying goes off without a hitch. The runners make the rendezvous for the hand-off when the Johnson gives the package back. The Johnson needs the data inside the package and is willing to triple his fee to get it. They can open the package in front of him if they accept. When they do, they find a strange flat object inside. It's an old media disk, positively ancient, a blue square a little under nine centimeters on each side. The offer stands if they can get him the data within 24 hours.

The disk is quickly identified as a 3.5" floppy disk. It is pre-Matrix technology and old enough that it's viewed as a museum piece. Hackers aren't equipped to use it, and even technomancers have trouble interacting with the disk. They only get vague impressions—secret, danger, and other ominous words. The only way to access the data is with a device that can read the disk. One place in the city has such a device—the Science and Industry Museum. The museum is large and open to the public Monday through Saturday. One of its most popular exhibits is on the history of computing. The drive is connected to an ancient desktop computer. Either the hacker will have to rig up a connection to the old computer or a technomancer will have to spend some time attuning himself to the old machine.

Getting into the museum is relatively easy for professional runners, but it soon becomes evident that there is another team on the other side watching the drive. If the runners case the exhibit

during the day, they notice they are being watched. If the team tries a night insertion, the other team is there to intercept them. The other team is not above destroying the ancient data drive to keep the runners from their goal. They won't start a firefight in a public area during the day, but they will try to get the runner isolated and arrange for a meet to discuss possible business.

The leader of the rival team, an elf named Blackwing, is willing to cut a deal. If they get a copy of the data, they'll go their own way, and everyone can return to their employer happy. The Johnson doesn't know about the deal, and there doesn't have to be any bloodshed. Otherwise, Blackwing's team shoots to kill, and they prove to be impressive foes. The museum is an excellent place to set up battles around relics of the past like submarines, manufacturing floors, and classic vehicles. The runners could also decide to hide away the disk to protect it from Blackwing somewhere in the museum.

The data on the disk could link back to one of the conspiracies described in this book. It could also have been corrupted and lost to reinforce a feeling of futility in your game. Will the Johnson ever find out if the runners gave up the info to Blackwing?

A BETTER ROACH MOTEL

The Johnson is beautiful but tough. Ms. Teixeira dresses well and, in a nice change of pace, expresses no obvious disdain toward the team. Her proposition is unusual to say the least. She's been invited to a week's stay at Synergy, a corporate resort that mixes working hard with playing hard. Instead of the extraction the runners might be expecting, she wants the runners to accompany her as her project management team. The SINs she has created for the runners are part of the payment, along with golfing, spa treatments, a casino, and gourmet meals. Beats squatting on a hostage in an old toxic-waste warehouse.

Synergy is a resort run by Efficiency Consultants International. ECI has plans for resorts like this all over the world based on the success of Synergy. The resort runs seminars and workshops in addition to providing time and amenities for rest and relaxation. Ms. Teixeira balances her time there between work and play. She doesn't care what the runners do on their own time, but she expects them to show up in her room if she calls.

One quirk of the resort is that instead of charging nuyen for amenities like drinks from the minibar or room service, the AR asks a few questions. The questions range from innocent to strange to prying to uncomfortably specific. The guests generally feel that the questions are part of the self-reflection that is supposed to take place during their stay.

Synergy is the latest insect spirit incursion into the material plane. The bugs learned their lessons from the Universal Brotherhood and Chicago. The people brought to Synergy have been identified as high probabilities for good merges once the full hive is up and running. They need to find the proper queen for their hive, and the questions are part of that process. The hive has discovered a queen candidate within Teixeira's team. A female runner is the first choice. If one is unavailable, Teixeira is chosen. The kidnapping occurs once the team is beginning to think their Johnson is just a corporate paranoid. Running scenes where the runners are living it up are a welcome break from the

usual intensity of a shadowrun. But, inevitably, danger rears its ugly head, and they will have to rescue someone from the hive in the upper levels of the main hotel building.

Sharon Teixeira is a mid-level executive. She's smart but not yet cynical. She came up through a corporate education and development program. She's as comfortable drinking wine with her bosses as she is rubbing elbows with runners in a dive. She's the kind of talent you want on your side and, should she survive the experience, she's the runner's ally for life. Synergy is also an excellent place to meet corporate contacts and old rivals. They may prove to be additional resources to use once the runners need to go inside the hive, or they could be additional targets of rescue from the hive cocoons.

Chances are that once the runners discover the bugs' influence, they will leave Synergy a smoking crater. But that doesn't mean the bug's plan is ruined. Who recommended Teixeira for the Synergy stay? Perhaps a rival knew about the bug connection and wanted to remove her, or a jealous supervisor sent her away with the hopes she'd do something stupid and pick up some blackmail. Perhaps Mr. Teixeira wanted her out of his hair for a week to conduct an affair and had no clue about anything related to the bugs. Though Synergy is destroyed, killing a corporation like ECI proves to be more difficult. If anything, the hive will be perfectly willing to abandon its plans for the company and wait until the heat has died down.

FIVE POINT FIXERS

Not all conspiracies originate from penthouses and shadowy conference rooms. Anytime people collaborate to consolidate power, someone is pushed out. In this case, that someone is a fixer known to the runners. The fixer shows up to a meet after having been beaten badly. The beating is unrelated to the job the fixer wants to pitch, and he doesn't want to talk about it. The gamemaster may wish to set this plot in motion slowly and have the fixer show up to meets with small, barely noticeable injuries at first. The next time the fixer calls for a meet, he doesn't show. The runners can find him at a hospital, recovering from a severe beating. The fixer needed to trigger his DocWagon contract to save his life.

The fixer is currently the target of a new organization called the Five Points. Five other fixers in the city have banded together to pool their resources and influence. Their goal is simple. Any Johnsons that want to hire runners have to go through them. Any runners that want jobs have to cut them a part of the profit. Anyone not willing to deal gets a warning. Then a beating. Then a trip to the hospital. Then the Five Points put the troublemaker on ice. The fixer in the hospital is certainly causing them more trouble by having the runners sniff out the Five Point's plan. That means it's time to deal with the fixer once and for all.

