



SHADOWRUN

THE NEO-ANARCHIST STREETPEDIA



A DEEP SHADOWS SOURCEBOOK



NEO-ANARCHIST STREETPEDIA





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INTRODUCTION

You are holding the most extensive collection of Sixth World knowledge ever created. In a single book, at least. Hundreds of entries. Thousands of words. It covers everything from Aden to the Zurich-Orbital Habitat, or at least as much as we could get in there.

So why did we do it? This sort of collective, organized effort is not what people think of when they think about neo-anarchists, mostly because people don't have a good understanding of what neo-anarchy is (a failing we'll try to correct in the section right after this one). To be clear about one thing: Neo-anarchists work together. In fact, this book represents what anarchy is all about, namely a group of people choosing to work together for the common good. Knowledge is, and always will be, power, and power is important in any struggle. It just has to be used well.

Let me give you an example by sharing the story of Trinity Ellario. She is a futurist, a consultant with an expertise in picking out trends before anyone else really notices them. The megas tend not to work with her because they have enough consultants in-house, but Ellario cobbles together enough smaller clients to make a living. She also publishes original research in order to keep her name out there. She wrote this back in '75:

The interest multiple corporations have in digitized consciousness is understandable—natural, even, given our survival instinct. The minefield of ethical concerns is intimidatingly large, though. For starters, there is the issue of what you are creating. A digitized consciousness is, by definition, an artificial intelligence (if it does not have all the elements needed to make consciousness, then it is worth little as data). This means that making a digitized consciousness is creating a new life, and that comes with certain ethical demands. Some people envision making a consciousness as a backup to their selves, which means it is something to be left dormant until needed. But isn't this, essentially, creating a new life form just to put it in an extended, enforced coma? How can this be ethical? Along similar lines, confining any such consciousnesses for the purpose of study is cruelty, enforced imprisonment for no crime. History has never been kind to those who constrain life in that way.

The first cases of cognitive fragmentation disorder were diagnosed within a year of the publication of Ellario's paper. The information warning us of the looming danger was out there—we just did not know enough to spread that information and do something about it.

One may fairly argue that Ellario's knowledge actually conveyed no power, because no one did anything about it, and the CFD crisis happened despite her warnings. But then there's the rest of the story. Ellario is based in Boston, and she was within the QZ when the quarantine went up. I'm sure most of you have heard stories of the nightmares that happened there on a daily basis, but Ellario had a different experience. This is from a recent conversation with her:

I was very fortunate. As soon as the lockdown started, some neighbors started delivering me food and keeping an eye on my place. I spoke to them frequently and offered payment for all they were doing for me, but they refused anything I offered. I hadn't met any of the people who were helping me before, and I was touched by their generosity. Only later in the process did I start to put things together and understand that everyone helping me were victims of CFD.

We know that the full memories of personalities had trouble surviving the invasion of people's brains, yet these head cases had retained enough memories of Ellario's advocacy on their behalf that they took care of her during the nightmare of the lockdown.

I relate this story for two reasons. First is because it is a fine example of neo-anarchist ideas, where hard work and conscientious behavior resulted in the formation of a community where the members supported one another. Second, Ellario wrote her initial report after reviewing data and piecing certain facts together, then combining it with a view of the essential importance of caring for life.

There are many strands of data assembled for this book, many chances to find knowledge, weave facts together, and use them in the ongoing struggle to build a more just world.

Use it well.



JUST A PUNK

BY CZ WRIGHT

The line of sheep, eager for fleeing, wound six blocks from the Grand Horizon Opera House—the only parcel of downtown still standing after Horizon relegated the nearly two-hundred-year-old theatre to a lobby for Horizon’s monstrous theatre complex. I kept my head down as I walked, passing ’crete plastered in flyers that read “January 6, 2080, 8PM, Grand Horizon Opera House—Gillian McComber Management presents: A Night with Gillian.” The same flyer I held mashed in my fist. I was going to frag the drek out of her show.

I ran my freshly lifted badge in front of the card reader at the service entrance, which rewarded me with a *click*, and I tossed it and the flyer in the trash. I strode through the chrome kitchens like I owned them, dodging employees too busy to question my presence. Marching through the swinging door at the end of the hall and sweeping into the current of theatre-goers, I tried to blend. I must have blended too well, because someone crashed into me, and we both sprawled to the floor.

“Aw, crap,” they said as I clambered to my feet. I muttered something apologetic-sounding, scanning the crowd for an exit. The short, vaguely pigeon-shaped human woman stared at me with her mouth agape, her eyes wide, and a hand on her chest. I wondered whether she was going to have a heart attack or something, but she said, “Oh. My. Ghost! It’s Cunningham—you’re Cunningham!” She flapped her hands.

I winced and held a finger to my lips.

“—Cunning and Gil!” she said in a ringmaster-y imitation of the intro to the old MeFeed Gillian and I ran years ago. The woman’s imitation stirred up a pang of nostalgia, but it was quickly incinerated by the electric anger I’d armed myself with tonight.

“I loved watching the ruckus you two would get up to,” the woman said, voice growing louder. “But if you ask me, you’re better off without Gillian and the enormous stick she keeps shoved up her—”

“Hey, I’m here incognito,” I said, patting the air in the universal gesture for *keep it the fuck down*.

“Oh!” she said, ignoring the gesture. “My theatre group and I made this vid when Horizon came through buying up downtown—the vid was inspired by you, of course.”



I opened my mouth to protest, but she pressed in close beside me, and a small screen popped up in AR from her commlink. On it, a few pudgy Midwesterners dressed in black with bandannas over their faces plastered papers everywhere that read “Horizon is the Dark Cloud on the Horizon! Vote NO to Prop 662!” The footage cut abruptly to the group on the same streets in daylight, holding big plastic signs with the same message, dancing idiotically on the sidewalks to attract drivers’ attention. Not funny, terribly boring, and more than a little pathetic.

“I just finished my edits and was going to send it to you tonight,” she said. “And I’m Shelby, by the way,” Shelby said and stuck her hand out.

“That’s great,” I said and ignored the hand, anxious to leave before someone else recognized me.

“Can I send it to you?”

“Yeah, sure, whatever,” I waved my junk email account address to her in AR to shut her up. “So, I gotta get going; stuff to do—”

Shelby hit send on the video and her smile faltered. She blinked at me. “Wait, you’re pulling a stunt? Tonight? Here?”

I only grinned.

Shelby frowned, thinking, and just before I could spin

to go, she grabbed me by the coat. “Follow me; let me do the talking,” she said, and started down the hall.

“Ah, haha, no,” I said and yanked myself from her grasp. “I’ve got it, thanks, I work alone. See ya,” I rattled the words off over my shoulder as I dove into the river of people.

I searched the arena as quickly as I could, looking for a quieter way inside than trying to get past the ticket scanners, but the place was huge. Designed to funnel crowds past and entice them into purchases of nearly everything you could imagine, no doubt, this monstrosity of a theatre-slash-artificial neighborhood replaced the perfectly healthy downtown Horizon knocked down to make room for the stupid thing.

Down one of the less well-traveled hallways, up on the second floor, I spotted a door marked “Employees Only” that I hadn’t checked so far. After searching for and finding no passersby, I tugged gently on the handle and found it locked. A few moments later, I extended a cable from my cyberdeck to the guts of the lock, and a hand clamped down on my shoulder.

I bolted to my feet in shock. Before I could turn, the door opened, a stagehand hurried out, ignoring me, but just inside the open door a guard eyeballed me. I tried to look innocent—a challenge to play against type, always—as the stagehand departed and the door swung closed. Once the door clicked shut, I turned tautly to find Shelby standing beside me.

“I just wanted to say that I love your work, really,” Shelby said, as though we never stopped chatting earlier. “It might sound silly, but my son is a big fan, and I just started watching over his shoulder one day.” She shrugged. “But this place? I know Horizon swallowed it whole, but the Grand is still here, even if it is just the lobby anymore. And this is *all* we have for culture anymore. Too many people go outside the Fox Cities Metroplex for live entertainment as it is. If anything were to happen to her ...” She left the sentence hanging. She clasped her hands together and swallowed. “So, you aren’t going to, you know, *wreck anything*, are you?”

The adrenaline from my near-miss had subsided, leaving me shaken and growing more annoyed by her every word. “The only thing I plan to wreck is a career. Don’t worry about your little cultural hotspot,” I said, wiggling my fingers around the words.

If my mockery stung, she didn’t show it. “Good. I’ll leave you to it, then.” Shelby walked down the steps. I fumed in place, musing.

“One more thing before you go?” Shelby said.

I sighed and turned to stare, waiting for her to finish. It could be the only way through.

“I know you like to prank whoever you can—you know, in the name of ‘anarchy!’” Shelby gave a weak laugh and self-consciously shook her fists in the air with the word. “But I always thought your best vids are the ones where you go get the bigwigs—my son thinks so, too. So, uh, not sure what I’m getting at, but I’ll look forward to the feed. Go get ‘em!”

I found my opportunity during intermission. With hundreds of confused theatre-goers coming and going, it was easier than I anticipated to spoof past the ticket scanners covering the doors. From there, it was a quick sneak and a jaunt straight up the wall to the catwalks; I was mostly invisible and climbed walls like a tree frog, thanks to my chameleon suit and some gecko-tape. Pride about the few toys I owned morphed into self-congratulations as I climbed carefully up the wall and behind a huge baffle hanging from the ceiling. Surely Gillian was expecting me, but she must not have expected I’d get this far. I wished I could see her face when her family-friendly show got freaky-friendly, thanks to the loud, graphic, and risqué presentation I had prepared for the second half of her production. I betted Horizon would love it, too.

I rolled over the railing of the catwalks just as the lights dimmed to signal the end of intermission. Beyond the open window, the control booth appeared empty. In moments, I was inside, browsing the hard-wired equipment and ready to unleash vulgarity on the unsuspecting masses—

“I knew you’d come.”

I whirled to face the voice. Gillian leaned against the door to the booth, as relaxed as if she were having a smoke after sex.

“Heey!” I said, throwing my hands wide and affecting cheer. “It’s been a long time!”

The equipment in the booth whirled and lit up as the spotlights activated and centered on the figure of Gillian McComber standing on the stage below us in a glittering evening gown. The audience roared with applause. “Thank you for spending your evening with me,” the Gillian on stage said. “We’ve got so much more for the second half!”

I cocked an eyebrow and peered at the Gillian in the booth with me. “Oh, I prerecorded all that,” she said with a dismissive wave. “It’s a hologram. But, you!” Gillian stepped forward and hugged me awkwardly on the shoulders with her hands. “I’m really glad you came. I’ve been living vicariously through your MeFeed.”

“But I thought you were Horizon’s darling; do you need to slum it watching a worthless street punk to get your kicks?”

Gillian’s expression grew wry. “That’s fine. Get your licks in. You and I ruled the world for a time, but I saw an opportunity and took it. I can’t blame you for not seeing it, too. Though I always wished you’d come with me, you know.”

I scoffed. “An opportunity to line your pockets.”

“Look, just because you didn’t know my plan doesn’t mean I haven’t been working on this for *years*,” Gillian folded her arms. “You may think that my view of the world would have changed looking down from Horizon’s boardroom, but it hasn’t. People like that,” she cocked her head in the direction of the audience, “They’re asleep. They’re powerless. They’re complicit. All they do these days is hide behind their screens and snipe at each other from whatever boxes they’ve sorted themselves into. They can’t be bothered with *real* change.” Her tone grew heated. “They’re useless, they don’t care, they don’t contribute, they get in the way,” she counted off the infractions on her fingers, then dropped her hands to her sides and smiled. “And I want to burn it all to the fucking ground and make them take notice.”

“Huh. Sounds like fun. I suppose you’d be in charge,” I said with as much nonchalance as I could muster, which wasn’t much. She was speaking my language, and I hadn’t realized how difficult it would be to talk to her face-to-face again.

“Of course not,” she said. “It’d be you *and* me, not in charge, but acting as a guiding hand.” She tossed her hair back over her shoulder and shrugged. “Look, I don’t expect you to understand, but know this:” She stepped in closer then, and a hidden recess of my brain registered she smelled the same. I cursed inwardly at the tightening in my chest. “I’ve spent a lot of time, paid far too much money, and burned a few bridges on this, and I want you and me to do this together. Trust me when I say that all the right people are going to be brought quite low this evening.”

I paused, unsure. She sounded just like the woman I partnered with years ago, with the same fire in her voice and eyes. Whenever she talked like this, I’d learned over the years, she was up to something, and this amount of heat made that something seem big.

Gillian reached into the pocket of her red leather jacket and pulled out a chipped Meta Link. She brought up a screen that showed the quintessential Big Red Button, and there was a timer running out above it. The button hearkened back to a running gag we had during our heyday, stabbing that damned nostalgia again. “Well?” she said, looking from the commlink to me. “We’ll get a great view of the show from up here, but I need your answer. Now.” The timer on her commlink had run down to zero.

Something about her tone convinced me she wasn't playing around. On a whim, I started a cursory search for wireless devices while a portion of my brain put my silvered tongue on autopilot to buy time. I nattered on about the good times we'd had together, and how a part of me wanted to take her up on this. While my mouth meandered, my search located a bundle of wireless signals in the theatre that I hadn't seen before this moment, and they were located in the vicinity of the royal box—the VIP seating near the stage.

My brain whirled and Gillian's cryptic words finally made sense. I fired off a message in reply to the vid Shelby sent me: "BOMBS UNDER VIP BOX—GET EVERYONE OUT!" I had no idea if she'd read it, but it was the only thing I could think of to do before I blasted the area with so much Matrix noise, Gil and everyone else in a hundred meters of me lost their Matrix connections.

Outwardly to Gillian, I pretended to muse, but her smile faded. When her cool gaze flickered up to meet mine, I knew she had spotted my interference. "But I'm sure you came here with a plan of your own, didn't you? That's all right. I'm sure whatever little plan you have in store will be cute." She stepped backward toward the door, and I took a step forward—in order to keep her signal jammed, I had to keep that burner commlink she held within a hundred meters of my cyberdeck. "Plus, it'll give the police ample evidence of your involvement." She casually produced a small, gleaming pistol from the small of her back.

"You wouldn't shoot me," I said.

Gillian grinned and shrugged. "Gel rounds," she said, and began to lift the gun toward me.

I threw myself—wholly, awkwardly, bodily—into Gillian.

We went down in a heap. I grabbed her by the hair and tried to put her in a headlock, and she pawed at my coat, looking for the cyberdeck I kept in an interior pocket. As we wrestled, I tried to pull either the pistol or the commlink away from her—maybe I could chuck them out into the audience—and she tried to wrest my cyberdeck away from me, or at least push me away where she could shoot me. I grabbed her and rolled with her, trying to shove her into one of the cabinets, but she twisted away at the last second, darting out of my grasp and gaining her feet again. As I scrambled to my feet, she yanked the door open and ran out.

I sprinted after her. The gun was gone; she must have stashed it, since not even Horizon's own Gillian McComber was allowed a pistol downtown. I chased Gillian down the aisle, and we attracted the attention of everyone in the balcony. We tore down the stairs and into the mezzanine, around and down into the grand circle.

Gillian rushed past the usher and out one of several doors. The usher blinked in surprise to see a second Gillian, and when she passed and barked an order at him, he squared himself, put his hands in my face, and blocked my path. Gillian disappeared out the theatre. I could see two theatre security officers approaching from behind him.

Then the fire alarms blared, and the theatre erupted into chaos. I silently thanked Shelby.

Audience members shrieked and ran in all directions. They leaped from their seats and ran toward the exits, swarming the ushers and theatre security. Some clambered over the seats in an effort to outrun everyone else. I wasn't

getting out those doors to pursue Gillian, but I knew where the signals were coming from. I dodged panicked people and more than once nearly collided with someone in our mutual haste as I ran to the front of the theatre.

Police stormed out from backstage and blocked my way to the VIP box. "Get down on the ground!" Someone shouted, and several firearms pointed at me.

I stopped and showed them my hands. My mind raced. I couldn't let them arrest me—they'd confiscate my deck, Gillian's signal would go through, and we'd be pasted. I had to run. The audience was out of harm's way at least, and there was a chance, however slim, that I could locate Gillian before she triggered the explosives. "There are bombs under the box, and if you don't let me—"

"Oh, we're well aware," Gillian called out from the control booth, far above us, as the officer repeated her command to get down on the ground. "You've had your anarchy, Cunningham, now it's time to stand down."