The runners can't spend all their time protecting the fixer at the hospital. The Five Points know he's vulnerable during his stay, and they send a team of all-stars to eliminate him. One of the Five Points leads the run himself. The run against the fixer should play on the players' style and strengths. If the runners are infiltrators, the Five Point team uses misdirection, doctor disguises, and a fatal overdose to make the fixer's death look accidental. Teams with

a strong face find themselves in a negotiation for the fixer's life. Heavy hitters have to repel an all-out assault on the building while attempting to limit casualties and collateral damage.

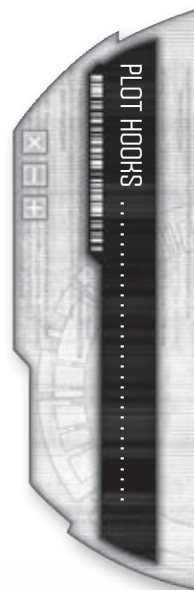
The Five Points are formidable opponents. Lumberjack is a deadly combination of a fixer's brain and a troll's brawn. Ho Ling has a reputation as an eccentric rigger and hacker that talks to his self-built devices as if they were alive. He is also willing to build devices for others if the price is right. Mister Matsuhiro is well connected with the Japanacorp as well as several other smaller corporations. He finds the Yakuza distasteful and will work against them if offered the opportunity. Aloysius Venus balances his talent agency with the real money of setting up runners with Johnsons. He is a whiz with financials and can get anyone a brand-spanking-new SIN. Lee Ellen Murtaugh has a reputation for finding buyers for items other fences won't deal with, and the runners could encounter her when trying either to unload an odd item or obtain one. If the gamemaster wants to make things personal, one of the runner's contacts can be the target. The runners will want to push back against anyone moving on somebody they trust.


The outcome of the hospital hit could be the end of the Five Points, but it might just be the beginning. If one of their own is taken out, the remaining Five Points could become implacable enemies of the runners, attempting to foul their runs and striking at the team's contacts, friends, and loved ones. They might also be impressed with the runners' capabilities and want to bring them under contract. They could make an offer to the previously endangered fixer to replace their fallen member. This puts the runners in an interesting position. Do they accept the offer so that they can attempt to take the rest of the Five Points down from the inside—or do they try to take over their scheme and set themselves up once the Five Points are dead?

FRANKENWARE

Fixers like to set up meets in loud places like clubs, concerts and other public places. But when the runners arrive at the Johnson's address for this meet, it's likely a place they would like to avoid. Reese-Hanke Funeral Chapel is located in a quiet part of town. The runners mention the Johnson funeral and are escorted to a viewing area. The Johnson is the only other mortal present, and he gets down to business as soon as the funeral employee shuts the door. The run itself is straightforward—they are provided with a home address and must eliminate the person who lives there as well as destroy anything related to a project called North/Northwest.

There are plenty of other elements that runners may want to look into. The funeral home is connected to EveRest, an A-rated corporation that is a leader in the death-services industry. The funeral homes they run put up a mom-and-pop front, but they are franchisees. Ian Ritche, the target of the run, is a cyberneticist who specializes in brain interface. His home is well secured because of an extraction attempt two years ago. Diligent legwork turns up some very strange information about Ritchie. He was the target of an extraction, but he was extracted by EveRest itself. Why would a company hire shadowrunners for some wetwork on someone they brought in just a few years ago?





EveRest's security detail never lets Ritchie out of their sight. Ritchie has gotten so used to them that it might be possible to insert a runner next to him posing as security. Ritchie's life is boring. He goes to the office once a week but works from home most of the time. Whenever one of the security detail has a birthday, he springs for delivery from one of their favorite restaurants. His Matrix contact outside of work is sporadic, though his datatrail shows occasional visits to AR sex clubs. Any digging into this shows that it's not Ritchie doing this—it's one of the security guards partying it up on Ritchie's bandwidth. Tracking down the guard partying on company time should open up a blackmail opportunity that could get the runners close to Ritchie.

Ritchie is the only one who can answer the questions about why EveRest wants him dead, which he will do freely if the runners come for him. Ritchie was extracted two years ago. His wife and young daughter did not make it with him. He later learned that they died in a car accident. He doesn't believe this story and insists his former employers killed them in retaliation. Their tragic death inspired North/Northwest. The project is devoted to bringing people back to life via a cybernetic implant that stimulates the brain and releases nanotechnology into the bloodstream to fix any fatal wounds or terminal diseases. The project has been faltering for a long time, but Ritchie claims to have recently completed a working prototype, and he notified EveRest that he was ready to move to testing.

The hitch, though, is that Ritchie does not, in fact, have anything close to workable. Nanotechnology is progressing, but death is not yet curable. The Johnson could have gotten word that Ritchie was getting nowhere and wished to eliminate that particular expenditure from EveRest's bottomline. Alternately, the Johnson could be working for a competitor worried that EveRest is going to make progress, or from religious groups upset at EveRest's hubris in working to overcome death.

DRAGON SCALE

There's nothing like a little art heist to break up the routine of collecting paydata and arranging corporate extractions. The run seems just difficult enough not to arouse suspicions that surround milk runs but not so challenging to scare off the team. The Johnson wants a small painting that is sitting in a certain bedroom. The painting is roughly a third of a meter in diameter, oddly shaped and very valuable. The Johnson encourages the team to take other items of value. The more items taken, the more likely it will look like a common robbery.

The target is a junior executive at Mitsuhama. It doesn't take long to find out that the target is ripe for the picking. He's got Yakuza connections, a mistress, and a gambling problem. The runners could make a fortune selling this information on their own, and the painting seems like a small part of the possible fortune at stake. The importance of the painting comes into play during the run to steal it. At some point, possibly after a glitch or an unfortunate turn of events, something happens to the painting that, according to the rules of logic, should destroy it. Except the painting escapes undamaged. It doesn't scan strange on an astral reading, and it is obviously old enough to not be some kind of new technology. Do the runners hold on to it and solve the mystery or

do they run as fast as they can to the Johnson and get rid of the hot potato before it causes trouble?

The painting's toughness comes from its medium—it was painted on a dragon's scale. The Johnson got wind of the scale and wanted to obtain it to use as a material link in ritual magic. Much like hair or blood from a metahuman, the scale establishes a sympathetic link between the caster and target. Getting the scale and conducting a ritual is a tremendous risk, but the chance to get some leverage over a dragon makes it worth it to the Johnson. Dragons, however, don't like to leave themselves vulnerable, so if the former owner of the scale gets wind of the scheme, he'll do something about it. Additionally, if any other dragon hears about it, they might try to get in on the action to get the upper hand on one of their kin. The runners could find themselves in the middle of a duel of dragons. The only thing worse than dealing with a dragon is getting caught up between two dragons fighting each other.

This could be the first strike in a new draconic rivalry or yet another move in a chess match between two grandmasters of intrigue. The runners could walk away, but where is the fun in that? The runners could find themselves with a very powerful patron or play a dangerous game by playing both dragons off each other. The dragons would expect nothing less. They also make it clear that they will not shed a tear if the runners are a casualty of the rivalry.

A REGULAR LIFE

The alarm rings. But instead of waking up in their usual dingy hideout, the runners find themselves in well-lit apartments. Some of them have spouses, kids, jobs, or they might own a business. The calendar says it's twenty years after the night they went to bed. They've been out of the life for at least a decade, and by all indications they bucked the odds. Instead of bleeding out on the floor of some secret corporate installation, they hit the big score and made it out of the shadows. Was it all a dream? Is this a dream? If it is, who would want to wake up?

A little investigation discovers that a job they don't remember taking paid off big time. It's a job they have yet to take. What's more, all their old enemies are missing, bought off, or somehow turned into friends. The runners live boring lives straight out of a luxury lifestyle feed.

But then strange cracks in reality start to appear. Any attempts the runners make to leave town are foiled. It's nothing more than an annoyance at first, but the coincidences start to pile up. A storm at the airport, a train workers strike, a rental place running out of cars. Then the runners' contacts start pressing for information about a previous job—nonchalantly at first, casual mentions over drinks, but soon more desperate scenarios happen. Just when the runners believe the world is false and start acting out against it, the illusion falls apart in bursts of static, code, and echoes.

The simsense section of this hook gives the gamemaster the chance to present characters that should seem real but have something slightly off about them. Characters introduced in the sim world feel like perfect matches for their real-world equivalents, but the program can't anticipate the runners' every action, so

they're likely to meet some people who just aren't right. This is also an opportunity to shake up the status quo with returning characters—turn enemies into friends, allies into enemies, and kill off characters for effect. Depending on the group, the gamemaster may want to bring other players in on the deception and have them help convince the captured runner that everything is on the level during the simsense part.

The simsense section ends when one of the runners awakens, if possible the one who struggled the most against the illusion. The situation then changes dramatically. The runner is brought to his senses by one of his teammates. The breakdown is simple. That runner never made it home after last night's celebrations, and the team went searching. The runner was taken by an old enemy and plugged into a simsense rig running a BTL-style program meant to fool the captive into thinking it was the future. The enemy hoped that once the target was in a relaxed state, he or she would divulge information about a previous run.

The runners have found their friend, but that's only half the battle. Now they have to get their disoriented friend out of danger. The most likely trail to follow is digging up information on the run the simsense characters were asking about. That earlier run could easily link to one of the conspiracies in this book. It could also be a jumping off point for a higher level campaign, taking the runners from the streets of their current campaign city to a world-spanning campaign, hunting down who did this and why. And what if some of the things that had not happened yet inside the simsense program come to pass? Is it coincidence, foreshadowing, or something more sinister?

THE MR. FIZZY CODE

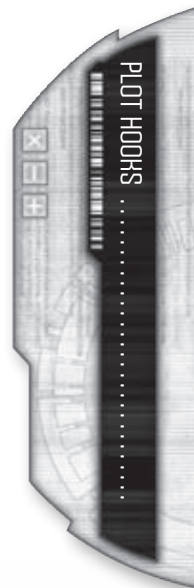
The door smashes under the heavy boot of the pointman. The runners are too late. The target they've been sent to assassinate is already dead. He sits as the victim of a BTL overdose. The Johnson doesn't believe it and the runners probably don't either. The Johnson offers to continue the payment if they find who killed the target. If that isn't enough motivation, the killers move quickly to pin the murder on the runners that found the body. Nothing like a Lone Star detective on your heels to make you put on the white hat for once.

The dead man was living a double life. The runners may know him by his reputation as the hacker Little Blue Crunchy or LBC on the Matrix. His corporate masters knew him as Wayne Knox, an assistant programmer on the popular Mr. Fizzy children's simsense series. Mr. Fizzy takes children around the world to famous locations and talks their ear off with educational trivia. The runners soon find out the latest Mr. Fizzy recording was missing from the apartment.

LBC had a penchant for California Hots from his dealing on the Matrix. Any runners running a Mr. Fizzy program in an illegal simsense rig built for hot ASIST finds differences in the recordings. Things that adults would find obvious, like Cairo being cold or the White House facing the wrong way. Word comes back that LBC was part of a pretty big job that went south a few years ago where the paydata was never found. LBC left a map in the most obvious place. If the runner's can figure out the locations in the city that the Mr. Fizzy programs point to, they can find the paydata LBC has hidden there.

The living survivor of the botched run figured this out as well. When the runners arrive at the final location, LBC's former partner in crime, a shaman named Ratcatcher is there with a new team looking for the pay data. The location is a sports arena that was being built at the time of the run. To ratchet up the tension, a big deal event is going on like a concert or a playoff game. Security is high. Innocents are everywhere. Ratcatcher is less concerned with collateral damage but smart runners will know the quiet play is the way to go. The chip holding the data is located on the huge scoreboard suspended above the area. Ratcatcher is crazy enough to jump onto it to collect the data.

What is the pot at the end of Mr. Fizzy's rainbow? Is it full of paydata collected through LBC's shady dealings? Is it footage of LBC sharing some BTLs with someone famous that has a reputation to protect? Is it evidence of one of the conspiracies in this book? If Ratcatcher survives his encounter with the runners, how far is he willing to go to get it back from the runners? What if the chip leads the runners on another wild run not just around the city but around the world?





The following text describes rituals for groups involved in hunting the artifacts from the *Dawn of the Artifacts* series and from the *Artifacts Unbound* campaign book. As of the end of *Artifacts Unbound*, the location of the four artifacts (the Phaistos Disc, Sextant of the Worlds, Shantaya's Compass and Piri Reis Map) is uncertain. It is assumed that a mysterious individual or group has acquired all four artifacts and may be planning to use them in a ritual that could have world-altering consequences.