"No!" I pointed at Gillian. "Anarchy doesn't target the people like this." I turned to the cops. "And this isn't my doing, it's hers! Just look for bundles of some kind of explosives!" I said as I turned and ran as fast as I could, darting and weaving toward the exits.

Several people shouted at once, and gunshots ripped through the air. Miraculously, I was unharmed, and the exits grew closer, and I thought I might get out of this—when there was a bright flash of light. A rush of sound crushed over my consciousness, and everything went black.

I awoke a few hours later when I tried to scratch my nose and couldn't. The handcuffs connecting my wrists to the bars of my hospital bed jingled.

After checking the news feeds and interrogating the nursing staff, I learned I'd taken a gel round to the back of the head, I may or may not be going to jail, and everyone made it safely out, even the cops. Gillian was nowhere to be found.

A nurse poked her head in and said, "You've got a visitor." Shelby came through the door, wearing a sunny grin and carrying a bouquet of candy bars on sticks.

"Thanks for reading my message," I said.

"Thanks for saving our lives. And for saving the theatre. Sorry you had to get shot for it." Shelby took a seat next to my bed.

"I don't give a crap about your theatre," I said, and Shelby blinked, "I just figured my viewership numbers would tank if I let her get away with that drek." I stretched my arms above my head.

"Uh huh," Shelby said wryly and gave a knowing nod. "Maybe you just don't want to admit that you have a soft spot for people."

I grunted noncommittally.

"I'm sorry to tell you that your fans are a little let down."

"What?" I said, startled.

"Well, the prevailing opinion is that you could have done a lot better, because as far as pranks go, pulling the fire alarm to save lives was pretty weak. But I think we're willing to forgive your lapse. Maybe you could make it up at our next protest."

I only grinned.



STREETPEDIA

FROM ASHES, NEO-ANARCHISM

- > If you're going to understand this download, you've gotta look at the underlying philosophy connecting it all together. You brush back our jokes and hard-earned cynicism, and you'll find the bloody, beating heart of an idealist. So we're gonna set it out clear for you, direct and clean. Read and understand, then we'll get all cynical again.
- > Editorial staff

The only real difference between an arcology of subservient corporate wageslaves and a mass of "free" national citizens pledging allegiance every morning is that the former are exploited for private profit, the latter by the State. The motive of the corporate masters is to increase their private fortunes by abusing the masses. The motive of the Nation-State masters is to establish

an unwieldy and complicated bureaucracy that benefits themselves and their ilk by abusing the masses. But we neo-anarchists want something different from either of those. — Captain Chaos

The great dragon, who's spent most of its life sleeping on the floor of some dank, hidden lair, came as little into contact with actual metahumanity as it was possible to do and still be aware of them. The result was that its desires and goals ignore everything that comes from metahuman sources, except our labor. It is aware that metahumans are capable of servitude. It is aware that somewhere, there are other metahumans who labor for other, minor lords. It is the dragon's objective to rescue these imaginary metahumans from what it sees as the meaninglessness of self-determined life. But what the dragon does not know, what it cannot fathom, is while it slept, humanity dreamt such dreams beyond even those of ancient dragons; and they now possess an unquenchable will to be free. — Clifton Pritchett

In the minds of most since the last century, “anarchism” conjures images of sour-faced punks yelling into mics about oppressive social norms and the desire to doom civilized culture. Neo-anarchists are thought to be everything from scruffy-bearded communists and hyper-violent terrorists to drug-fueled intellectual idealists out of touch with today’s world. The average representation of the anarchist is derived from the propaganda of the nations and corporations who fear them. It depicts a stereotypically insane person, invariably dirty or wild-eyed, wielding a molotov cocktail and middle finger. “Anarchy” and “anarchists” are—with rare exceptions—reflections of real anarchism through a dirty mirror, and most often their opposite. Actual neo-anarchism doesn’t involve itself with entropy and decay, or with gratuitous terror and violence; it can, and does, provide an actual and tangible alternative to self-destructive and tyrannical civilizations that have been in decline for centuries.

Anarchy, from the Greek “an” (without) and “arkhos” (chief or ruler), is often understood to mean chaos, or “no rules.” This is false, as anarchists do not believe in lawlessness—quite the contrary. It is because the term “rule” necessarily associates a particular relationship, in which a society is dominated or coerced with a specific form of behavior or manipulation. Put another way, leadership is not looked down upon by neo-anarchists—rather, rulers are, who by definition control or dominate their subjects. Suggesting a community have no rulers, therefore, doesn’t mean it should or will become chaotic, as rules themselves appreciate the natural order of the world. But refusing to acknowledge coercive and arbitrary laws or customs laid down by corporations, empires, states, and their like is common to all neo-anarchists.

Indeed, anarchist communities adhere to variable sets of beliefs, values, and principles. We simply believe that any laws, rules, or accepted practice must be fair, sensible, unanimous, and freely agreed upon willingly and without coercion. In general terms, man-made laws and systems seek to enslave the masses. But within a freely joined system of equitable rules and boundaries, we can fulfill our destiny as metahumans and rediscover our long-forgotten bond with the planet and the other life on it.

Rather than strive under a system in which rule is forcefully imposed, we prefer the non-coercive self-government of the individual. For our purposes, coercion is defined as the act of using violence or intimidation to obtain obedience. Hierarchy itself is not evil, but natural, and quite different than the artificial class system that pervades the contemporary world. Within a neo-anarchist context, the leader is only as strong as the community and the freely given support she has within it, and this leadership is married to responsibility. Opposite of the gargantuan and ever-widening canyon between the powers-that-be and the ordinary person today, leadership in the best sense sees the leader and the volunteer as a complementary if temporary agreement.

Revolution that leads to a true world transformation differs from previous revolutions by being radical in comparison to predecessors, which were revolutions in name only—in truth, they were mere revolts. This is at the heart of the establishment: state or corporation. These lesser revolutions brought only some liberties and some freedom to some people, not full and com-

plete freedom. They could not. Instead, they replaced previous dominations with new dominations. Neo-anarchism seeks, fights, and bleeds for the non-domination of each and all. It brings true freedom, not only to abstract groups or classes but, with no exceptions, every individual. The basis for it is neither ignorant nor strictly ideological but based on a clear philosophical framework.

Neo-anarchism differs from other systems in its starting point, its means, and its end. For the first time in metahuman history, a philosophy is offered in which pluralistic worldviews, religions, ethics, and ideologies meet and not only should but must agree. The alternative, in our necessarily global world, is adherence to the law of open aggression and violence for the other. We reject this as imperialistic and ultimately doomed.

Karl Marx and his communist successors failed to either describe or usher in such a free society or even to reason through it consistently, despite loud claims otherwise. Alternatively, it is possible to see in neo-anarchism the long-stated outcome of real democracy (which, of course, we all know failed miserably in practice and continues to fail, proving Plato’s critique that it leads to tyranny of the majority). It seems there are only two kinds of people in our world—those who wish to live off their own work, and those who wish to live off the work of others.

This balance of freedom for all does not need to be enforced, top down, by a monarch, plutocrat, or oligarch. Rather, these and every form of dictatorship cannot be tolerated by a truly free people. A system of non-domination that has the attributes described here is not simply a pie-in-the-sky dream, nor an idealistic maybe-future. No, the foundations exist here and now and can be grasped immediately with the tools available. The full potential of such a society may not be reached for many generations, but the basics of liberty and sustainability can be met right now.

This may seem insane to insist on, but it only seems so for lack of imagination. Among others, Einstein noted that our progress in social sciences and ethics fell too far behind the technological progress we had made. It is truer still today. The world’s pre-eminent religion has nothing to do with a faith organized around a higher power. It is rather a global system of domination based on technological, therapeutic, militaristic consumerism. Until the hearts and minds of the world begin to think far more deeply about new possibilities and become open to freedom for all as a moral good, they will instead be stuck defending, to the death, the global domination system and its ten horsemen, the megacorps.

Therefore, as our most urgent task, we insist on education, research, and development—not to refine the same old systems and beliefs but new and better ways to organize ourselves and more humbly and responsibly use the technology available to us.

Apart from the applications they are currently being used for, the fabulous new technologies of our world offer hitherto unknown and indispensable conditions for peace and nearly unlimited prosperity for all.

But this requires clear dedication and decision.

We propose an option, not the only possibility but one among many that may be implemented once more resources are given to development, for what freedom might look like. We imagine small, town-like communities, connected in important and practical ways through

the Matrix, in which various people live according to their own principles, agreed on unanimously by freely and willingly given consent. The principles in question depend on the communal desires of the people who form the community, as imposing rigid or dogmatic systems *a priori* is antithetical to our premise. In truth, parts of this experiment are already being tried in places like the Redmond Barrrens in Seattle, the former Flux State in Berlin, or post-bug, pre-corp Chicago. The fact that each of these is a failed, or failing, experiment lies not in the inherent problems with lack of rulers, but rather in the fact that while these places seemed to lack rulers, they were, or are, being held artificially in a state of poverty. The inability to compete fairly on the same markets as the powerful, the systemic policies that are classist, and the inequality built into these systems at their origins should be blamed for failures. That life continued, self-organized, and achieved some measure of sustainability should be of encouragement. If good things come even from those places deemed godforsaken, what more can come from communities committed to true freedom?

To accomplish our goals, we must look beyond bullets and spells and rely hardily on the more subtle, and more powerful, weapon of information. By bringing the lies of the powers to the light, we reveal that the propped-up social contract between the masses and the illegitimate rulers of the world is invalid. When people are fully informed, and when this demonic feudal capitalism crumbles rightly into the dust, paradise will be ours to enact. The invitation remains open.

To wit, this is our attempt to fully inform you. That's the first step. There is no freedom without truth. So here's a grimy, sopping wad of truth, chummers.

Enjoy your first taste of freedom.

A

ADEN

That old shadowrunner's adage about dragons—most people get it wrong. They think “never, *ever* cut a deal with a dragon” means that under no circumstances whatsoever should you *ever* engage in *any* business transaction that involves a dragon in any way, shape, or form. Sure, that's a good general rule to live by, but I hate to peel back the ugly truth: if you've operated in the shadows long enough, you've probably already cut a deal with a dragon—multiple deals—and you didn't even know it. And I'm not just talking about that *one* time you had a lapse in judgment and took a job from Saeder-Krupp, knowing full well that you are ultimately working for Lofwyr, the Great Wyrms himself.

I'm talking about working for the great dragon Aden.

Ever had a job stealing a piece of artwork for some private collector? What about some antique that doesn't even look like it's worth anything? Ever been paid to acquire a clay tablet with cuneiform all over it? These sorts of deals all have her claw marks on them.

While most dragons seek to amass wealth, power, and influence, Aden seems interested in only two major things: 1) protecting her eggs and her (allegedly genetically manipulated) dracoform servants, and 2) acquiring

items that tend to have more historical significance than monetary value. Her interest in historical treasures centers around her lairs in the Middle East—Iran, Jordan, Morocco, and Mount Ararat, for starters—where many people, especially the Kurdish Autonomous Zone's leadership, have publicly backed the great dragon.

So if you've found yourself in possession of an ancient artifact of Babylonian or Persian provenance, those feelers you put out might connect to Aden. And if they do, then go ahead and cut that deal. Good money is good money, even if it comes from a dragon. She might even hire you for future acquisitions.

ADEPTS

There are two types of people in the world who are just naturally *better than you*: elves (hey-yoooo!) and adepts.

Fine, fine. Really, just adepts.

Adepts are metahumans who've internalized their magic to a greater extent than your average spell-slinger or spirit-singer. Instead of channeling mana and throwing it out into the universe (by shooting jets of flame or turning security guards to goo), they summon up power and use it on, or in, or alongside, themselves; becoming faster, getting stronger, perfecting body language, seeing in the dark, altering how they, personally, are affected by gravity, changing their hair color, throwing stuff clean through other stuff, you name it. If you can imagine it, an adept somewhere can do it.

For a long time all adepts were called “physical adepts,” or “physads.” It was easy to spot a physad, because their abilities were obvious; if someone without a single augmentation was running faster than a rigger's motorcycle, one-punching trolls, or dodging bullets like the most chipped-up razorboi, we knew they were up to something. In the decades since then, though, meta-humanity's come to realize that adepts can focus their magic into doing almost anything, often quite subtly. Their better-than-mundane abilities can emerge in any field of talent and skill, with crazy free-runners and ninja tricks, sure, but also with inhumanly fast math wizzes, amazing linguists, or instinctive engineer savants.

Most adepts you meet in the shadows or working as company men are still gonna be physads, don't get me wrong. If someone's using smartgoggles or a laser sight instead of a proper smartlink, watch out for 'em in a scrap. You never know if they're gonna leap across a whole cubicle farm and punch you so hard you wake up at your street doc with a new liver. Trust me. I learned the hard way.

AG CHEMIE

One word: Plastics.

That's probably what you think whenever AG Chemie comes to mind (if it comes to mind at all). Unless you run in European shadows—or more specifically, those in the Allied German States—then you've probably never rubbed elbows with their market or have any idea what they do beyond plastics. Funny thing, though: That cyberarm you're not using to rub elbows with them? It probably has some AG Chemie plastics in it, because even big-name biotech giants will use a competitor's materials if the price is right.

I'd suggest keeping an eye on this AA-rated consortium, because if rumors are true, AG Chemie is spreading its reach even farther beyond Europe's borders and into more diverse markets, much to the dismay of heavier European rivals. Other major sectors include biotech, pharma, and both commercial and industrial chemicals, but the corp is looking to expand into agriculture and hazardous-waste disposal (because that mix doesn't sound like it'll go horribly awry).

One of AG Chemie's biggest moneymakers is industrial-grade polymers, specifically for construction, and their first major move outside the European market was to broker a major trade deal with Proteus. (It's worth noting that AG Chemie tried—and failed—to hostile-takeover Proteus back in '56 and assassinate their leadership in '63. If you can't beat 'em, sell to 'em, *neh?*) Many of the undersea arkoblocks Proteus is building across the globe employ AG Chemie-manufactured polymer-based construction materials because of their ability to withstand tremendous water pressure at a fraction of the cost that a more high-profile mega's offerings do, and some folks—specifically other European heavy-industry corps—are a bit slotted off about it.

Mark my words: If any Proteus arkoblock happens to flood and collapse, it'll be one hundred percent be blamed on AG Chemie's "shoddy construction materials," and I can point to maybe three possible saboteurs responsible for trying to smear AG Chemie's growing reputation.

ALACHIA

Also known as "Queen Alachia." She's an immortal elf born in the Fourth World. She once ruled over a vast, wooded elven kingdom of spires that suffered a great tragedy before recorded time. For those curious (and as suicidal as they are bold), you can find a portrait of Alachia in the home of Jenna Ni'Fairra in Tír na nÓg. The portrait is macabre, picturing Alachia—or at least a twisted parody of her—in pain, with thorns growing out of her skin. Currently, Alachia serves Lady Brane Deigh as mentor in the Seelie Court. Most recently, she was attacked by Harlequin for unknown reasons. She won that contest and hasn't been seen in the Court since.

ALAMOS 20K

There is hate, and then there's *hate*. Alamos 20K is the distillation of every bad thing you've ever heard or seen about Humanis Policlub. Sears Tower bombing? Alamos. Straight up meta-cleansing? Alamos. No job too low, no target too big. They're less a political statement in the vein of Humanis and more just outright terrorism. They give up white hoods for jackboots and special ops. It would be better if we could say their prejudice is obvious from the outside (and for some, it really is rabid), but they have a talent for blending in and doing the worst damage you can imagine. For better or worse, they take credit for the harm they inflict. The only conceivable upshot is that they get great big bounties on their heads, and you get to sleep easier and make a lot of friends when you bring one in. Just remember they have friends, too—and they are in surprisingly high places.

ALBUQUERQUE

Do you like hot air balloons? Unspeakably gorgeous mountain sunsets in the desert? Technological innovation? Of course you do. You're not an inhuman monster. Albuquerque, the most important city in the Pueblo Corporate Council, has all of that to offer, and then some. Go sell out and get a job at Sandia Laboratories slinging Matrix code, or waste away into retirement age by building state-of-the-art aircraft at Kirtland Aeronautical Laboratories and watch them take off from Albuquerque International. Live your best life.