Player characters may be hired by any of these groups to obtain the required artifacts that will be central to these rituals to further the goals of one of the conspiracies described in this book, or a plot of the gamemaster's own creation. Or these groups could hire the runners to track down and obtain other items (exotic reagents, normal reagents, unique items, and unique enchantments) needed to fuel their rituals while they locate and acquire the artifacts themselves. While most of these rituals are not meant for players to use directly, they can be used by gamemasters for potential run ideas. Also, while some groups are gathering items for these arcane (and potentially dangerous) rituals, there are always opposing groups determined to stop them by stealing the artifacts, destroying the ritual materials, and/or extracting or killing the participating magicians.

There are also magic groups in the Sixth World that will pay shadowrunners significant nuyen to acquire copies of these rituals, whether because they wish to use the rituals for themselves and their agendas, or to study them out of academic or cultural interest.

AZTLAN

Since the start of the Amazonia-Aztlan war, Aztlan has been the target of terrorist attacks by the great dragon, SIRRURG. Although the United Nations has sided with them and declared SIRRURG a war criminal, that is of little use to the Aztlan nation when SIRRURG is still free to launch attacks against them, which are made more damaging by the use his Twist of Fate power against them.

The priests of the Path of the Sun religion may have found a solution to this problem that will help them level the battlefield

Urgent Message.....

AZTLAN RITUAL

Location: Performed in a teocalli (preferably in Tenochtitlan, in a temple dedicated to Tezcatlipoca, the god of fate and confessions)

Primary artifacts: Sextant of the Worlds

Secondary artifact: Pre-Colombian artifacts: rotary disc (made of tumbaga) from the region of Nariño, gorget (made of tumbaga) from the region of Tolima, breast-plate (made of gold) from the region of Cauca. Aztlan artifacts: Mayan calendar.

Exotic reagents:

- 10 units of fresh shapeshifter blood (Any breed, preferably native to Aztlan. The shapeshifters cannot have been dead longer than six hours, and no unnatural preservatives can be in the blood itself; it must remain pure.)
- 10 units of bark from Sangre del Diablo trees
- 3 living metahumans who have been properly prepared for sacrifice in the ritual
- 1 unit of sap from a Sangre del Drago tree
- 2 units of venom from an elder lindworm
- 1 griffin egg
- 3 talon clippings from the great dragon SIRRURG (this is the material link to make this ritual work properly)
- 1 live merlin hawk
- 1 live Amazonian warrior

Normal reagents:

- Silk from 4 spider beasts
- 1 pelt of an embracer
- 12 units of radical gold
- 10 units of radical copper
- 6 units of radical quartz
- 6 units of radical obsidian
- 3 units of refined silver
- 30 scales from a chimera
- 20 units of orichalcum

Other items:

- 8 mirrors (inlaid with quartz)

Required participants: At least six priests of the Path of the Sun religion who are Nahualli and who are at least Eighth Level Initiates. The Nahualli must also be able to perform blood magic.

with Sirrurg: the Sextant of the Worlds. The sextant is charged with entropic properties. When individuals get too close to it, they risk being impacted by those energies (often referred to as the Curse of the Sextant). Many in the Aztlan religious order believe that the sextant can be used to suppress the great dragon's Twist of Fate power and neutralize an advantage he currently enjoys over them.

The only problem: the Aztlan priests do not possess the ritual to properly activate the sextant. They found clues in pre-Colombian artifacts, but the record is not complete. Wherever elements seemed to be missing, the priests and researchers substituted materials and techniques from their own magical tradition.

There is no guarantee this incomplete and spliced ritual will work. And if it does, there is no guarantee that the magic of the incomplete ritual will be compatible with the magic of the sextant. The sextant was removed from Aztlan custody shortly before the ritual could be tested. If activated, this ritual may not necessarily work as intended and could have adverse and dangerous consequences.

THE BLACK LODGE

The Black Lodge is a dangerous organization with a hidden agenda; its Awakened members scattered around the globe are devoted to world domination. They use secrecy to conceal their true motives, and they work behind the scenes to manipulate and control individuals and institutions. They do this very covertly, often using lower-level bureaucrats and multi-pronged strategies to prevent anyone from seeing the big picture and realizing what's happening—that they are being manipulated into carrying out actions that may be contrary to their organizations' objectives. When conspiracy theorists refer to "shadow governments," there is a good chance that they are referring to some aspect of the Black Lodge.

The Federal District of Columbia is a major source of power for the Black Lodge, and the organization is deeply ingrained in the UCAS political structure. The Black Lodge has gained power and control over many of the trappings and institutions of the Freemasons, who were instrumental in the design and the construction of the UCAS capital. These trappings include a five-point star carved into the very streets of DeeCee by the Freemasons. This five-point circle covers a couple of kilometers of DeeCee's most prominent neighborhoods, including the following points: Dupont Circle, Logan Circle, Washington Circle, Mt. Vernon Square, and the White House. When activated, this five-point star becomes a massive, arcane power site.

To activate this power site, the Black Lodge needs five artifacts, one for each point of the star in the DeeCee streets. The five artifacts required are the Piri Reis Map, the Phaistos Disc, the Sextant of the Worlds, Shantaya's Compass, and a Freemason-specific artifact that was originally called the Mace of the United States House of Representatives. The Mace of the United States House of Representatives was enacted in 1789 as the official symbol of the House Sergeant of Arms. There has been more than one mace used by the United States government since that time. The original mace was believed to have been lost when the Capitol,

Urgent Message.....

BLACK LODGE RITUAL

Location: Performed on the Five Point Star that was built into the street layout in DeeCee

Primary artifacts: Shantaya's Compass, the Piri Reis Map, the Sextant of the Worlds, the Phaistos Disc, and the old Mace of the U.S. House of Representatives

Secondary artifacts: 3cm x 3cm section of the old United States Constitution, 3cm x 3cm section of the old United States Declaration of Independence, 3cm x 3cm section of the original paper copy of the UCAS Constitution, 3cm x 3cm section of the original text of the Star-Spangled Banner, 3cm x 3cm section of the original UCAS flag, 7 scrolls from the Monticello library detailing the "master ritual," 3cm x 3cm section of the Magna Carta

Exotic reagents:

- 5 units of polished limestone from the original exterior of the Pyramids of Giza
- 5 units of granite stone from the Pharaoh's Chamber of the Pyramids of Giza
- George Washington's inaugural Bible
- 2 Venezuelan Bolivar coins (one silver, one gold from 1879)
- 1 horn of a unicorn
- 5 units of brickwork from the Arch of Constantine
- 5 Roman coins bearing the images of 5 different Roman emperors
- 5 units of brickwork from the Parthenon
- 5 scrolls from the Library of Alexandria
- 3 units of brickwork from the Statue of Athena at the Academy of Athens

Normal reagents:

- 5 live merlin hawks
- 13 feathers from an emperor eagle
- 13 feathers from a bald eagle
- 1 live phoenix
- 5 units of orichalcum
- 1 live pegasus
- 1 live griffin
- 1 oracle owl
- 15 units of radical gold

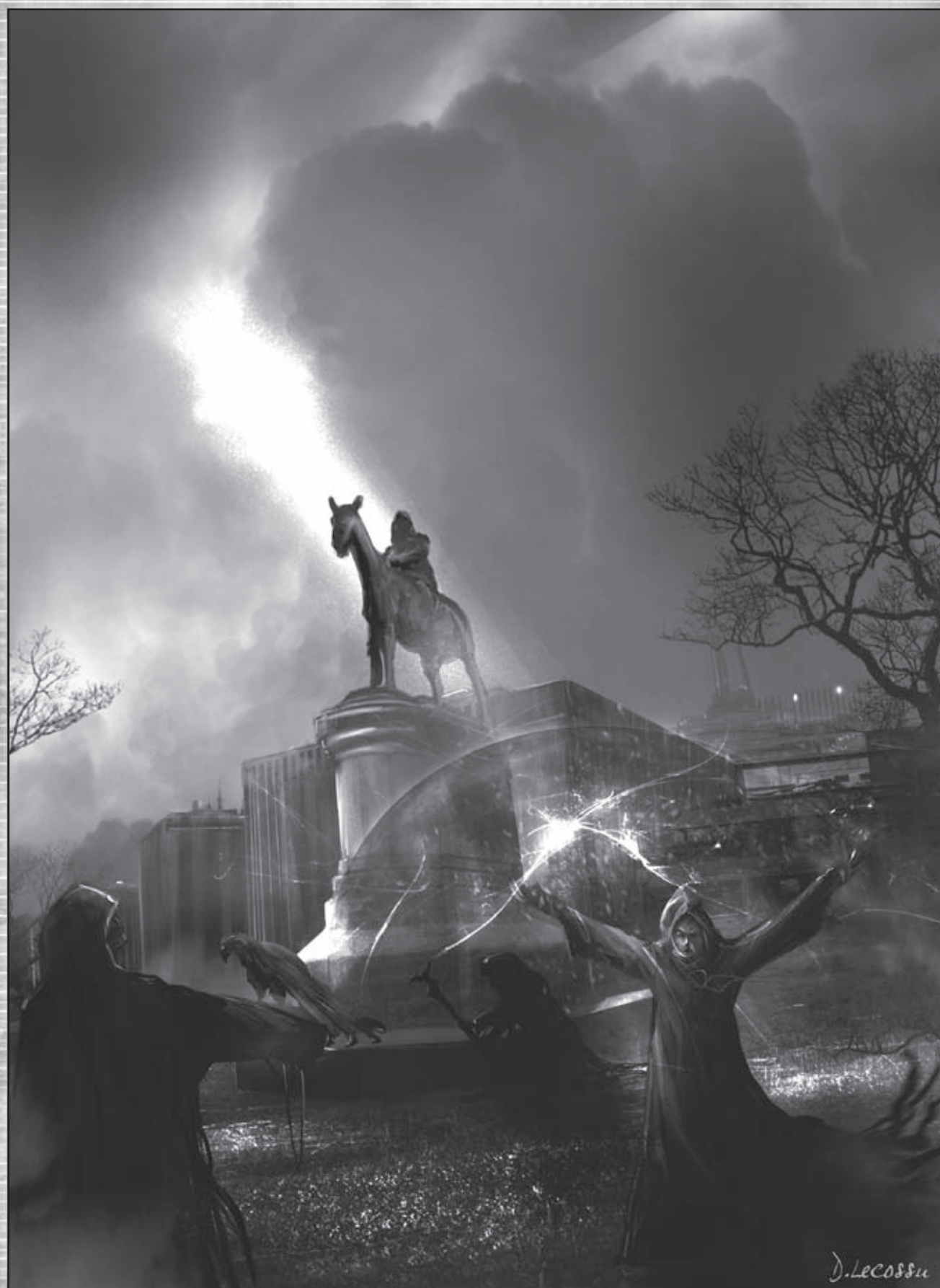
Other items:

- 5 ankhs (Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters for "eternal life")
- 13 arrows
- 8 true names for 8 ancient spirits
- 4 names of Caesars from the Roman Empire
- 4 names of Pharaohs from Ancient Egypt

Participants required:

- The Penultimate Master, the Lodge of Merlin

MAGIC RITUALS



along with much of the city, was burned during the War of 1812. In truth, though, the Freemasons and/or the Black Lodge used the chaos as cover, removing this mace for preservation.

The structure of the mace is very symbolic. Thirteen ebony rods make up the mace (representing the original thirteen colonies), bound together by silver bands. At the top of the mace is a silver globe, on which a solid silver eagle is perched. This mace was used to open the daily sessions of the House of Representatives and to indicate whether the House was in session or in committee based on its placement around the rostrum. It was also used to get unruly members back into order, though not its use as a weapon. It is brought forward during heated confrontations to be a visual reminder of the office representatives hold, and the respect they should have for it. Some believe that its use in this fashion is more than just ceremonial or symbolic—they believe that the mace has some kind of compulsory or calming powers.

At the time of the Awakening, the original mace demonstrated magical qualities similar in scale to those of the other four artifacts, though the nature of its power is still unknown. Given that the existence of the original mace is not common knowledge, learning about its magical properties would require connections who know about the Freemasons or Black Lodge.