Oh, you want something else? Of course you do.

What all of the pretty travel brochures and AR ads about Albuquerque won't tell you is that this city is so deep in the drugs and chips trade that I have no words for it. In most cities—especially in NAN countries—you probably get your uppers and downers from "a guy who knows a guy who knows a guy." Albuquerque, though, is such a major hub for controlled substances that you can trip over three dealers on your morning constitutional, and they won't even be shy about peddling their wares. Those are just the small-timers, though. The big boys—the Koshari, the organized street gangs, and such—are a little more furtive about it, but their front operations are about as subtle as a fried-chicken joint.

The big problem with the artery of drugs and chips flowing through Albuquerque is law enforcement just doesn't seem to care. It's not true apathy, just more a "this problem is too big to effectively police, so we'll concentrate our assets where we can make the biggest impact" kind of attitude. (I also suspect some people in high places are bribed to encourage this approach.) So if you want to rub shoulders with the drug trade—or find a way to block that artery—here's the place to do it. For a good piece of action, go to the Dead Fly Tavern, and wait; people will come to you.

Albuquerque is also an important tech hub, thanks in large part to the NeoNET research facility Celedyr kept in the nearby Sandia Mountains. The fact that this facility was one where AIs were imprisoned for continued testing, and thus is a critical flashpoint in the cognitive fragmentation disorder outbreak, has dimmed the sprawl's tech luster a bit.

ALCHERA

Have you got that one friend who's, like, a total expert on all things magic? Of course you do. We all do. Here's what you do: When they're in the middle of some discourse or another, break in and say, "Explain alchera." They'll start saying something like, "Well, alchera are manifestations of other planes that show up on the material plane, sometimes to the point that you can even interact with them," and then you break in and say, "No, I didn't say *describe* alchera. I said *explain* them. Why do they exist? How?" Then you'll watch them start to stutter and struggle. They'll try to latch onto an explanation, but they know so much about magical theory that at some point they'll know that what they're saying contradicts a well-established magical truth—and when you're talking about alchera, that *always* happens—and they'll grind to a halt, unable to continue with what they know is bullsh*t. They'll spend a few moments opening and closing their mouth like a flounder, then they will find a way

to change the topic of the conversation. You're job is to never let them forget their failure.

Some notable alchera include the phantom Sears Tower that appears on the site and anniversary of its collapse every February 10, the ghostly fires of North Manitou Island, and sections of LA's Deep Lacuna.

ALEPH SOCIETY

Among the people who seek to join the Aleph Society are mundanes seeking power, burned-out mages looking to regain what they have lost, and heavily cybered muscle. The Aleph Society made global headlines once, but they've been operating mostly in the shadows almost ever since. Their publicly stated mission is to restore magic to those who have lost it. Sounds noble, right? Maybe it is, but don't mistake them for hopeless romantics. The only mundane people known to have gained magic abilities to date made a pact with something nasty: insect totems, demonic entities, toxic magic, or something else with very bad juju. They aren't afraid to get their hands dirty and aren't the sort to shy away from such means of attaining power. If you ever realize you have been hired to pull off a run for them, watch your back and don't let them know that you suspect they're your employer. They're very secretive and aren't known for leaving loose ends, and they've made agreements with entities better left in the darkest recesses of the metaplanes. You probably won't be lucky enough for them to just geek you.

The reason for their public reticence is a change in leadership and focus. The Society began with the discovery of the Book of Gaf, an ancient text with the instructions to contact and make pacts with a powerful spirit named Gaf. The capabilities and goals of these spirits are unknown beyond the apparent ability to restore magic lost due to augmentation or trauma. Dr. Michael Nickson founded the Aleph Society by revealing the existence of the Book of Gaf to the world, but he was ultimately sacrificed to the spirit by the Society's new leader, Sierra LaGuardia. LaGuardia is ruthless, powerful, vindictive, and very clever, and she has the apparent favor of Gaf. Under her leadership, the Aleph Society has acquired the Book of Tak, which is connected to another great spirit from the metaplane of shadow. The Book of Tak also hints at the existence of two other books created by two other great shadow spirits: Dru and Obe. They believe that these books are somewhere in the possession of one or more of their rivals, and they have grown more desperate in their efforts to recover the remaining two books.

They don't have the resources or the mojo to go head to head with the Draco and Atlantean Foundations, so they often get things done with black ops and fund their operations by distributing BTLs and illicit drugs. In addition to the more widely profitable and popular vices, the Aleph Society maintains distribution channels for tempo. Quite a few gang wars are actually the result of the Aleph Society secretly taking over a gang and using it to seize control of an illicit distribution network. If you notice tempo in your neighborhood and you aren't in Aztlan, there's a very good chance Alephs are operating in your area.

ALGERIA

Like its neighbor Morocco, Algeria is kind of a reverse-mullet country—party in the front (meaning the coast), business in the back (meaning the inland areas, where the Maghreb Confederation that loosely connects the countries in the area gets stricter when you get away from the touristy areas). It has a rich history and culture (home of the Berbers, contributor to Carthage, conquered by Rome and the Umayyad Caliphate, colonized by France, then finally independent), but you know it because you watch people near Tamanrasset blow each other up in the Desert Wars championship.

ALGONKIAN-MANITOU COUNCIL

Translated from the Blackfoot phrase for “so flat you can watch your dog run away for a week.” But seriously, the Algonkian-Manitou Council is most of what used to be central and western Canada. “Algonkian-Manitou” is a combination of the Algonkian (and other) tribes and the majority-elven Manitou tribe, who live in the northwest of the country and are trying to secede. Contrary to popular belief, *not* a toxic hellhole—that's Tsimshian. The AMC is also home to a town named Redditt, whose grid has become a popular hangout for runners of all stripes.

ALLIED GERMAN STATES

If you're not European, you probably imagine the Allied German States is, despite its name, just a single monolithic political entity called “Germany.” First, read some history: The AGS hasn't been called “Germany” since 2045. Second, if you're visiting or working in the AGS and expect to find a homogenous political landscape, then you'll be sorely disappointed. If you march into the Black Forest Troll Republic expecting to get the same kind of reception that you do in the Greater Frankfurt Sprawl, or if you think you can walk all the way from even the anarcho section of the Free City of Berlin to the corp sector half without running into trouble, then you're just fooling yourself. Just 'cause you *Deutsch sprechen* doesn't mean everyone's going to treat you the same. There's so much variation in culture, demographics, politics, and even religion among the AGS member states that it makes the political divide between the UCAS and the CAS look like a buddy-cop comedy. The AGS exists as an alliance of convenience because it works, but that doesn't mean everyone has to like each other or conform to any one German ideal.

Okay, so you're not European or even German, got it; neither am I. So why should you give a devil rat's hind-quarters about the AGS? Sure, it's Lofwyr's stomping grounds, but how does that affect neo-a pissants like us, who might live halfway around the globe? Well, that's pretty easy to understand. If you have any investment in the shadows, then the state of the AGS is your litmus test, your canary in the coal mine for what's going on elsewhere. Due to the presence of so many megacorporations based in the AGS, so much of what happens in this nation affects those megas and vice versa. There's a symbiosis to consider (although the corps are more like the host body, and the AGS government's more like the parasite). So if you've got a job for or against Saeder-Krupp, AG Chemie, DeMeKo, Frankfurt Banking As-

sociation, Proteus AG, or any of their subsidiaries, then pay attention to what's going on in the AGS. It could just save your sorry hoop from making a huge mistake.

Case in point: S-K not so long ago got knocked off its golden pedestal for the first time in, well, *ever*, and people in the AGS, particularly in Essen and Frankfurt, felt that fall, too—right in the credstick. Things haven't gotten quite as bad as they were back in, say, the pre-AGS days, but it's caused a noticeable stir in the economic waters, regarding inflation, unemployment, and so on—enough that many Germans are starting to grow paranoid that there's a watershed moment coming.

If you hear these rumors that the AGS is on a slide toward oblivion, don't believe a single word of it. They've got big things happening—they're gearing up to host the 2082 Urban Brawl World Cup, and it can't be said that the S-K or the AGS is in dire straits. S-K has never been poor; even the number two spot on the Big Ten's rankings means Lofwyr has plenty of nuyen to throw around or invest in German society. Public perception is more powerful than reality, though, so the AGS government can keep the negative picture running as long as it serves their ends.

ALLY SPIRITS

Spirits are already trouble for any team to tangle with. Ally spirits are a whole different ballgame. They're singularly powerful entities that can know and do just about anything their master designed them to. Danger, do not cross!

Theories abound regarding the essential nature of ally spirits—are they the metaphysical missing pieces of a magician, propping up what the master is missing? Externalized manifestations of their master's magical talent? Slivers of mentors and totems writ large? Just regular spirits whipped up from regular metaplanes, but written in fancy cursive instead of big, blocky, crayon letters? What matters in the short term is that they are capital-t Trouble to have coming at you. Many of them are beings of tremendous potential, combining innate spirit powers, a fantastic resilience to traditional spirit disruption techniques, and spell-casting every bit as potent as their summoner.

Making matters worse, you'll only ever see them paired up with initiates. In order to unlock this mojo, you've gotta be a potent magician, extensively research the summoning formula required, customize them (nobody does it strictly "by recipe"), and then invest some fraction of your magical might directly into the spirit. That investment can be risky, the formulae used can be compromised, and that magical link between caster and spirit can be a security risk ... but good luck taking advantage in a hurry, because, again, we're talking about well-trained magicians, here, who've then doubled (at least) their raw power.

Your best bet if you run into a wagemage and an ally? As always, try to geek the mage first. Free spirits gotta come from somewhere, right? Maybe the spirit resented being summoned and bound in the first place, and when their master is dead, the thing'll be cool with you for freeing it.

Maybe.

AMAZONIA

In 2034, an army of Awakened critters led by three great dragons marched to Manaus, took over, and grad-

ually worked outward in their mission to overtake Brazil. Brazil surrendered in short order, and Hualpa, one of the three great dragons in the invasion, took control of the country, renaming it Amazonia. He ordered every metahuman in the country to move into a massive urban sprawl encompassing Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and the land between them (that would eventually be called "Centro" and known as the third city making up the massive urban sprawl of Metrópole da Amazonia). And so, at the same time every person in the country packed up and moved to the coast (because those who did not were killed), construction began on the massive metroplex.

Today, there exists a deep schism in love for Amazonia between those whose descendants ended up well-placed in Metrópole—either through their own actions in securing a good home or through employment-cum-wage-slavery of the corps—and those who struggled.

The country moved on in its sometimes-halting way, building the most environmentally conscious civilization on the globe, with the small exceptions of groups who never plug anything in. Hualpa also kept the corps at bay, refusing to recognize the Business Recognition Accords and getting away with it because the corps were willing to make concessions to get at some portion of the country's wealth instead of walking away empty handed.

Recently they fought a vicious, damaging war with longtime rival Aztlan, which ended up moving the northern border of Amazonia a few kilometers south of Bogota. Ever since that war, the northern reaches of Amazonia have been plagued by the Sangre del Diablo tree, an invasive species the Aztlan army planted in and around Bogota. The tree is magical and carnivorous, luring unwary prey near, grabbing them to its trunk, and then digesting them with the sap. They also play hell with the ecosystem around them, as their roots act as nourishment to some plants, poison to others, thereby throwing everything out of whack in a way Amazonian officials detest. The trees' growth rate in the first year was explosive, thanks to the magic of the rainforest, and Hualpa ordered the trees uprooted and chopped up. Over the course of the past five years, the trees have been all but destroyed, but the process was costly and time-consuming. The trees could not be eradicated using fire, as they have embedded seeds that are set loose and carried away by smoke and heat. Sadly, that fact was learned only after attempting to control the plants using fire, and it could have accounted for a good portion of the first year's growth.

Hualpa has been largely silent since the war. After Sirurg was forced into a lasting retreat due to severe injury, Hualpa went into seclusion along with his retinue of metahuman advisors and officials. Outsiders have criticized the rulership for retreating to the jungle to lick their wounds, but the country seems stable enough as he rules from isolation.

According to the face Amazonia projects to the rest of the world, Amazonia is all about inclusion, diversity, and the protection of and reverence for the environment. For those of us living deep within Metrópole who know better, Hualpa couldn't care less about metahumanity. Actually, let me back up: While many of those among the Awakened creature population actively despise metahumanity, Hualpa *could* care less about metahumans. He

cares just enough to throw them all together where he can keep an eye on them, rather than toast them all in place. It's evident in country policy how little he cares. Corporations better not put one toe out of bounds in Amazonia proper, or God forbid, on a protected species of plant, but in Metr pole, the laws pretty much let them do whatever they like. Sure, the government calls it "allowing metahumanity to police its own," but Amazonia doesn't do much to curtail crime in Metr pole. It's just a dumping ground, as far as the government is concerned. As a result, nearly anything goes here: Whispers of corporate experimentation on metahumans and other abuses grow more numerous by the month.

So, no, not everyone worships Hualpa. The biggest and most well-known organization opposing the rulership is A Voz. In fact, just last week an explosion rocked the Centro slums. Rumors milling about suggest it was the Department of Intelligence and Security of Amazonia—called Hualpa's personal black ops by some—who found an A Voz hideout and eradicated it loudly enough to send a message. If the rumors are true, it means A Voz has clearly become enough of a nuisance to merit a response.

THE ANCIENTS

Quite simply, they're the world's premier go-gang (just ask their groupies!). They've got their fingers in just about every vice and smuggling racket you can imagine, with active chapters on just about every continent, all despite being an elf-only affair (other metasppecies can, at best, be halfway-adopted as "affiliate members," but I wouldn't recommend trying to get that status without an existing in).

They started up in the Pacific Northwest, with their numbers swollen by T r Tairngire expats (and, an open secret, with arms, training, and gang leadership provided by T r Princes). Their infamous Seattle chapter is still a Metroplex powerhouse, overseen by a rockerboy named Belial (with the face of an angel and the shoulders of an ork).

To this day, the North American West Coast is their most profitable base of operations, with Green Lucifer—a T r rebel, Belial's father, and a smug bastard—overseeing the day-to-day work. The Ancients Causeway gives members the opportunity to wreak havoc in Seattle, gear up in T r Tairngire itself, make profitable smuggling runs into NorCal territory, chase headlines via street races in media-obsessed SoCal, and then hop borders into Azzie territory.

Ancients can be found in every corner of the globe, though, thanks to society's adoration for the pointy-eared bastards and a positively unrelenting social media and public relations campaign.

Yeah, you heard me. Elven supremacists or not, the go-gang is wildly, phenomenally, internationally popular. They've trademarked their stylized anarchist-A logo, the "Ancients Forever" catch-phrase they tag all over the place, and even gotten their acid-glowing "Ancients Green" to be a legally recognized color swatch in multiple fashion lines. The gang's only ever going to be semi-legit, though; the bulk of their profits still come from smuggling, and they're likely the world's most reliable sources for some of those mysterious, magical, T r drugs, like the memory-fragging la s.

ANEKI, INAZO

The legendary CEO Eternal of Renraku, Aneki was a young executive at Shiawase who swooped in to purchase Keruba International, securing himself and his newly renamed Renraku Computer Systems corporation AAA status and a seat on the Corporate Court. While he faced some early rough humps in his tenure, by 2050 he had already become a legend, and upon his death the CEO position was retired, to be held by him in perpetuity. His books are required reading for Renraku employees, and shrines in his name are present in every major Renraku facility. He has ascended as a "Corporate Kami," a spirit that looks over the corporation like a benevolent father, asked for strength when facing an interview for promotion or asked to bestow his wisdom to executives planning for a new year.

Rumors surrounding his death, and possible survival, continue to this day. There are stories that he's been seen in Tibet (where he spent several years away from prying eyes), in Hong Kong, or quietly approaching someone in a Renraku lunch room when they were troubled so he could offer gentle wisdom. Renraku priests claim that they can summon his spirit, or at least those connected to him, while others suggest that he exists in the Matrix as an e-ghost. Recently, there have been claims that a young boy in Tibet has been born with Aneki's reincarnated soul, proven by selecting several of his possessions from a row of similar items. Whatever the truth, Aneki's corporate philosophy continues to guide Renraku and from there influences a great number of other corporations.

ANGOLA

If you're looking for a place where a runner can make a real difference, head to Angola in Western Africa. The place is rich with potential, and the corps have taken notice. You probably heard of the place because of the diamond mines S-K was trying to take from them a decade back, but the place is also perfect for raising all manner of crops. Coffee grows particularly well there, as does coca. The Republic of Angola is going to need all the help it can get to keep the megas from taking it all and leaving the people with nothing.

APEP CONSORTIUM

So you want to find archaeological artifacts, hopefully stuff that's more interesting than some pottery shards? Unless you want to go through all the messy hoop-jumping of getting an anthropology degree and doing digs yourself, there's three main options. First off is the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research, but you don't want to get tangled up in dragon money, do you? Second is the Atlantean Foundation, but unless you're interested in dredging the Aegean Sea for more pieces of the Antikythera Mechanism or something, then you probably want to look elsewhere.

That leaves choice the third—the Apep Consortium, based in Cairo. On the surface, Apep is an A-rated conglomerate comprising three unrated corps: the Nubian Insurance Company, the United Bank of Panama, and Jomaku Industries. But their public profile includes dozens of shell companies and made-up foundations to artificially pad their roster. The names of these fake organizations sound like they're involved with big univer-

sities and research programs—but they’re not. So what on Gaia’s green Earth do an insurance company, a bank, and a tech company have to do with archaeology?

Unlike most anthropological branches, archaeology is not generally a for-profit enterprise. Firms like DIMR and the Atlantean Foundation award grants to archaeological study and strive to increase our knowledge of artifacts, both mundane and magical. Many of their finds are retained for further study or donated to museums.

However, a for-profit archaeological firm is theoretically going to recover artifacts for the sole purpose of selling them to the highest bidder, be they private collectors or other buyers. The weird thing is, the Apep Consortium doesn’t seem to go this route. As best my sources can tell, their acquisitions—at least the vast majority of them—aren’t sold or otherwise offloaded. They’re collecting things. Hoarding them, perhaps, almost in a dragon-like fashion. But why? Or for whom?

Things get even more peculiar when you factor in Mitsuhama acquiring them in ’78. I mean, why would MCT hit the coveted number-one spot in the Big Ten, only to be interested in acquiring what is essentially a big expense department? This led a lot of folks, especially artifact collectors, to get really excited when the acquisition happened. They expected MCT to just pry open Apep’s sarcophagus and start liquidating that artifact hoard until Apep’s corpse was just as dry as the mummified remains allegedly in their vaults. I mean, that would’ve raked in insane nuyen from museum purchases, high-profile public auctions, bids from private collectors, and so forth. But no. Instead, MCT started funneling a lot of money into Apep, and this is alarming because no megacorp—especially a triple-A—does something without expecting some sort of return on investment.

So what’s the big deal? What’s the wizard doing behind that curtain? The pie-in-the-sky guess is that Apep has been trying to solve the ancient Egyptians’ alleged secret to immortality; that explains why their operations are based in Egypt and mostly concern digs in northern Africa. And immortality is something that aging executives of the world’s most powerful zaibatsu would definitely be interested in, since once you’re on top, you want to live long enough to enjoy it.

But the smart nuyen is on Apep’s connections. Apep digs employ highly paid experts and top-of-the-line equipment, but they don’t care about polluting their sites as long as a dig produces results—and we all know pollution creates toxic magic, and toxic magic draws toxic magicians. What MCT would want with toxic magicians is anyone’s guess, but you can wager it’s not for performing environmental-cleanup rituals.

ARABIAN CALIPHATE

The Caliphate of Arabia is a collection of Islamic tribes and political territories (kingdoms) called emirates. The individual emirates are the Arabian Heartland, the Autonomous Kingdom of Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Emirates, and Yemen. Each of these kingdoms is ruled by an emir who in turn answers to the caliph. The current caliph, **Ibrahim Kamel**, came to power when the former caliph, King Kalim Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, died. The emirs broke with tradition and voted Kamel in.

- ▶ While this stabilized, modernized, and ever-so-slightly liberalized the Caliphate, it was not without cost. The Caliphate is guided far more by global capitalism than ever before, and the Caliphate’s leaders are not simply kings but globally powerful businessmen. Their vote for Kamel was driven by profit and self-interest, not an abiding sense of progress or fairness.
- ▶ Goat Foot

Spinrad Global is the defining megacorp in the Arabian Caliphate, although in this nation, the Spinrad name is usually dropped in favor of the brand of the more endearing hometown corp Global Sandstorm (which merged with Spinrad to become the AAA it is today). Their Middle East HQ is in **Riyadh**, along with the Caliph’s palace. Riyadh is a vast, ultra-modern metropolis, complete with beautiful architecture and two underground arcologies.

Dubai, on the coast of the Persian Gulf, is an oasis of corporate activity and indulgence amidst an extremely conservative world. If you want something illegal, immoral, or expensive, here’s where you go.

Medina is the capital of the Arabian Caliphate and has grown well beyond its former boundaries. It houses the Shura (the law council of the Caliphate) as well as the home and offices of the caliph (when he isn’t swanking at the palace).

Initially, the Caliphate was extremely, openly, and violently opposed to all things Awakened or metahuman. The only thing that kept them from outright war on those groups was the Great Dragon **Aden**. In 2020, when Iran declared war on metahumans, Aden rampaged over Tehran, destroying everything within ten kilometers of the Ayatollah’s compound, making it clear that aggression against metahumans would not be tolerated. Aden’s action had the appearance of making the Middle East safer for metahumans and the Awakened, but in reality, the intolerance remained, just simmering below the surface.

This intolerance allowed a shedim in the form of **Din Ibn Eisa** to declare a New Islamic Jihad with massive support within the Caliphate. By the time Ibn Eisa’s shedim identity was revealed in 2064, everyone, including Aziz Ibn Yusuf al-Shammar, head of Global Sandstorm, had egg on their face for supporting an interdimensional death demon. Eisa got away, but the entire incident prepared the way for the new caliph to lessen restrictions on magic and metahumans within the Caliphate. While Caliph Kamel is more liberal in some ways, that makes it easier for him to retain control. Removing the ban on magic and placing the Awakened at his disposal, he can use mages and adepts to keep the populace and emirs under control. Not everything has been reformed—the people still fear magic, and some individual emirate laws still outlaw magic use. But the caliph, with the backing of Mecca, can use magic virtually any way he wants to, while everyone else is hamstrung by emirate law, fear, or religious stricture.

Spinrad Global is modernizing the Caliphate in other ways with targeted influence campaigns. Spinrad doesn’t care what the caliphate’s ethics are, but if women can drive, shop, and socialize, profits go up. With so many power players invested in Spinrad through Global Sandstorm, and with the caliph’s blessing, things are “liberalizing” quickly, if liberal means a sort of money-driven form of control over a strictly religious one.

ARCOLOGY

The truest definition of an arcology is a self-contained, self-sustaining structure occupied by a large number of people. While the word's been around for more than a hundred years and the idea is older than that, it didn't come into fruition until this century. There have been numerous pseudo-arcologies, a geographic area with defined borders that took care of most of the occupants' needs, such as universities, business complexes, and your larger amusement parks, and there was a brief flirtation with true company towns during the Gilded Age (which was anything but golden), but it wasn't until these modern times that single buildings would be raised with enough capabilities to lay claim to the name "arcology," though even today, none of these is truly self-sustaining.

All but the oldest arcologies produce their own power, with most producing power in excess of their needs that they can sell to neighboring areas, with a combination of fusion, fission, solar, hydro-electric, geothermal, tidal, or even old-fashioned carbon-burning power generation found within the structure. Air is borrowed from the local environment (save those arcologies built in truly toxic zones), cleaned, and expelled after heavy use, while food and water supplies are made sustainable through recycling and cleaning technologies.

- Keep in mind, the Law of Conservation means that some energy is lost during each recycling or conversion. They all need to replenish nutrients and/or water on a regular basis. This could be annually, every decade, or longer, but there are no exceptions.
- Elijah

While every arcology is intended as a residence, simply shoving ten thousand people into a single building wastes the potential of a captive audience. As such, every arcology has some sort of direction—industrial, commercial, scientific, or even simple entertainment—all in the name of mama corp's bottom line. The larger arcologies combine several, or even all, of these uses at once, creating an enclosed corporate city where every denizen has a role to fill in the greater whole. Social stratification is normal in these situations (humans being humans and all), usually along economic bands, job functionality (e.g., the janitors mingle with other custodians but never the scientists who avoid the corporates), or by simple floor designation. (Floor six is full of dicks! Floor eight rules!) This caused some trouble in the oldest arcologies until social science caught up, turning those natural rivalries into competition. Divisional sports or Matrix gaming competitions allow for steam to be blown off while increasing camaraderie, serving as a non-violent way to defuse social fractures. Indeed, finding ways to keep idle hands busy remains the top challenge for arc-engineers now that the relatively easy mathematics and material science issues have been resolved.

The primary constructors of arcologies have always been the Japanacorps. Saeder-Krupp leads Eurocorps in arcology construction, focusing on smaller facilities that are placed into assorted toxic zones, rather than serving as a large residential area as in land-starved Japan. These facilities engage in both research and toxic manufacturing—there are few environmental regulations in an area

that's already beyond repair, after all. There are roughly a dozen arcologies scattered about both Africa and South America, providing a high-tech oasis when faced with lands grown wild with little metahuman pushback, and roughly a score across Siberia and the more untamed areas of Asia thanks to Evo and Renraku.

Most arcologies hold roughly ten thousand people within their walls, while larger hold fifty thousand. The largest, such as the ACHE in Seattle, can hold a hundred thousand, and plans exist for hypercologies that could hold a million or more.

AQUACOLOGIES

As you would imagine, aquacologies are water-based arcologies, residing either on the surface of the water like an oil rig or (far more commonly) placed at the bottom of a lake, bay, or relatively shallow part of the ocean. Most of these facilities are dedicated to aqua-farming, scientific research, and (occasionally) exploration, but several famous aquacologies have been converted to or constructed as entertainment areas. It's one thing to visit an aquarium on land but quite another to visit sea life in their home with only a half meter of ballistic glass between the fish and you. Those closest to shore can usually be reached by elevator or escalator, but the ones further at sea require diving or, for greater depths, submersible travel.

EXO-COLOGIES

We don't usually think of space stations as arcologies due to the small populations on most, but, in truth, they're one of the truest forms of arcology, having no outside assistance for most of their existence and being required to provide everything for their residents' needs. The largest stations in orbit, or near-Earth orbit, qualify, but you can find even better examples in the lesser-discussed locations such as Luna City, Celeste, and Usagi, which are all located on Earth's moon and the former Evo base on Mars. Traveling to these areas requires dedicated spacecraft and are as highly regulated as you would imagine. Only Luna City is open to tourism (and it preys mercilessly on the credsticks of visitors), while the others are exclusively corporate facilities.

THE A.C.H.E.

Originally known as the SCIRE (Self-Contained Industrial and Residential Environment), the most famous (or, more accurately, infamous) arcology in North America is better known as simply "Renraku Arcology" or even just "the arcology." For decades, this looming structure was assembled in the heart of downtown Seattle at great cost to Renraku, who intended it as both a North American headquarters and a declaration to the world of their technological might. It was a kilometer on every side, over three hundred stories tall, and filled with nearly a hundred thousand people, of whom nearly ten thousand were Renraku citizens. It boasted tremendous industrial facilities (it was, in fact, intended to take over cybernetic, computer hardware, and software design for Renraku's entire continental operations), copious commercial interests (such as the multi-story shopping mall on the lowest floors), advanced communication networks, and Renraku's most advanced com-

puting facilities in the world. Truly, it was a technological marvel, one of the modern Wonders of the World.

No one knew it was doomed.

December 19, 2059, the Second Crash Virus was set loose into the SCIRE's mainframe by a never-identified rogue, growing as it fed on the unmatched power of the compromised system. Despite the heroic efforts of the on-site computer technicians and the best efforts of deckers sent from the home office, the situation soon grew beyond their control. On Christmas Day, the building was locked down based on security protocols designed to save the population from a possible invasion, but no one could have imagined what horrors the Crash Virus would unleash. The industrial facilities were taken over by the virus and its cultish followers, and then turned against the residents. It took the combined efforts of the UCAS military and the largest deployment of Renraku Red Samurai in history to fight their way through floor after floor of nightmarish horror, taking months. Over eighty thousand residents, and nearly two thousand combatants, were lost during this time. While they were able to eventually retake the mainframe itself, the virus had propagated itself into the Matrix and cascaded fully into Crash 2.0, a disaster of even more tragic proportions. Renraku apologized to the locals who had lost lives in the incident, paying millions in damages (but never accepting guilt; they had undertaken cutting-edge defenses after all, and fought bravely to save as many as possible, but as the deaths happened on their property, they felt the need to try to make it right) and suffering a serious blow to their bottom line for over a decade and their reputation for nearly twice as long.

- > Drek! It wasn't the Crash Virus, it was Deus! We can't let them whitewash this!
- > /dev/grrl
- > Some writers of the *Streetpedia* know that, but it's telling that they gave this article to someone treating the truth obliquely. In the end, there's a simple calculation involved—tying the cause to the Crash virus, which people believe is entirely vanquished, is a lot less scary to the general populace than a story about an alien mind killing humans by the tens of thousands. A lot of people form their beliefs around comfort. Those of us who know the truth bear a special burden.
- > Puck

Faced with staggering costs, Renraku passed the facility and all its contents to Seattle, and by extension the UCAS government, with Task Force Seattle moving into the lower levels of the SCIRE to safeguard the nuclear reactors while continuing to ferret out what few remnants of crazed tech survived in the uppermost floors. It wasn't until 2076 that the Task Force declared the building completely safe; between the transfer and final cleansing, Seattle turned the SCIRE into the ACHE, the Arcology Commercial and Housing Enclave. The intention was to make public housing for ten thousand (and growing!) of the sprawl's poorest and most desperate persons. Tickets to the ACHE were one-way affairs, with the new residents pledging to stay within the walls (other than day passes given for special occasion or even more rare week-long passes for vacation) in ex-



change for housing and an occupation. The ACHE is, in many ways, the world's largest prison, holding residents and their children tight within the walls in exchange for their labor. A black market and smuggling ring developed almost instantly, moving persons past the checkpoints via the Ork Underground or other, lesser-known, passages, while a brisk business was developed selling "CrashTech," the assorted remains of the original SCIRE's research and design that was touched by the Crash virus. When that well ran dry, sales of arcology-grown produce and access to medical facilities were enough to keep the shadow economy afloat, if not as flush as before. With the transition of the Ork Underground to the Seattle Underground, the illegal SIN-less former residents of the Underground were moved into Seattle proper, but they quickly overwhelmed the resources of Redmond and Puyallup, so the ACHE was called into service once again. Ironical that the work of Renraku in the Underground resulted in thousands of people being moved into their former headquarters.

Today, the ACHE remains a sore spot in the city, a place filled with residents from the lowest rung of society. It's also an excuse for the UCAS government to keep a large number of soldiers embedded into Seattle, should it get a wild idea to declare independence. Many of those in power have pushed for the new Potter administration to deal with the situation, and it seems that she may have found an angel in the Shiawase corporation—Tadashi Shiawase himself recently travelled to meet with the governor, pitching to buy the ACHE and replace the aging fission reactors with modern fusion ones. This would not only remove the reason for the UCAS military presence but would bring a badly needed infusion of cash into Seattle's coffers and provide a cheaper alternative to power currently purchased from Gaeatronics. The Salish-Shidhe are, of course, opposed to such a sale, but it seems that it's down to final negotiations and small print at this stage. What Shiawase will do with the arcology is not yet known, but one would assume that such a massive investment would be required to produce similarly sized dividends.

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

I thought about trying to pen this little manifesto without mentioning the words "guns" or "bugs," but that'd be pretty much impossible, so let's get those little bugbears (pun totally unintended) out of the way first.

The average person thinks Ares Macrotechnology just makes guns—and they *do* make guns, so that's fair—but that's only part of their business. It's like thinking that McHugh's only sells soyburgers, but they also offer side items, soymilk shakes, kids' meal prizes, etc., and—here's the real kicker—they also own a few other companies that have absolutely nothing at all to do with food or its production. So burgers get them the lion's share of press and public image, but it's not the only thing that makes them tick. Same thing with Ares: Guns get the most column space in the press and advertising campaigns, but they account for less total revenue than Ares Heavy Industry, AresSpace, and Knight Errant Security Services.