It is unclear what the master ritual actually does. It could be used to bring in spirit allies from other metaplanes (the eight ancient spirits for which the Black Lodge obtained true names could be their generals). It could be used by the Black Lodge to rid itself of certain rivals (the great dragons, the Illuminates of the New Dawn), or the master ritual and its five-point star formation could be used in conjunction with other rituals and other power sites located around the world (Stonehenge, the Pyramids at Giza, etc.) to achieve something even bigger.

SIRRURG

While Aztlan would like to use the sextant to take away SIRRURG's Twist of Fate power during an attack and hopefully render him vulnerable, the dragon himself seeks the sextant to magnify that same power. No one knows for certain how powerful the great western dragon's entropic powers could become when amplified by the sextant, but given that it is a powerful artifact from another age, everyone fears that the magnification could conceivably be enough to leave a sprawl's entire population dead.

The last time SIRRURG used a variation of his Twist of Fate power occurred without the use of the sextant, and nearly ten thousand people died. Many groups, including Hestaby, are determined to make certain that SIRRURG does not get his talons on the sextant to perform this ritual and enhance his destructive powers.

SIRRURG is a straightforward dragon, and his motives are clear. If he should ever obtain the sextant, he will perform this ritual to rain more death and destruction down upon his current target, Aztlan, or upon any number of targets that he feels may help him reach his ultimate objectives. The CAS might be the first non-Aztlan attack he would make, with the goal of drawing them into a military conflict with Aztlan.

Urgent Message.....



SIRRURG RITUAL

Location: Performed on a mana power site, preferably in the heart of the Amazon Rain Forest

Primary artifact: The Sextant of the Worlds

Secondary artifacts: The Coins of Luck, two tomes from one of SIRRURG's lairs that date back to the Fourth World, the Tapestry of Fate

Exotic reagents:

1 goblet (3 units) of great dragon blood from a living specimen (though not from SIRRURG—he would not use his own blood in this ritual)

3 teeth from a living great dragon (also not from SIRRURG)

1 body of a greater roc

3 bodies of greater thunderbirds

3 bodies of each uisges

3 bodies of recently deceased Aztlan soldiers (must have died no more than 12 hours previously)

10 teeth from a living megalodon

Normal reagents:

1 hide of a juggernaut

10 bodies of spider beasts

1 body of a cerberus hound

3 pelts of nagas

The bodies of an entire pack of fenrir wolves (every member of the pack must be killed, otherwise the ritual will be ruined)

1 body of a behemoth

3 units of radical animal reagents, native to the target sprawl (preferably from natural predators)

3 units of radical herbal reagents, native to the target sprawl

3 units of radical metal reagents, native to the target sprawl

3 units of radical mineral reagents, native to the target sprawl

5 units of orichalcum

Other items:

Primordial spirits, including:

2 arboreal spirits

2 gan spirits

2 man-of-the-woods spirits

2 storm wraith spirits

2 tangleweb spirits

Participants required: SIRRURG and three feathered serpents who follow him fanatically



ILLUMINATES OF THE NEW DAWN

A rival magical group to the Black Lodge in Washington DeeCee, the Illuminates of the New Dawn consistently challenges the Black Lodge in both the arcane and political arts, and struggles with them for influence over the mundane world. The goals of the Illuminates of the New Dawn include finding ways to weaken the influence of the Black Lodge, winning the war with them over new recruits, securing the four artifacts from the *Dawn of the Artifacts* adventures to be used for their rituals, and otherwise advancing their agenda of building the talents of their members and advocating for magic-friendly laws and cultures across the globe. They are aware of the five-point star that is built into the DeeCee streets, and they are fanatical about guarding it. They will go to great lengths to ensure that their bitter rival cannot activate this power site and use it to gain the upper hand in the struggle between the two organizations. Some members of the IOND have a different goal, though—not only do they hope to keep the Black Lodge away from the site, but they also want to use it for themselves, both to harm the Black Lodge and to increase the IOND's powers.

In recent years, there has been some dispute within the Illuminates of the New Dawn over what their main agenda should be and how they should go about their business. In previous years, around the time Dunkelzahn ran for the presidency of the UCAS, the leading elements on that agenda involved bringing both science and magic together in a mystical balance to help evolve metahumanity. In more recent times, the Illuminates of the New Dawn have evolved a growing militant wing that, in much of its rhetoric, sounds more like the Black Lodge in its ambitions than the progress-oriented old guard. Increasing numbers of newer members are expressing their views that Awakened people are superior to the mundane metahumans around the world, and that as such, they have a divine right to rule and to properly govern those who are handicapped by their lack of mystical understanding and talent.

Though the Illuminates of the New Dawn likely possess rituals for each of the four artifacts (along with rituals to use all the artifacts together), the ritual listed below is specific for Shantaya's Compass. Like the Black Lodge, the Illuminates of the New Dawn are powerful summoners, and they are fascinated by ancient spirits. They are aware of the compass' abilities to navigate through the metaplanes, and they are very interested in learning how the secrets it uncovers can help them explore and find new ways to wield power. They believe that the compass will aid them in their search for extraplanar allies, which has become increasingly important as more corporate and governmental organizations are trying to use such beings in their information-gathering operations. The Illuminates of the New Dawn often use obelisks and sundials in their rituals, and the Washington Monument in DeeCee is considered a power site for them (though control of the monument is fervently contested by the Black Lodge). The Illuminates can perform this ritual around any of the world's most famous obelisks, including the Luxor obelisks in Egypt and France, the obelisk in St. Peter's Square in Rome, and the obelisk of Buenos Aires.

Urgent Message.....

ILLUMINATES OF THE NEW DAWN RITUAL

Location: Performed around or inside of the Washington Monument in DeeCee

Primary artifacts: Shantaya's Compass and the Key to Shantaya's Compass

Secondary artifacts: First Key of Power, Excalibur, the Shroud of Shadows

Exotic reagents:

3 talon clippings from the late President Dunkelzahn

George Washington's inaugural Bible

3 Brasher Doubloons (1787)

3 United States 10-dollar coins (1838)

George Washington's epaulettes

Great Seal of the Confederacy

4 original manuscripts/letters from any of the Age of Enlightenment philosophers (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Kant, Locke, Rousseau, etc.)