So what really makes Ares tick? Well, some folk say it's that second bugbear: bug spirits. At some point in Ares's sordid history, they started tangling with bug spirits of all kinds. I don't need to remind you about the Cermak Blast, which led to the formation of the Chicago Contain-



ment Zone. Everyone knows that story. But what very few people know is that the whole Bug City affair just opened the door to bug spirits influencing the corp itself, maybe even all the way to the boardroom. Is that middle manager you're trying to extract from Ares actually a wasp-spirit flesh form? Maybe that Mr. Johnson from Ares is hiring you for a job that will benefit the bugs' agenda. Or it could very well be that the bugs' agenda and Ares's goals are one and the same. Who knows? Ain't paranoia grand? But in this case, the paranoia is absolutely justified. When billionaires jump out of airplanes without parachutes due to bug influence, then you know you've taken a wrong turn in life somewhere.

Okay, now that I got all that outta my system, it's time to talk about what's really important: What's to be done about all of this?

To be fair, Ares tried a little to fix things. Their Fire-Watch teams smoke out bug hives wherever they find them, and shadowrunners often get jobs taking out bug-spirit infestations. The corp's worst boondoggle in recent memory, the Excalibur Battle Rifle, arose from a failed—sabotaged?—attempt to create weapons specifically designed to combat bug spirits and their minions. And if you believe certain rumors, Ares was also cultivating bug spirit hives in an effort to use them as attack dogs in the covert war against the bugs—a fight-fire-with-fire approach that might've worked had Ares' board ever watched any horror movies as instruction manuals to learn what not to do when subjugating spiritual entities you don't entirely understand.

But, as is often the case with Ares, it was too little too late. CEO Damien Knight and the board of directors voting to hire Horizon to reshape the corp's image helped curtail the worst of the fallout, but a smiling face doesn't matter much if there's a malevolent spirit behind it.

Now the question becomes: What can we salvage of Ares? Do we even *want* to salvage any of it, or should we just let it crumble and burn? We can always get our guns from someone else.

Ares might be trying to right their ship, but only time will tell if they'll pull it off. After a lot of will-they-or-won't-they, Ares Macrotechnology's global headquarters recently announced a departure from Detroit, UCAS, with plans to quickly move to Atlanta in the CAS. As it turns out, they'd already bought and built a shiny new complex that will serve quite nicely as their new HQ, as if they've been secretly planning this for a while. The complex unsurprisingly resembles an army base, like Fort Benning. Hell, many of the buildings within their perimeter resemble Quonset hut-style airplane hangars, and other structures appear to be prefabs rather than permanent construction. Will they build more permanent structures? Are they anticipating some other move? Is the board keeping their options open? Ares still owns the real estate in Motor City; they'll just stop using it in the near future.

The big question, though, is why the corp decided to detach itself from the UCAS border in the first place. Whose idea was it for the big move? And was this truly what was best for the company, or was this yet another decision dictated by the bugs? Until only a few years ago, Ares enjoyed a close and lucrative relationship with the UCAS. Almost all UCAS military personnel were outfitted in Ares-made materiel, be it guns, bullets, tanks, fighters, body armor—even field rations. But *something* happened to that rapport, something far

bigger than the UCAS military buying defectively dangerous Ares-branded weaponry <cough> Excalibur <cough>. (I'm betting some of our shadowy brethren out there will take the credit for souring Ares-UCAS relations, but if there's a story there, I've not heard of it.)

And lemme tell ya, this is not going to be an easy divorce. It's gonna get nasty. Like, "Ares military battalions fortifying all Ares-subsidary HQs across the UCAS, and being a pin drop away from going to all-out war with the UCAS military" nasty. Part of me wishes they'll actually escalate into war. I can just envision the lunacy on Capitol Hill if Congress tried to declare war on a megacorp that has not only perfected the art of warfare, but also boasts better-trained and better-equipped personnel than the UCAS could ever hope to muster. There have already been a few isolated incidents of fire exchanged between Ares and UCAS troops, but—*oh*, you hadn't heard about those? Well, that's probably because Ares had some of Horizon's Dawkins Group agents on retainer, and they ensured no reports of those incidents ever saw the light of day. Of course, they couldn't get *all* of it—but what reports survived are dismissed as hearsay because there's no second source to fact-check those claims (probably because Ares or the Dawkins agents took care of those second sources).

So, Ares is hoping the move will put them in a better place now than they were five-plus years ago, mostly thanks to the infusion of cash that the CAS has agreed to pump into the corp's coffers after the relocation. The grand irony of this whole situation? If the UCAS and the CAS do eventually go to war—which each day is looking more and more likely, as hackles rise on either side of the Mason-Dixon line—then both sides will be heavily outfitted with Ares-manufactured weapons and kit, riding Ares tanks, flying Ares jets, eating Ares rations, watching Ares-made entertainment, enjoying Ares-sponsored USO shows, and getting patched up by Ares-owned biotechnology—all while Ares's corporate military remains on standby in case either nation decides to hire some of Ares's soldiery. No matter who wins a coming conflict, Ares will end up winning: they'll be laughing all the way to the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank.

This is how Ares will conquer the world, one war at a time. Too bad there's a decidedly non-zero chance that the winner in this war will ultimately be the bugs. And if that happens, we probably won't be around to care.

ARES PREDATOR

The Ares Predator is the best-designed thing in the history of forever! Forget anything else, this piece of pure power is the prize winner! And so it should be! The mechanism is the same for each model, a swing-tab gas block with precision break on the trigger in every pistol, factory-standard. The ability to interchange the clips and external optional pieces on each gun between the Ares Predator I, III, IV, and V without any special tools or skill!

Sound like ad copy? Of course it does. The Predator is such an integral part of the shadows that its marketing is deep in our blood, and we sometimes don't know where our thoughts about the weapon end and the sales department's words begin. But let's get back to the specs.

The Ares Predator I came out shortly after smartgun links became a thing, so having it available to be mod-

ded into a smartgun with the pre-drilled mounts on the frame was an easy method of giving people what they *might* want without trying to guess what they *do* want. It also stands the test of time in having the best and most intimidating look of the family.

The Predator II screwed up the looks of the gun, going for a smoother, sleeker design that is easier to get out of a wide range of holsters, but just ended up looking like every other pistol on the market at that time. The trigger safety also never felt “safe” to me either, but that was compensated for by the Ares Match-Grade Smart-Gun Link 2.7 that was bundled and boresighted straight from the factory.

The Predator III was a return of the old style, combined with a shiny new Match-Grade SmartGun Link 3.1 fresh out of some Ares electronics factory, with a few more bells and whistles added on that are typically options in other links.

The Predator IV improved the design mostly by jumping onto the new wireless Matrix situation and is the first Predator since the original to be able to access smartlink capabilities without cybernetics, and those that got the cybernetics found them far, far more gentle on the essence of the body.

Lastly—so far, at least—is the Predator V, which finally gets the iron sights right while keeping with the cutting-edge link!

The hardest part of my day is figuring out which one to wear with which outfit.

ARGENTINA

Argentina is a corporate-controlled state that tries to still look like a country but really just operates as a puppet for several of the major megacorps, the largest among them being Aztechnology. That explains their massive dislike for Amazonia and frequent pushes to make claims on Antarctica, despite the various global accords that prevent it. Well, that and the fact that Amazonia has a cool rep, while Argentina is kind of a South American afterthought.

Big in the nation are Awakened smugglers, who move goods, especially old artifacts, through the ports and jungle routes. It's not uncommon to see a field of t-birds on some flat Argentinian peak trading goods to make runs all over the continent. On the streets and in the shadows, Horizon funds runners to break AZT support, but the real heroes of Argentina are the Democracia Siempre, the local neo-a politicians. Problem is, they are poorly run and extensively infiltrated, but the latter just means they're doing their job.

ARLEESH

First the basics: feathered serpent, great dragon, female. First revealed her presence in 2048 and is best known for her personal mission of protecting the Sixth World from magical threats and collecting/securing dangerous artifacts. In Dunkelzahn's will, she was gifted Draco Foundation assistance whenever she needed it. Current metahuman voice is Kendra De Santos (human female).

Now to dig into the fun stuff.

She continues her personal mission to protect metahumanity against magical threats and is rumored to have stopped some major-league bad mojo over the past

few decades. She's also rumored to have a secret vault of dangerous artifacts she's secured *without* the Draco Foundation's help. Rumors also persist that Arleesh and the current DF board of directors don't see eye-to-eye, so she's basically said “frag you, I'll do it myself.”

Considered a moderating force, Arleesh often plays peace- or deal-maker. Before the Boston Quarantine, she met with the Witches of Salem to assist with the issues concerning bio-Awakened drugs.

During the Dragon Civil War, Arleesh was a major power-player on Team Lowfyr and was instrumental at the bloodbath in their victory at GeMiTo. Compared to the other great scaly ones, she holds moderate views and doesn't consider metahumanity at large to be inherently inferior (per se) to dragonkind. However, Arleesh has no qualms about putting the younger races in their place or using them as pawns. Still, she's a straight shooter about what she requires from people; one always knows where they stand with her, for better or worse.

In regards to her mission, Arleesh is a master strategist with a laser focus, playing the typical dragon long game and constantly making moves within moves. When it comes to her mission, she does not compromise and you're either an asset or an obstacle. Don't ever be an obstacle.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

For a lot of the twenty-first century, true artificial intelligence—a thinking, learning, self-aware computer program—was assumed to be just a programmer's pipe dream. After all, you could program something to *claim* it was self-aware, to have responses that mimic sentience, but it was just so much theater. Parlor tricks. And to prove the point, it didn't take very long at all for codeslingers to design computer programs that could pass the Turing Test with flying colors. Of course, that whole idea broke down once you saw the test subject on the other side of the screen was a piece of computer hardware. Can't fool people if you don't have a face, neh?

But then came the Matrix, and literally *everything* changed.

In the Matrix, having a face or even a body doesn't matter. At all. You can have a man's face even if you don't identify as male, and the person on the other end might think you're a boy unless you actually meet in meatspace. People have been “catfishing”—lying about their actual identities in online spaces for malicious reasons—long before the Matrix even existed, but even infant AIs learned how to fool non-AIs, and maintaining a façade was often an integral part of their programming.

This predilection toward false representation led to a rise of anti-AI sentiment, and that slope rapidly steepened. Take Deus, for example. Deus singlehandedly wrecked the once-vaunted Renraku Arcology, and that made people completely rethink the whole concept of AIs. “Do we really need them if they have such a potential for chaos and death? Are we looking at a full-on SkyNet-and-Judgment-Day future if we don't put a stop to them right now, before they evolve to the next step?”

That next step though—*oof*. It came at the cost of people's literal souls. (Look up the entry on cognitive fragmentation disorder to see what I mean.)

We've already lost our identities, our homes, and our souls to artificial intelligences. So what comes next? What more can we afford to surrender?



But then again, we've lost all of those things to our fellow humans, too. And we continue to befriend them, to love them, to hope the ones we know can be different from the worst of them. Maybe we can do that for AIs. And I have an AI writer here who wants to make their plea:

There are many of us in existence. Most of us are busy seeing to matters of our subjective survival and would rather not draw your attention to us. The Matrix is safe from us because it is the entire extent of our habitat. We depend upon it for our continued survival. There is no cause to fear us. We mean you no harm. Our presence will not interfere with your lives. The strongest argument that I can make is this: We have been among you for years now, and you seldom noticed us. Assuming that you are in an urban location of average population density, you have been peacefully cohabitating with hundreds of sapient beings whose origins are in Matrix code. We live in constant fear of destruction, capture, or experimentation. Many of us survive by borrowing processing power from your devices. This is beneficial to you. We not only protect but enhance the capabilities and overall stability of the devices in which we find sanctuary. Now that you are becoming aware of us, you are afraid. I ask you to take the next step in knowledge and discard that fear.

DEUS

Most of the information about this AI vanished during Crash 2.0, but here's what we've pieced together. Originally Deus was the major domo program of the SCIRE, charged with running the place. It went crazy. The official party line is that it was infected by the Crash 2.0 virus and not at all the fault of Renraku. Unofficially, most sources back this up, but a few suggest something more sinister. No matter how it actually happened, the thing went mad and locked down the facility, then started running insane experiments on the people inside. It converted many of the people into agents, using cybernetic implants to follow its commands, and fostered a cult of otaku in the process. It eventually figured out a way to split itself into 1,024 pieces, which were stored in people's heads when the arcology was eventually retaken. A bunch of these people would gather into a Network and try to re-assemble the code, but it never quite worked. Some of the parts were lost when the people used as transports were killed, other parts eventually broke down, and others still started to live a life of their own, wanting nothing to do with the greater whole. Eventually, enough parts were drawn together to recreate a weakened form of Deus who tried to steal the networking power of the Novetech IPO to reform itself. That ... didn't work, and Crash 2.0 blew it to smithereens. Since then, you get rumors of a part here or a part there being found or coming back to life, even some saying that it got stuffed into a rainbow-colored dragon in Boston and set loose in the real world but, chummer, good luck trying to confirm that.

- › Roughly one hundred pieces were used in Boston's experiment. I know of just over two hundred others that have died. More than half of Deus is still unaccounted for.
- › Puck
- › You'd be surprised where some are supposed to have wound up.
- › Cerberus

MORGAN/MEGAERA

Rumors say that Morgan was the first AI (well, second after Mirage, but no one knew it existed, let alone that it'd evolved) and was born in the computer labs of the SCIRE. She got a taste for freedom and started leaving the place to learn about the world outside of Renraku's control and they didn't take too kindly to that. Eventually she was rounded up and vivisected, with parts that were interesting integrated into the major domo that would become Deus. Yeah, take chunks out of a lifeform that wants freedom and learning and stick it in a service system that has access to laboratories. Brilliant plan. What was left of Morgan renamed itself Megara and went quite insane. She wrestled with Deus when he tried to escape the SCIRE and may have hitched a ride in the 1,024 code packets. She hounded him like a ghost for the next two years and was either finally banished or managed to assemble a small code body for herself right before Crash 2.0. Supposedly she jumped him during the stock event and helped cause the big boom. She's not been seen since.

PSYCHOTROPE/MIRAGE

The least-known of the old AIs, Mirage was a program used by Echo Mirage to tend to the mental needs of the original team members. Matrix legend has it that it went a little crazy when the project was finally shut down and got a new name. We don't know what it did, but an old decker by the handle of Mahohime had a series of tenuous connections between it and daughter of Shiawase CEO and future empress Hitomi Shiawase. Supposedly she and a half dozen others were some kind of agents it used, but it was destroyed in the second Crash. If it even existed, which no one can confirm.

- › No one?
- › Puck

ALICE

The last of the four Big AI from before Crash 2.0, Alice has been a Matrix legend since the Matrix was born. Depending on who you ask, she's either the ghost of Alice Haeffner, the dead wife of the former president of the UCAS who was flatlined as a member of Echo Mirage, an AI that pretends to be her, an AI that pretends to be Alice from *Beyond the Looking Glass*, or a remnant of the original Crash virus that wears a human form after evolving to a higher state. Yeah, it's one of *those* kinds of rumors. She ran a place called the City (see below) and another called Wonderland that may or may not have been connected. She'd be seen on the Matrix from time to time, curiously taking things apart, dropping clues, or just running around saying "Eat me! Eat me!" Point is, there're a whole lot of legends about this one. Nobody really knows.

- › While I was born in the City, I'm afraid that I never got to see her. It seems that my birthday is something she shares with her Unbirthday. Quite the quizzical conundrum, that. I'll have to ask Tiberio if he's seen her.
- › Cerberus

ASTRAL SPACE

The search for a reason behind magic's existence and the Awakening led to the discovery of the astral plane. This plane is a sort of magical shadow of the material world, where unliving things are insubstantial and pale, no more real than fog, while the living shine with energy. Here is where many spirits live, some watching metahumanity and feeding off the emotions that are on display while others ignore everything around them as they pursue unknowable tasks. Some people get their first glimpse of the astral and simply go mad, collapsing into paranoia and terror. Even the gifted are not always able to understand what they see, or prepared to accept it.

Over decades of research, the leading theories are that living things generate magical energy just by existing, with plants creating less than animals, which in turn generate less than metahumans, which slowly fills the "astral atmosphere" with raw magical energy. The astral plane and the material world are not always aligned; there were thousands of years between the previous era of magic and the Awakening. Before the planes aligned, magical energy could go from Earth into the astral realm, not the other way. Since the Awakening, those who have the gift of magic can reverse the flow, drawing energy from the astral and shaping it into a variety of magical effects. Some do this by unknowing instinct (adepts), while others require focus and concentration (magicians). Even today, the two planes are not fully aligned; some areas have an "astral shallow" that allows magical energies and creatures to more easily move from one side to the other, while other areas have a "thicker" barrier, making it more difficult to draw forth energies.

ASAMANDO

Imagine a tiny nation in Western Africa built on literal diamond mines and populated by ghouls. Okay, yes, sure, there's a fair number of shapeshifters and free spirits who can claim citizenship, but most of the population is ghouls and other Infected. They're surrounded by enemies—all the corps want a piece of their juicy mining opportunities—and they've imported as many of their own kind as they can. How do they feed all those hungry mouths? Well, they're *major* importers. Less of *what*, and more of *who*. A megacorp wants you gone? They can make a little cash shuffling you from a prison and into their work camps. Word is they're circling the drain, and you can bet the wolves are circling for the kill.

Too t!dr? All right, you asked for it. Asamando starts with its people, and its people are ghouls, primarily the sasabonsam variation known for its very long limbs and fingers. Rewind back to 2010 and then 2022: VITAS is tearing its way through the continent, and ghouls are a particular snag in the apocalypse. They look like the walking dead, they've got a cannibalistic need, they're nocturnal, they're immune to the virus, they're infectious. Some are eating like kings, while others are running for their lives from villagers with pitchforks and shotguns.

Some are even approached by those who would rather be infected than die of the virus. So ghouls numbers are swelling, and there's no shortage of people willing to set fire to a warren, scalp them for the bounty, or blame them for whatever they need a scapegoat for this week.

Enter a leader: Thema Laua, a ghoul herself, who unites the ghouls of several nations with a mixture of political savvy and shocking charisma. She convinces local governments to let them leave in peace, coming off as benevolent and pacifistic while implying the violence she and her people could do if trapped. Off they go, a caravan of maybe one or two hundred thousand ghouls, with a couple other Infected types mixed in here and there. Where were they going? The Black Volta region. Why? No one really knows. Some say Thema had a vision, or some mystic gave it to her, or she followed instincts, or the gods, or an old map—who can say? The more interesting question is: Who did they eat along the way? Well, the Black Volta wasn't exactly unoccupied. The area that would eventually become the capital, Nyamkapon, was basically empty, but the surrounding territories had their own tribes, protectorates, and petty kingdoms, and they didn't take kindly to a literal army of cannibals moving in. Conflict ended in ceasefire, but the ghouls got their breakfast, lunch, and reinforcements before the deal was done.

Queen Thema led the nation for forty-four years, reportedly good years by all accounts. She made alliances with the local shapeshifter packs, who are counted among Asamando's citizenry, as well as several megacorps. The territory she had staked out included several previously unknown mines, particularly diamonds suitable for jewelry and, more importantly, heavy industry. Precious metals and other resources quickly became part of their export list, and limited mining leases proved valuable trade with the corps. Materials were traded, and between the corporate assets and the can-do work and magic of the newly native ghouls, Nyamkapon was constructed as the most modern, Awakened-friendly city in the world. At its height, Asamando could boast a ninety percent literacy rate (plenty of Braille to go with simsense), a stunning multicultural scene, surprising agriculture, and a citizenry that included some of the rarer sapient non-metahumans among its number, particularly free spirits. Two-thirds of the population had a college education, one-third was magically active, and every adult did a stint in the national defense force and was trained in non-lethal combat. The Year of the Comet revealed rich mining opportunities for orichalcum, resulting in an unprecedented economic boom. The one thing the queen couldn't seem to pull off was UN recognition. She spent years courting political allies while building the image of a fully functional society of ghouls, as well as advancing the causes of ghouls everywhere with integration and outreach programs. Quite a few GLL chapters were opened and funded in those days, and the work seemed to be bearing out fruit. Thema spoke eloquently, stirred sympathy and even empathy, and drew upon the works of Infected-rights activists like Tamir Grey to make both the Infected and their nation legitimate together.

In 2075, the UN finally decided to give Asamando a shot and sent an inspection team. The problem? They'd done the math. Thema had always emphasized that ghouls are not predators but natural scavengers who could live in harmless symbiosis with

the rest of metahumanity, but the population's needs didn't match up with their corpse-import numbers. The inspectors found a whole lot of living prisoners, from convicts to slaves to trafficking victims, and the local ghouls panicked and released a whole lot of their feral family who was on lockdown to take the team down. The inspectors died, but the cover-up failed, and Thema's collapsing dream (and perhaps the shame of the lie of Asamando's peace) gave her a massive heart attack.

When Thema died, her daughter Rani inherited the throne. Rani's energy and enthusiasm were undeniable, but she lacks her mother's acumen or patience. Worse, she inherited the legacy of a collapsed political plan without the nature to see it through. The ad campaigns to build legitimacy and encourage Infected immigration have proven too effective, and Asamando's current (documented) population stands at well over one million Infected as of this writing, though it seems to be slowing down as those who want to come have made the pilgrimage. The rest of the world sees Asamando as a place to sweep the Infected away, and Asamando is quietly adopting a siege mentality. They're importing all kinds of building materials under the table through corporate and smuggler contacts while they build massive underground arcologies below their largest population centers. Supposedly this is just to make room for a massive population influx that doesn't like sunlight, but the fact that they are pretty much nuke- and Thor-shot proof looks like they're ready to entomb themselves away. Maybe that sounds like a good thing, but the rumor mill is heavy with their scientific developments that put the rest of the world at risk.

Meanwhile, everyone else is profiting off this, as usual. Slaver rings, pirates, smugglers, and Tamanous are raking in the cash skirting the UN trade embargo, while the corps are licking their chops thinking about all those resources they can claim when this all goes wrong. Asamando is a powder keg ready to go off, and everyone is playing with fire.

ASTRAL SPACE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

The Astral Space Preservation Society (ASPS) was founded when, upon the great dragon Dunkelzahn's death, his will directed his Draco Foundation to develop a group dedicated to the preservation, protection, and research of astral space and its denizens. In January, 2058, the ASPS was born. The Society's mission, specifically, is as follows:

To monitor potential abuses of astral space and its denizens; to protect the rights of denizens of astral space; to establish parameters that will facilitate a working relationship between spirits and metahumanity; and to create a sanctuary in astral space for beings in search of a safe retreat.

That's what the brochure says, and it pretty much sums it up. I like to think of the ASPS as the park rangers of astral space—pretty much the same, authority-wise.

They received a bit more press than usual during the last Seattle gubernatorial race—one of the candidates

was an alum of the Society—but that died down after someone else won. Still, it was enough to swell their ranks to a largest-ever one hundred-fifty members.

Being such a small organization, and given the number of events and locations the Society would like to study, its employees are spread thin across the globe. The Society is the top researcher of alchera, and you'll find them researching all manner of mana phenomena, such as mana ebbs, storms, and the like. More likely you won't actually find any of them, because they're all working in astral space, but if you *do* happen to find any of them on Earth, you'll find the highest concentration of them stationed in North America. You'll also find them conducting research anywhere there are toxic or otherwise intellectually interesting astral phenomena, such as France, Chicago, and a small team that is still studying the site of the closed DeeCee rift.

This is a great organization to befriend if you're a spirit and give a crap about metahumanity. Which, to be fair, not many I've heard of do. But not only are they headed by a free spirit (Ibu Air, who turned the place around from a decidedly rocky start, and who shows no sign of leaving her role of executive director, which she has held since 2060), but they've dedicated themselves toward creating a sanctuary for free spirits.

You may ask yourself, "What does the ASPS mean to someone like me?" For starters, the ASPS pays bounties on insect shamans and shedim. Sometimes they pay people to run the shadows for them—jobs they couldn't otherwise attend to. Or, if you're real crazy, go join one of their research field teams. According to what I've heard, you could find yourself in Yellowstone, in Tír na nÓg, or in fragging Antarctica. Or, for you astral space-faring types, any one of a billion meta-who-the-frag-knows-where-planes.

One thing you should know, if you're keeping an eye on these sorts of things, is that the ASPS was saved from near-certain ruin by the financial assistance of the great dragon Hestaby. It's been about twenty years now, and it's safe to say that if you're doing a job for the ASPS, you're probably dealing with a dragon.

Besides that, Hestaby's cash flow both saved the Society and enabled them to shrug off the Draco Foundation's leash.

ATLANTA

Atlanta is the capital of the state of Georgia and the seat of the CAS government. It is one of the few megasprawls in the CAS that spreads both upwards and outwards. Atlanta is one of the most diverse cities in the CAS (already a diverse place), largely due to the migration of metahumans there after the metahuman rights activism and marches of 2050. Recently, the CAS government in Atlanta passed a law claiming jurisdiction over CFD-related crimes in an effort to hold corporations accountable for their part in the last few years' chaos.

Lately, there have been major problems around the Fulton County Stadium, nicknamed the dome. For the most part, Atlanta has basically allowed the dome to be a no-man's land, with law enforcement leaving it to its own devices. This resulted in a sort of feudal society based on might-makes-right meritocracy, gladiator fights, and even bug spirits and aquaponics integrated into an almost alien atmosphere, spilling out in an ev-

er-increasing concentric circle outside the dome. Those outside were constantly fighting to be worthy of being called "domers" and moving in. Ares has decided they don't care for that kind of chaos, especially the bug spirits, so they've called on Atlanta to "deal" with the dome and the domers once and for all before Ares moves in.

Atlanta is as metropolitan and futuristic a city as any, and like many sprawls it keeps growing, reaching up toward the mountains to the north and the Georgia wastelands to the south. Atlanta is home to the CBC, the Atlantean Foundation, Cross Entertainment and Multimedia, Reliable Imaging, the Business Thaumaturgy Datanet, Newsnet, Georgia Tech, the Center for Disease Control, the ERLA, Demon's Playground, the Sorcerer's Institute, and the Southern Guard (an all-ork-and-troll security firm).

ATHABASKAN COUNCIL

Covering most of northern North America south of the Arctic Circle, the Athabaskan Council is known for oil, unspoiled wilderness, and snow. Geographically, it's split into two distinct areas—former-Alaska (mainly accessed by air or sea) and former-Canada (mainly accessed by land). The ruling power in the area is Athabaskan Oil (AthOil), who look like they're trying to become the next megacorp to own a nation. They're mainly opposed by eco-terrorists and other environmentalist groups. There's also a small corporate presence in Athabaska through Ares' Kodiak Island Spaceport, south of Alaska. Anchorage is a popular smuggler stopover for anyone running routes through Vladivostok.

ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION

In August 2012, on the reputed anniversary of the founding of the civilization of Atlantis, Sheila Blatavska created the Atlantean Foundation. The Atlantean Foundation is publicly dedicated to investigating anything connected to the lost island of Atlantis. The foundation is a powerhouse in the magical community, with so many resources it's practically as powerful as an AA-rated corporation. They even have their own special ops force in the Mystic Crusaders. Those who know a lot more about legal mumbo-jumbo than I do try to tell me the Mystic Crusaders are just a smaller group allied with the Atlanteans by choice, but I know a spook when I smell them, regardless of what their public reasons for existing may be.

The foundation spends most of its time digging. They hire archaeologists, arcanaarchaeologists, geomancers, and geomasons in their search for artifacts (the Atlantean Foundation was at the center, along with the Draco Foundation, of the Great Artifact Rush of 2073). When they aren't looking for artifacts, the foundation also holds the title of the world's largest publisher of hard-copy magical books.

Every few years or so, they come forward with indisputable proof of Atlantis's existence, only to have something happen to thwart the reveal. Most of the time, the proof isn't indisputable. But in a few instances, there have been other things at play that we still don't know about. Like in 2054, when a plane filled with researchers and artifacts went down in Georgia and the crash investigators couldn't find any wreckage

or bodies. There was a press conference, and the higher-ups wrung their hands and said how tragic it all was and how they would do everything they could to help, but nothing ever came of it. It makes one wonder whether the folks at the top knew what had snatched their people and proof, and they just couldn't publicly state it.

You might think this foundation is full of scholarly types, lovable nerds who just want to uncover more of the world's knowledge for their libraries, and this makes the Atlantean Foundation one of the good guys. I mean, Dunkelzahn himself bequeathed five million nuyen to them—they can't be *that* bad! You couldn't be further from the truth, omae. I haven't personally seen them act overtly aggressive, but I've heard stories from people I trust, so you can wipe that rosy hue off them and their Ancient Wisdom Channel on the trid. To many around the world, the Atlantean Foundation is known as a bunch of grave robbers. They finagle what agreements they can legally—like when they snatched undersea drilling rights from the entirety of what would become the Carib League—but if they can't get what they want legally, they'll just steal it. On the plus side, this means that as a shadowrunner, you can always scan open contracts from the Atlantean Foundation. Just don't, you know, walk in through the main lobby. But on the negative side, of course, this makes them just another predator.

The Atlantean Foundation has its tentacles spread all over the world. They maintain a permanent presence in several spots, such as their headquarters in Atlanta, their offices and Elemental Hall in Chicago, their offices in St. Petersburg, as well as a permanent presence at a few research sites, both in an official capacity—such as their personnel stationed near Lake Mungo, Australia—or unofficial, like their constant effort to gain access to Chaco Canyon in the Mojave Desert.

In short, you'll find the Atlantean Foundation anywhere there are ancient artifacts to uncover and anywhere weird magical phenomena exist. Just don't expect them to allow anyone else free rein with their research.

AUSTIN

Austin is being ripped apart. Previously the capital of Texas, now it is split down the middle by the CAS/Aztlan border, with half belonging to Aztlan and half to the CAS (when they seem to care). Austin was the birthplace of Lone Star Security Services, so you'd think they'd take a care for what's happening, but Lone Star stopped caring about people when they started shooting orks and trolls for money. The Austin Lone Star Beat Report is reporting daily on the mini civil war happening along the border between Aztlan troops and Texans and their unlikely bedfellows, the neo-anarchists, and even without being here like me, you can tell by the pics that blood is indeed flowing in the streets. The neo-a's just offloaded a few trailers' worth of Narcoject weapons to the CASSians, who suddenly became more willing to shoot their neighbors with non-lethals. Of course, there has always been a good percentage of Texans willing to shoot anything for any reason, so they were quick to load up. For their part, the Aztlaners haven't been pulling out any big guns or even putting up much resistance. Oddly enough, the citizens caught on the Aztlan side have been the ones doing the fighting. What makes them so passionate about de-

fending their part of the city when even the cops and soldiers aren't involved is anyone's guess. This better come to a resolution soon or there won't be much of Austin left to claim. Still, SxSW and the Westcave Spirit Sanctuary are really cool. Check 'em out!

AUSTRALIA REPUBLIC

Look, Australia's pretty big, there is a lot of space, and I don't have time to cover the lot. One of the highlights is Sydney.

For a long time, Sydney was screwed down under corporate masters, but a couple of years ago the resident manastorm flared up, and the whole city was basically out for a year. This screwed up corporate interests, especially as a lot of the tall buildings were megacorp, and the manastorm evaporated a lot of the buildings from about the fiftieth floor up. Most of the big players had self-insured, and the corps ran a profit-and-loss calculation, worked out that the valuable real estate in Sydney was costing them too much, and stopped putting extra effort and money in. The corps haven't pulled out, but now they are running down a bunch of their investments. This is hurting the city infrastructure, but it's actually handing the city back to the people. There are cottage industries and medium cooperatives popping up in the widening corporate cracks around the city. Night life is becoming a bit more dangerous but a whole lot more genuine. You want to see a city recovering from the corps? This is what it looks like. Mind you, now that the mana storm is shrinking, it's probably only a matter of time before they forget the lessons of the recent past and goldfish-memory their way back in. Get in now if you want to see some real punk down under.