4 original letters from Thomas Jefferson (letters are in the Jeffersonian library at Monticello, which is under the control of the Black Lodge)

An original copy of all 85 articles from the Federalist Papers (many are in Black Lodge possession)

1 unit of stone from Bewcastle Cross

The Hope Diamond

3 units of moon dust (or could be substituted with 3 units of moon rocks)

2 live phoenixes

Normal reagents:

15 units of radical gold

3 units of radical diamond

10 units of refined silver

10 units of feathers from a bald eagle

5 small to medium-sized obelisks

Other items:

50 candles

5 mirrors inlaid with refined gold

1 sundial, elegantly designed, encrusted with jewels, and infused with 2 units of orichalcum

Participants required: At least four high-level initiates (10th grade and above)

DRACO FOUNDATION

The Draco Foundation was established in 2057 to administer the numerous bequests that the great dragon Dunkelzahn had left to specific metahumans, corporations, and other entities from the vast horde of wealth that he had amassed over the millennia. Administering the will and all the tokens and favors from Dunkelzahn has become one of the main reasons why the Draco Foundation has become so well known internationally in a relatively short amount of time.

To honor the wishes and the legacy of Dunkelzahn, the Draco Foundation regularly pays out bounties on certain magical threats, such as blood mages and toxic shamans. In recent years, the Draco Foundation has become more proactive in dealing with magical hazards, going so far as hiring shadowrunners to hunt down specific threats. They have also partnered with other like-minded organizations, like the Astral Preservation Society and the American Association of Thaumaturgy, to try to repair the damage these magical threats have done to the environment.

To that end, the Draco Foundation has designed a ritual it can use to help track all the damage and the devastation that the magical threats they have captured have wrought. Their goal is to repair this damage (such as all toxic domains that an individual threat may have generated) and to ensure that there aren't still

lingering threats out there that originated from the ones they have captured, such as any free toxic or free blood spirits that they let loose onto the world, or any insane followers that may have been spawned from the threat's maniacal teachings. Through this ritual, anything that has had significant astral contact with a captured magical threat can be tracked down and investigated. The ritual may also help the Draco Foundation locate victims of these twisted magical practitioners and provide necessary magical or medical assistance.

This ritual would involve the Piri Reis Map.

ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION

The Atlantean Foundation sponsors dozens of archaeological digs and expeditions around the world to seek out the arcane secrets and mysteries of metahuman (and non-metahuman) civilizations and to give proper context to every major historical event dating all the way back to Atlantis. Some of their digs draw in only a few capable competitors, which is easily within the foundation's resources to manage, while other projects, such as the recovery of all four Dawn of the Artifacts relics, bring in competition from all corners of the world, from the largest megacorporations to private collectors and organizations. To deal with competition at that level, the Atlantean Foundation requires an edge—something that will allow them to keep ahead of their competition, and something that will allow them to get to the site first.

Urgent Message.....

DRACO FOUNDATION RITUAL

Location: Performed at the Draco Foundation headquarters in DeeCee

Primary artifact: Piri Reis Map

Secondary artifact: None

Exotic reagents:

- 3 units of drake blood voluntarily given from 3 different drakes
- 2 units of a material link (such as blood, hair, or skin samples) from the specific target (blood mage, toxic shaman, etc.)
- 1 bug spirit from a targeted hive, colony, or nest (if the Draco Foundation's targets are bug spirits)
- 1 unit of pure water taken from the ice of Antarctica
- 1 unit of hair taken from a saber-tooth cat
- 1 unit of venom from a night manta
- 1 horn from a greater unicorn
- 1 live gomatia
- 1 unit of hair from a Tasmanian tiger
- 1 live cerberus hound

Normal reagents:

- 4 horns from wild satyrs
- 5 units of orichalcum
- 1 unit of venom from an ekylebenle

Other items:

A circle etched on the ground, with silver-engraved symbols similar in nature to ancient cuneiform

Participants required: At least two initiates (5th level or higher) to perform the ritual and a third to act as an astral spotter

Urgent Message.....

ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION RITUAL

Location: Performed at the Atlantean Foundation's headquarters in Atlanta, CAS

Primary artifacts: Shantaya's Compass, the Piri Reis Map, the Sextant of the Worlds, and the Phaistos Disc

Secondary artifacts: Shroud of Shadows, Dunkelzahn's ancient tarot deck (given to Dr. Miles Swinburne in his will), the Mayan calendar

Exotic reagents:

- 3 units of stone from the Prague Orloj (Prague Astronomical Clock)
- 3 units of volcanic rock from Gunung Agung
- 3 units of volcanic rock from Mount Paektusan
- 2 terra cotta soldiers (intact)
- 5 units of feathers, talons from oracle owls
- 3 units of feathers, talons from eyekillers

Normal reagents:

- 5 units of dirt from the country or region where the artifact/site may be located
- 3 units of brick from the Great Wall of China
- 5 units of orichalcum
- 1 set of antlers from a grandfather elk
- 10 units of radical crystal

Other items: None

Participants required: At least two initiates (5th level and above); both need to have the divination metamagic.

MAGIC RITUALS

The Atlantean Foundation's answer to this is ritual magic. The foundation has created a ritual that will use all the artifacts from the *Dawn of the Artifacts* series along with the divination metamagic to allow them to find key artifacts and other archaeological discoveries. This ritual would allow them to limit the number of false leads they pursue, and allow them to have a sizable advantage over their competition.

This ritual requires all four of the *Dawn of the Artifact* relics. The next big project on the Atlantean Foundation's agenda: understanding the great dragons, since they existed around the time of Atlantis.

APEP CONSORTIUM

While the Draco and the Atlantean Foundations are typically well intentioned and are (usually) looking out for what is best for metahuman civilization in their research (despite their fierce rivalry), the Apep Consortium is more of a question mark. It appears on the surface to be genuinely interested in making discoveries that will benefit metahumanity, but the members of the organization often have an unsavory nature (including blood mages and toxic shamans, to name a few) and their true motivations remain unknown.