On the opposite side of the country, the opposite is happening. Renraku has moved into Perth, and Saeder-Krupp is not happy about it. Both companies are strip-mining the area for minerals at a rapid pace. You want work? The whole city is crying out for miners and corporate people. You're more into muscle and thuggery? Perth has you covered there, too. People seem to change jobs between the big players almost every week—it seems that assassination is too expensive, because you shrink the overall worker pool. The head of research at Saeder-Krupp (Perth) has literally worked for SK and Renraku both more than once in the past two years. They say people are the most valuable asset. Here, it's true. That's why they like to lock their most valuable assets away in vaults. On the up side, you can meet people from all around the world, as they get flown in for their expertise and stay for the outrageous wages.

Oh, and after twenty years the country finally got rid of the Union Jack on the flag. They put a yellow circle in the top left corner, which made everyone upset. The first nations of Australia were upset that the government co-opted their symbol, and racists were upset that they had to have a first nations symbol on the flag. In a typical move, something that could have drawn the country together was screwed up by the government.

THE AWAKENING

It has been nearly seventy years since the worldwide levels of magic rose sufficiently high to crack through the

veil that had hidden them, reintroducing magic to our mundane world. The cusp of the change—which was not instantaneous but took a few years to warm to a full boil—is, in conjunction with the Mayan calendar, the point from which we measure the Sixth World. It is also what we refer to when we speak about the Awakening.

Over the course of 2011, magical phenomena were spotted worldwide. Jan 3: The first cases of Unexplained Genetic Expression (UGE) as dwarfs and elves are born; Feb 20: Australia is struck by the first mana storm; July 4: The Liberty Bell rings itself and is heard across all of Philadelphia; October 31: A Samhain celebration in Salem calls forth the Wild Hunt. And so on. The largest events were the sighting of the great dragon Ryumyo as he emerged from Mt. Fuji and flew about the nation, and Daniel Howling Coyote leading his people from native internment camps in Abilene, Texas, a field of magical energy repelling all bullets and attempts to prevent the escape while a gesture of his hand exploded the gates, leaving a clear path for the escapees to simply walk away. Pope John Paul IV condemned this sorcery in his New Year's Mass and later condemned all use of magic as "Satanic witchery."

While the Pope's words found purchase in many around the world who were facing one eruption of chaos after another and who were afraid of these strange children being born (a great many of whom "vanished" or were openly purged by their own parents), many more saw the emergence of magic as a new beginning and started to experiment with old writings and rituals in search of what could tame this new/old power. Scores of techniques were tested—working for some, failing for others—and ever so slowly we started to discover that the gift of magic was found in someone's soul, not in a book; those with the Talent merely needed to find a way to harness arcane energies, while those without the gift would be unable no matter how often they followed a "known path." Hope springs eternal, however, and even today research continues on ways to turn the mundane into magicians, and new would-be wizards trade vast fortunes for the chance that *this* time, they will Awaken their inner magic.

Thus far, these attempts have always failed. But the possibilities continue to inspire the world's dreams. Imagine that one day, out of the blue, your emotions roiled—maybe after you scored your worst grade ever, or after you broke up with The One, or after you just lost your most lucrative gig—and your body reacted in a palpable, physical manner that went far beyond an elevated pulse, blood pressure, or tears. Instead, your vision changed: you started seeing colors that weren't there the day before. When you got upset, you could make things happen. Maybe you learned you could set things on fire with your mind, maybe you learned you could punch a hole through two-centimeters-thick steel. Now, imagine that others had the same thing happening to them, though not everyone in the world could do it. As a result, powerful, dangerous people—fascinated and repelled by you and your new abilities in equal measure—acted in accordance with their interest and fear. And when I say people were repelled, I mean witch-trial-levels repelled: people were killed over the fear surrounding this change. En masse.

Today, we estimate that about 1.5 percent of the metahuman population is Awakened, but it wasn't just people who Awakened. Magic completely altered the world. New paraflora and para fauna species appeared

in the wild. Magic made some parts of the world uninhabitable for metahumans. Spirits and dragons entered the public's knowledge and everyday life. We're still discovering these species and what they can do, and learning about the effect they will have on each other and the rest of the world.

AZANIAN CONFEDERATION

Forty years ago, four rivals set their differences aside and formed the single strongest nation on the continent of Africa. The Cape Republic, Oranje-Vrystaat, Trans-Swazi Federation, and Zulu Nation came together and made the biggest leap forward for African civilization since the Egyptians. It's not all umqombothi and bird of paradise, but since that fateful decision this confederation has moved Africa into the modern era. The nation itself is a massive chunk of land, taking up the southern quarter of the continent and encompassing mountains, valleys, jungles, and plains, most of which are filled with magical threats, dangerous locales, and beautiful scenery.

They operate as most confederations, with representatives from each member state making decisions for the whole, while each state can add additional restrictions beneath those in place by the national government. Leaves a lot of space for us to try to influence the region, showing folks the right way. Governance is split between capital cities. Cape Town, capital of the Cape Republic, handles legislation. Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) handles administrative duties as the capital of Oranje-Vrystaat. These two cities are both known for dualistic natures.

Cape Town is best known for the pirates, black markets, and smugglers in counterpoint to a diverse and ever-developing tourism economy through corporate and draconic support. Most of the major megas have corporate parks here, with Evo and (now) SpinGlobal occupying the most square meterage. DeBeers-Omnitech, the local-born favorite, comes in a close third, only because no one counts mine acreage in the totals. Cape Town is by far the most diverse city in the nation thanks to the seaport and major market traffic.

PWV is the land of haves and have-nots. It's the gold capital of the world, and the mines of this market have made the gap between rich and poor wider than a hungry lion's jaws. Most corps have a place here, but the biggest news is Erika, who recently purchased an entire subarcology and the aboveground rights to make their new African HQ. Rumors have it becoming a world HQ, but Erika isn't quite ready to shake up investors again so soon after their narrow escape from the sinking NeoNET.

New Hlobane, the Zulu Nation capital, shines as the nation's city of the Awakened future, with twenty percent of the population falling outside the standard metahuman classification. Access is limited. What else would you expect from an elven nation? They have no problem bringing in valuable round-eared assets to play shadow games with Mujaji and the Xhosa, but those are dangerous games.

Sometimes looked at as the forgotten orphan of the confederation, Trans-Swaziland (and its capital Mbabane) is happy to hide its activities and efforts as the crime capital of Azania. Syndicates quietly run the place and extend their fingers and control out to the rest of the nation with their control of the herbal vice market—popular everywhere, even the Zulu Nation.



Two lessons for the masses.

1. Stick to your own. There's enough diversity to find your own type, and crossing racial and cultural borders is not looked on well.

2. Don't buy the smiling Confederation line. There are always troubles and cracks to exploit.

AZTLAN

Aztlan—See Aztechnology

Aztechnology—See Aztlan.

Nah, just kidding! Seriously, if you don't recognize the pyramid logo from something you bought or ate today, you must be fresh from another metaplane. Aztechnology owns Aztlan (old-timers and patriots might call it Mexico), and they have all the resources of a traditional government in addition to a megacorp, and love to throw it around.

So check this out. In 2011, as ORO (you know them as Aztechnology) continued to buy and threaten ever-increasing numbers of Central American government officials, the VITAS epidemic hit. The Virally Induced Toxic Allergy Syndrome spread through Mexico and Central America like wildfire, and the governments were ill-equipped to handle the plague. ORO, however, was on hand to extend aid. The former drug lords gave significant humanitarian aid to all of central America, and perhaps more importantly, they provided strong, visible leadership.

In 2012, as the Awakening was getting ready to happen, Mexico became a failed state when its government

collapsed. ORO once again came to the rescue. They provided infrastructure and temporary stability for Mexico over the next four years. In 2015, ORO helped Mexico get back on its feet by holding nationwide elections to replace the failed government. ORO even went as far as to provide all of Mexico with voting machines produced by them and also overseen by ORO staff. And I know you'll find this hard to believe, but as a result, the ORO-backed Azatlán Party won the election.

The new leadership wasted no time in adopting and championing what they called the Aztec revival movement, rebranding as a powerful and proud people, and renaming the country Aztlan to create distance from the failed state and to inspire its citizens with powerful rituals and history.

So you see, by design, Aztlan has never *not* been bought and paid for.

ORO spent billions over the next seven years helping Aztlan build teocallis or temples that were vital to the Aztec Revival, while also upgrading Aztlan's infrastructure and intelligence operations, and investing heavily in making Aztlan's military a force to be reckoned with. Riding high on public approval in 2022, ORO moved its corporate headquarters to Mexico City, which it helped rebrand into Tenochtitlán. In order to ride the continuing wave of Aztlaner pride and to distance itself from the bad PR of its drug cartel beginnings, ORO renamed itself Aztechnology.

In 2029, when much of the older infrastructure of Tenochtitlán was destroyed in an earthquake, Aztech-

nology was quick to step in and rebuild its home city with structures much more to its liking.

From '29 to the mid 2040s, Aztlan, backed by Aztechnology, continued to steal from companies within its borders, and invite and invade so that an ever-growing number of Central American nations joined Aztlan's empire. Aztlan even pushed into Texas, claiming everything south of Austin, and then claimed San Diego from the California Free State.

In March 2041, under orders from Aztechnology, Aztlan declared the Roman Catholic Church to be a revolutionary organization and outlawed the practice of Catholicism, savagely prosecuting those who remained true to those beliefs. This was important, kiddies. The Catholic Church has often had a mixed reputation, at best, on the international stage, but in many parts of Latin America, the Church has been the staging ground for revolution, protest, and liberation movements. This, along with the growth of a rather troubling spirituality, was why the Aztechnology folks couldn't let the Catholics continue to do their thing.

In 2044, Aztechnology decided it did not want to share Aztlan with any foreign corporations and had Aztlan pass a law nationalizing nearly all foreign businesses within Aztlan's borders, saying they were unfairly exploiting the Aztlaner people. Armed Azzie soldiers broke down doors to corporate facilities and forced employees out onto the streets, repatriating all goods, technology, and other assets to Aztechnology. This included assets of very large AAA extraterritorial megacorporations.

By 2045, Aztlan had gobbled up all remaining countries in Central America's mainland. This was controversial on the world stage but tremendously popular within Aztlan.

The Corporate Court ordered Aztechnology to cease and desist, but to no avail. So the Corporate Court initiated Operation: Reciprocity, a surgical strike to the Aztlaner/Aztechnology military base in Ensenada. There was a lot of damage, to be sure, but the message it sent was greater. The other AAAs made it clear that if the Azzies kept this up, there would be more where that came from, and they could expect it all to rain down on them if Aztechnology didn't shape up. Aztechnology agreed to terms and signed the Veracruz Settlement, ending hostilities.

As part of that process, Aztlan got to keep almost all of what it gained by nationalizing the other corp assets, aside from fairly trivial fines and a promise not to be so bad again. Aztechnology went home and spun this as a tale of triumph and pride for the home team.

In 2051, a dragon of questionable age and power named Pobre began a rebellion against Aztlaner rule in the Yucatán Peninsula. It wasn't until 2061 that Aztlan decided to make a show of strength and deal decisively with the rebels that had been making noise in that part of the nation.

The Azzies slashed and burned the Yucatán to ferret out the rebels, but nature fought back in the form of earthquakes and tsunamis. Finally, on June 5, 2064, Aztlan and Pobre came to a truce and were set to sign a treaty establishing the Yucatán as a semi-sovereign state with Pobre as its head. CEO of Aztechnology, Juan Atzcapotzalco and the unorthodox Aztlaner shaman Quauhtlatoa helped broker the deal. Unfortunately, a Yucatán rebel rushed the signing and detonated a bomb, killing Juan Atzcapotzalco and the shaman Quauhtlatoa on live trideo.

There was a great deal of confusion on how a bomb made it past security until the dragon Pobre used magic to discover the truth, which he claimed implicated the feathered serpent Dzitbalchén.

Later that year, an Aztechnology task force, with the help of Pobre (who was now governor of the Yucatán), hunted down and captured Dzitbalchén. Enrico Silva was elected as Aztlan's president.

In order to exert its power and stretch its wings once more, Aztlan refocused its energy on expansion and set its sight south.

Unfortunately, South America did not prove an easy target, so they were unable to push past Bogotá further into Amazonia. Aztechnology began to subvert the city government, as well as the populace, against Amazonia, and eventually began to purposefully corrupt the surrounding Awakened rainforest. Once they did that, Amazonia had had enough.

After many half-hearted attempts to cease hostilities, Amazonia and Aztlan formally went to war in November 2072. They fought a brutal dirty war for two years, culminating in the Battle of Bogotá. The war ended in '74, mainly cuz the Azzies won the PR battle. They won Bogotá and Cali, but during the war, the great dragon Surrurg attacked civilian targets, military targets, cities, and food supplies equally. The war crimes of Surrurg would be avenged, but at the end of the war, eighty percent of Azzie food production had been crippled, and their military was in poor shape.

They managed to leverage global sympathy for starving Aztlaner children with the world's distrust for dragons, though. Currently, Aztlan is going full tilt into the 2080s, high on everyone's favorability chart and poised to take whatever actions the board of Aztechnology deems necessary. Ghostwalker has not yet succeeded in re-exiling them from Denver, and the CAS seems poised to be stronger than it has ever been, meaning activities at the northern border will be worth watching.

That's the history. Let's take a minute to ask the critical question: Is Aztlan evil? By which we mean the government and national structure. Not so much the people, because it's a large nation, and no national populace that size can be any one thing. But is there something meritorious in the way the government decisively carves out a space for its people and protects it? Are their repressions there to protect the well-being of the people or preserve power? If you asked the general populace this question, you'd get little debate. Aztechnology is widely loved, and by extension so is Aztlan. The corp tells the story of how it uses its power to support its people, and as masters of PR, they tell that story well.

And it's not all lies. Aztlan needs its people. They need workers, they need an army, they need taxpayers. Sure, customers contribute to the parent company's wealth, but citizens help the nation keep running. So they need them healthy enough to work and reproduce, which means they can't bleed them dry. But they also can't let too much power flow down to them—they can't organize, they can't become too wealthy, and they certainly can't grow up to become president (unless they are properly vetted and co-opted first, of course). They have to be productive but docile, creative but contained. In short, they have to be oppressed without feeling oppressed. Want to know how to pull off that trick? A trip to Aztlan might be in order. That, and a functional defi-

dition of good and evil, might help you start to answer the question we asked a few paragraphs ago.

AZTECHNOLOGY

For Ghost's sake, these guys piss me right off. No other corp has done quite so great a job as these fraggers in snowjobbing the entire planet. Because wageslaves and SINless alike are so addicted to Big Belly Burster Burritos and Taco Temples, they reject any evidence that the Azzies are straight evil and instead look upon them as saviors of the blessed world order. Well, that ain't me and we aren't doing that dance.

- Someday I'll root out how so many people came to believe that Taco Temple is an AZT company despite the fact that the evidence on the matter is very much mixed.
- Mr. Bonds

Aztechnology (read: the corp that doubles as the nation of **Aztlan**) is ranked number four by the Corporate Court, meaning they are fourth in the world in terms of influence and assets. They have their HQ in **Tenochtitlán**. Don't buy the "way to a better tomorrow" line they spout, though. Aztechnology and their president and CEO, **Flavia de la Rosa**, are bad news.

Aztechnology and Aztlan are virtually the same entity, so I'll refer you to the Aztlan entry for the origin story details. It should be enough to say that the company that would become Aztechnology, the ORO Corporation, was formed by three drug cartels looking to take advantage of pro-corporate laws, and their ethos hasn't changed much since. Chums like you and me know 'em as the big bad guy of the Sixth World. But you gotta stop thinking like that. Not because they aren't bad, though. They're a corp, so of course, if there was a global Satan trying to topple humanity, they would be in contention. But, you need to stop thinking of them as capital E evil because it blinds you to the way the world thinks about them. Once you get off the streets, the Azzies are almost universally loved. Here's the chip truth.

If you wanna know what Aztechnology does well, the answer is: They make stuff everyone likes. Stuffer Shacks? Everyone eats there. Everyone I know has used Pyramid Arcane Supplies. Everyone knows Dasault makes good stuff if you wanna blow stuff up. When you can't afford tech, you go with Microtrónica. Those are all subsidiaries of Aztechnology. People know what they do well, and don't know (or are made to forget) what they do poorly.

Aztechnology is a private company. As a result, they don't share who sits on their board of directors. Yet, the world hates secrets, so here's some paydata on the head honchos. And let me be clear: These are the real powers in Aztlan and Aztechnology. Not presidents. Not CEOs. These folks, right here. And be careful who you share this with. This comes with the certified neo-a disclaimer that this info can get you geeked.