To make quick nuyen in the artifact rush, the Apep Consortium has been releasing replicas of the four artifacts on the streets. The replicas are not being sold as the real thing, but rather, fences are selling them as enchanted items that work off the magical energies of the real artifacts to help magicians of various levels create certain unique enchantments. For each artifact, they are selling a unique ritual that the Apep Consortium either designed themselves or stole from one of the megacorporations—or from the Draco and/or Atlantean Foundation (they might have corrupted those rituals after they acquired them). Although these replicas are showing up with some frequency, no one has been able to link them back to the Apep Consortium.

Warning: These rituals may or may not work as intended (at the gamemaster's discretion). These rituals may not last as long as promised, they may have consequences that were not told to the magicians, or they may have another, darker purpose built into them (such as draining the casters' energy and channeling it to nearby Apep members, or allowing a particular creature to perform energy drain while individuals are distracted with the ritual).

INTANGIBLE

This ritual imbues an object with the power of intangibility, allowing its wearer to choose to be intangible to objects that he desires (such as walls, vault doors, bullets, etc.). With this ritual, an individual can walk through walls as if he were astrally projecting. (Unfortunately, should the enchantment wear off while the individual is in a solid object, he will materialize in that object. Depending on how much of the character materializes in the object, he could lose an arm, a leg, or even his life.) This ritual cannot allow an individual to bypass wards or astral barriers. Even if an individual is intangible to an object, he is still visible and can be caught by security measures such as cameras. The target of the intangible ritual can choose to make himself intangible to certain security devices such as motion sensors and trip beams, but he

must maintain the conscious effort to remain intangible to those devices. If the gamemaster feels that he has lost concentration and has dropped his guard, or if he needs to remember to remain intangible to more than one security device or to more than one object, he can call for either a Composure Test (Willpower + Charisma) or a Memory Test (Logic + Willpower), whichever is more appropriate. A failed test means that the individual is no longer concentrating on being intangible, and is therefore able to be influenced by his environment. The threshold for these tests is determined by the circumstances of the scene, as laid out by the gamemaster. After this unique enchantment is activated, it is believed to last one full hour.

Urgent Message.....

INTANGIBLE RITUAL

Location: Performed in any magic lodge, Rating 6 or above

Primary artifact: Phaistos Disc replica

Secondary artifacts: none

Exotic reagents:

5 teeth from a rockworm

1 complete set of piasma claws

1 pelt of a demon rat

Normal reagents:

1 unit of orichalcum

Other items:

1 unit of duracrete

1 unit of plasteel

1 item to place the enchantment on (ring, gun, cyberarm, etc.)

Participants required: Ritual must be performed by at least one magician with both Ritual Spellcasting and Enchanting. The magic is cast onto an item, making it a unique, enchanted item. The enchantment of this item follows the rules of Crafting Foci on p. 84, *Street Magic*.

LUCKY

Everyone knows that they could use a little extra luck every once in a while. This ritual from the Apep Consortium promises just that. An individual can receive a unique enchantment for approximately one hour. In that time, the individual's Edge pool is increased by one half of the normal amount, rounded down. For example, if a character has an Edge pool of 5, her Edge for the period that the enchantment is active is increased to 7. This increase can exceed an individual's natural attribute maximum. In the astral plane, the individual appears as though she has an active focus, and she will be impeded by wards and astral barriers.

Urgent Message.....

LUCKY RITUAL

Location: Performed in any magic lodge, Rating 6 or above

Primary artifact: Sextant of the Worlds replica

Secondary artifacts: None

Exotic reagents:

2 feathers (radical quality) from a thunderbird

2 feathers (radical quality) from a firebird

Normal Reagents:

1 unit of orichalcum

1 unit of venom from a stonebinder

Other items:

1 physical coin

1 horseshoe

1 set of physical dice

1 rabbit

Participants required: The ritual must be performed by at least one magician with both Ritual Spellcasting and Enchanting. The wearer of the enchanted item has to be Awakened.

PIERCING VISION

Piercing Vision is a ritual designed to enchant an item, such as contact lenses, glasses, or sunglasses, giving the wearer the ability to see through certain barriers. Piercing Vision allows an individual to astrally perceive and look through warding or astral barriers as if they are transparent. Although the person could see through an astral barrier, he still cannot pass through it while magically active or while the enchantment on the item is active. In addition, if a wearer of this item assenses another magician who is using masking, the wearer does not need to make an opposed test to try and penetrate the masking. He can assense the individual as if the masking was not there, seeing his true astral signature, the foci he has on him, etc. The enchantment on this item lasts one hour.

Urgent Message.....

PIERCING VISION RITUAL

Location: Performed in any magic lodge, Rating 6 or above

Primary artifact: Shantaya's Compass replica

Secondary artifacts: None

Exotic reagents:

4 feathers (radical quality) from a griffin

2 eyes from an eyekiller

1 unit of blood from a peryton

Normal reagents:

1 unit of orichalcum

Other items:

1 item to place the enchantment on (glasses, shades, contact lenses)

Participants required: Ritual must be performed by at least one magician with both Ritual Spellcasting and Enchanting. The wearer of the enchanted item has to be Awakened and able to astrally perceive.

REGENERATE

The Regeneration ritual is similar in nature to the properties of the Immortal Flower compound, as it grants the target the critter power of regeneration. Some see this ritual as being too costly and too time-consuming to replace simply using the immortal flower compound. On top of that, the immortal flower lasts for longer periods of time. Those who support the regeneration ritual, however, are quick to point out that the ritual leaves no ill effects on the body, that you don't lose Essence from the repeated use of the ritual, and that the ritual doesn't cause you to suffer damage as it tries to "repair" the damage done to your body from cyberware and bioware. Once the enchantment is expended (after one hour), the regeneration ends.

Urgent Message.....

REGENERATE RITUAL

Location: Performed in any magic lodge, Rating 6 or above

Primary artifact: Piri Reis Map replica

Secondary artifacts: none

Exotic reagents:

1 body of a banshee

3 bodies of fideals

3 units of silica deposits from a segmented section of a rockworm

Normal reagents:

1 dose of immortal flower

2 doses of shade

2 doses of tempo

Other items: None

Participants required: Ritual must be performed by at least one magician with both Ritual Spellcasting and Enchanting. The wearer of the enchanted item has to be Awakened.

MAGIC RITUALS



FIN

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