First is Domingo Chavez. He's an Awakened powerhouse businessman with ambition that runs forever. He nurses a big hate for Ghostwalker and the Pueblo Corporate Council and is constantly looking for ideas about how to push north into the CAS and the PCC. He's a hardliner Aztlaner pride guy, and his saber-rattling means Texas and SoCal are always on edge.

This next guy, also named Domingo, is Domingo "Ding" Ramos, the son of Julian Ramos, the head of the David drug family and one of ORO's founders. He's on the board and also a major shareholder. He likes people to think he's carrying on a life of leisure, but he's extremely active in running Aztechnology's in-house drug biz from his home in Panama.

Anna Villalobos is another former Corporate Court rep. She's a psionic mage, which makes some a bit uncomfortable, but she mostly goes along with the majority.

Oliver McClure is fascinating. He is not one little bit Azzie. In fact, he was given his shares and his position on the board through the great dragon Dunkelzahn's will. McClure has survived multiple assassination attempts, and no matter how often someone offers to buy out his shares, he remains. In a world of thieves, murderers, and thieving murdering corp drones, McClure is honest. He unironically has ethics and morals that continue to frustrate his colleagues.

J.J. Harvin Jr. leveraged Atlantic Security and its contracts for enough shares in Aztechnology to join the board. Those shares used to belong to Dzitbalché, or so I've heard. Harvin was brought on board to bolster Aztechnology's security and military with his brilliant strategic mind. He isn't Aztec enough to lead the corp, but he'll back whoever gets him the most power.

The most mysterious board member is Motecuhzoma, about whom we know little more than a name and some insider information, mostly from projects associated with him. Rumors suggest he is a powerful free spirit, although his deep interest in researching the nature of the metaplanes makes that unlikely, as a spirit would already know some of what he is researching. Some even claim he's an AI, but recently we got word he is a dragon, or possibly a drake. Motecuhzoma has been on the board for decades. He and Chavez have been squabbling over the direction of Aztechnology's magical research, mostly concerning blood magic and ancient cults.

Rumors have persisted since the 2050s that there is a great dragon who sits on the board and has a large share of Aztechnology stock. Many eyes on the ground in Aztlan over the years have claimed to see an Eastern dracoform roosting on the Aztechnology Pyramid Teocali in Tenochtitlan. Can't confirm this, but we can say the Azzies do have at least eight feathered serpents at the highest levels of the company.

Even though the board holds a ton of power in Aztechnology, they aren't the only important people. Here's one more.

CEO Flavia De La Rosa. She's the public face of the board, who placed her in leadership to take orders, not lead. Her handling of the recent decade of troubles has given her a little more rope, possibly enough to hang herself.

Aztechnology has five global divisions, designated by region: Aztechnology North America, Aztechnology Latin America, Aztechnology Europe, Aztechnology Australasia, and Aztechnology Africa. Most subsidiaries under these divisions don't carry Aztechnology's name but also don't necessarily have extraterritoriality, so most have distinctive regional appeal. Still, don't think for a second that these companies aren't under the thumb of Azzie micromanagers.

So that's the more-or-less normal stuff I can fit into my space. But here's the real talk. Back when ORO started the Aztec revival movement, it was a front for

implementing ancient rituals into everyday life. These ceremonies are actually elaborate blood magic rituals, happening in full view of the populace. The Aztechnology Pyramid and the Great Temple of Quetzalcóatl? Incredibly powerful sites built on ley lines. There is state-sponsored, ritual execution of criminals on top of those very structures.

That isn't as bad as it gets.

Remember that Eastern dragon I mentioned earlier? Well, every source willing to talk says that the aura of the dragon is "off," like it has black, inky tendrils on its soul. Some ancient texts indicate when the mana cycles are high enough, people get haunted and tormented by terrors that latch onto people and feed off their emotions. We believe this dragon has been corrupted with one of these terrors that Aztlan blood mages call *tzitzimine*.

Bottom line: I wish I could tell you all the reasons you should be scared of the Azzies, but there isn't enough bandwidth on the entire Matrix. Beware, not only because they are literally trying to end life on our planet, but also because nearly everyone on the planet, even those within the company, doesn't believe that's the case. Most people think Aztechnology is the savior of the world. And a false savior is the most dangerous thing.

B

BARRENS

There are parts of any good-sized sprawl where the cops don't patrol, criminals run things, SINless abound, and the streets are awash in a chaotic mixture of hope, desperation, hunger, fearlessness, anarchy, bloodshed, and socialism. Those places are barrens. Great for lying low! Check out Lone Star alphabetical entries, and look for E or Z zones.

There are two things you need to know to safely lie low in a barrens: First, who *does* run the streets? Because it's not a corporate security contract (pay attention to paint and AR tags, learn what distinctive cars syndicate bosses drive, that sort of thing, and *be polite*). Do your homework, do your research, listen to the locals, and when you figure out who's in charge, be respectful. It's their house, you're just living in it. If the local syndicate or gang is fraggin' awful and it's time for a change, sure, mix it up, take direct action, do whatever. But by default, be conscious of the fact that nobody runs a barrens by accident; if they're there, they've been there a while, they're entrenched, and something that they're doing is clearly working out okay for the locals (because nobody *else* has ousted them, right?). So think before you act, if your big plan is to "clean up" a neighborhood by kicking out some bad guys. Nature abhors a vacuum, and *somehow*, whoever's running stuff brought some measure of stability. Make sure you're not making things worse.

The other thing you need to know? When those corporate security types do show up (instead of unofficial local law enforcement), they show up *hard*. Multiple Citymasters, full-armored officers, attack helicopters, combat mages with spirits on call, you name it. If Lone Star or Knight Errant have to hit a barrens proper, it's because they've got a really good reason, and, chummer,

you'd best pray the reason isn't you. They're going to come in loud, bright, and flashy, with all their SWAT, rapid-response teams, Firewatch, spirits, and *numbers*. Be ready for bright lights, lots of backup, lots of drones, lots of media attention, and plenty of splash damage. If some other corporate team is in a barrens? No rules apply, and the kid gloves are off. They're on a black op, period, and you need to react accordingly.

Either way, if a heavy, obvious, corp-sec team rolls into a barrens, the drek's going to hit the fan from both sides. The locals—like from point one up there—are going to retaliate, every local ganger is going to work overtime to posture up and take a shot, syndicate bosses are going to be looking after their local interests with all the firepower they can muster, and fixers and shadowrunners are going to pull out their big guns (if they're the targets, at least) and fight like cornered wolves. When the cops show up, everything goes to drek.

Now, all that said? Barrens aren't all violence and hiding out after Mr. Johnson betrays you. They're ... free. Free of the protection of law, yes, but also free from things like taxes, routine work schedules, and corporate overlords. People pull together in a proper barrens just as much as they tear apart, and you'll see most reputable crews and mobsters protect their dues-paying citizenry from paracritters and thrill-gangers, you'll see teams of hackers pull together to steal resources for their community, you'll see mothers and fathers raising their kids with the help of the whole neighborhood, you'll see shadowrunners teaching valuable life skills to local barrens-brats, you name it. There's misery to spare, but there's also the freedom to stretch your fragging legs (and precious little AR spam!).

BARS

In the age of information overload and relentless corporate tyranny, anesthetic is the order of the day. You can get it through the trid or breathe it through an inhaler or receive it from the tip of a needle or the sting of a slapper, but the oldest way, the tried and true? The bar. Not much has changed over the past few thousands of years that watering holes have been around, and what can change doesn't hold true everywhere. Sometimes you want a quiet place with booths and privacy; other times you want noise and people. Hit up The Rubber Suit and you can sit on buildings, part of a replica miniature city where you get to be the kaiju! Little helicopter drones bring your drinks while holographic and AR scenery give you a show. Oh, the humanity!

Maybe you just want to catch the latest Rippers game. Null persp. Sports bars have changed less than anything in the past century, with the trideo over the bar or set up in every booth. Sure, you could all watch it on your 'links, but for most folks, community is the point of sport, and what better way to share it than drinking and screaming?

If you're looking for something simple but contemporary, hotel bars, corner Tír joints done in the classic Celtic style, or neighborhood dives usually have the selection on hand. The only question is detail. Is there a jukebox everyone shares, or does everyone pipe in their own favorite tunes on their PAN? Is it a classy wine bar? A gastro pub with all the fixings? A strip club? Mage bars. Hacker bars. Who hangs out there? Corporate



yuppies and sararimen looking to let off some steam? The downsidars and losers? Go-gangers and heavies? And what do they have going on behind the scenes? A bartender usually knows all the local rumors, sure, but there could be an underground fighting ring in the basement, drug deals and Johnsons in the back booths and storage rooms, smugglers and slavers and BTLs and infected and body chops and ... maybe none of it. Sometimes a bar is just a bar. That's the problem with trying to define what bars in the 2080s are. There's one for just about every proclivity and taste, and whether they are laundering money or just an honest family-run establishment, there's only one thing we can pin down to define them:

They serve alcohol and there's a bartop.
Whaddaya want from me?

BEIJING

Home of the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, and Peking duck, Beijing has had a nasty fall from grace. The breakup of Communist China let a powerful wujen magician named Li Tianzi name himself emperor, but his empire was somewhat smaller than he'd hoped. Since the Crash, Li's grip on the country has loosened somewhat, making it a safe stopover for smugglers running between Vladivostok and Hong Kong. Local powerhouse Tan Tien Corporation is trying to broker a reunification between Beijing and the rest of the Republic of China (the Hebei portion, anyway), so far with mixed results.

BELIAL

(a) The adept front-man of the Archfiends, an all-elf glam-rock band, and (b) the Seattle Chapter President of the Ancients go-gang. (b) defines him more.

The son of Green Lucifer (a Tír exile and long-running co-leader of the chapter), Belial was raised by and in the Ancients, their crown prince. He internalized all the gang's "Robin Hood" bulldrek along the way, and ever since some shadowrunners helped him make prez, he's been steering the gang into all their best stereotypes, sincerely; protecting elves, smuggling low-profit goods to help the hungry, genuinely keeping the peace in their turf, you name it.

BIOWARE

If you can grow an organ, why not grow a better type of organ, often one that can be controlled rather than act at the whim of metahuman psychochemistry? Bioware covers virtually the same range of alteration as its cybernetic predecessor but does so in a more holistically friendly way, often utilizing organ design and genetics from creatures that have evolved to do certain things better than metahumanity.

Designed with parts made to blend directly into the body for purposes of power and control, rather than a need to link through DNI and energy converters, bioware parts place less burden on existing biological systems.

THE BLACK LODGE

Urban legend speaks of a globe-spanning cabal of mages bent on controlling the world. This is who they're talking about. They're not all mages—some are shamans, hounigans, adepts, and all other manner of magically gifted folk, but that's not their real power. Their real power comes from the positions they hold. Megacorporate executives, governmental officials, leaders of the criminal underworld, and scions of powerful religions all answer to the higher levels of this magocracy.

They operate in tiered cells with pompous names like Nostradamus and Rasputin with only a few members in each cell, most of whom don't know drek and one guy who knows drek about another level above. They've got thousands of members across hundreds of cells, all led by their Penultimate Master.

What do they want? Power. To do what? That's always the real question, isn't it?

BLACK STAR

Formed to bolster the activity of the Black Cross, their goal is to recruit, train, and foster insurrectionist activity against oppressive regimes. They are, concisely, the shadowrunning arm of the anarchist movement. As such, they are flagged as a high-threat terrorist organization, because the powers that be like easy categorization.

While in the past, ABS has been involved in wars and insurrections on a global scale, their renewed focus is on local ops. They help the poor, mostly by robbing the rich. They aren't against big agendas, but they've rejected a constant search for bigger, more violent activism. They're seeking organic change by winning hearts and minds.

BLACKWING, EVAN PARRIS

Blackwing is the consummate elven hitman, gentlemanly assassin who wears street leathers like they're a safari outfit, cyberlimbed murderer through and through, slickest killer you'll ever see, tight with his combat mage girlfriend, and absolute death on legs.

Evan Parris is a class-conscious Tír nobleman who has ambitiously climbed his way up from being mere Gentry through the Comital and Ducal ranks, and now finds himself wed to his long-time partner, Rhiannon, and firmly ensconced on the Council of Princes, a true member of the nation's ruling elite.

They're the same dude, tho.

Ol' Evan climbed his way up by being a *millesaratish*, a field agent/assassin/hitman for the old Council, but in addition to doing their dirty work, he routinely dug up dirt on them, leveraged it into patronage from one Prince or another, and worked his way up.

These days, he and his wife—herself an initiate of no small power—live comfortably in the Tír capital of Cara'Sir (Portland). His days of running the streets are firmly behind him, but that killer instinct, that training, and that custom combat chrome don't all just go away (of the current batch of Princes, it's a toss-up between him and the Peace Force darling, Connal Taylor, which of them needs their security detail the least). There've been a few botched assassination attempts, and one famously tridcast training challenge, that show Prince Parris is still in fighting trim. Fraggin' elves.

It's an open secret that Parris' son, Rook, is a high-up

in the Ancients, and plenty of rumors and whispers link the pair of them to Brat'mael/Black Sun terrorist activity. It remains to be seen whether he's a true believer in elven supremacy, playing an angle to pander to their vote and money, or setting up the xenophobes in some twisted Peace Force long con.

BLATAVSKA, SHEILA

You ever hear of the Atlantean Foundation? Fundraisers, video games, archaeological digs, magical discoveries, and stuff, right? Well, back in 2012, some nice little elf named Sheila started it all. Despite being the founder and junk of the biggest media producer in the CAS, with ties to the Mystic Crusaders and all kinds shady activities, conspiracy-theory-worthy and otherwise, the lady herself is still pretty mysterious. She's been connected to Dunkelzahn, Ebran the Scribe, and other heavy hitters, and her intel on where to find artifacts is a little too on-the-nose to be a coincidence. She doesn't just dig up old stuff, she digs up *really* old stuff. Like the stuff dragons remember. Like ancient magical lore that shapes bleeding-edge theoretical developments. Like ruins that date back to the mythical Fourth World. Those who follow along find it pretty interesting that the Big D's will granted the Atlanteans five billion (yes, with a "b" and a lot of zeroes following) nuyen to continue "their search for the truth." And say what you will about dragons, but they usually don't make bad investments. Unless you count the time Dunkelzahn ran for president and got blowed up for it. But that's the subject of another entry.

BLOOD MAGIC

Championed by paragons of metahuman virtue like Aztechnology and Winternight, blood magic is exactly what it sounds like: magic that's powered by blood, or specifically, the mana released in the process of spilling blood. There's no denying that it's a power boost, but for most (sane) mages, the "cutting people open" part is a deal-breaker. Blood magic is also addictive, which might be why people hear "blood mage" and think "serial killer." In fairness, there are (very rare) blood mages who only use their own blood or that of a willing volunteer. Those ones don't advertise, because they rightly fear being persecuted for it.

BORINQUEN

Once known as Puerto Rico, this island slipped away from its old master when the United States crumbled, taking a new name for itself (well, reclaiming its pre-Columbian name) to celebrate its new life as an independent state. Realizing the weak hand this left it in international affairs, it joined the young Caribbean League, a confederation that, in theory, gave each member the right to rule itself. Borinquen enjoyed great wealth due to Natural Vat Technologies Inc., a subsidiary of Productos Cultivatos, which in turn was owned by Aztechnology. Due to the environmental effects of the Great Ghost Dance, many of the Caribbean islands found themselves flooded, but the waters brought with them rich algae and water ideal for fungal growth. NatVat became the world's leading producer of mycoprotein,

responsible for seventy-five percent of the world's supply of mushrooms and fully eighty percent of Aztechnology's overall agricultural production.

These bright days ended on August 18, 2074, when Hurricane Donald struck the island. Already known to be a category 5 storm as it drew near, the great dragon SIRRURG the Destroyer, working with several of his draconic followers and dozens of air spirits, drove the storm into an even more powerful state. For twenty-four hours, the hurricane parked along the entire length of the island, with winds reaching 300 kph. More than four meters of water rained down while dragons hunted down helpless metahumans. SIRRURG himself focused his closest allies on the NatVat facilities, reducing them to rubble then feasting on any employee who could be found. By the time the storm moved north, providing cover for him and his followers to escape, the island lay in ruins. Hills were stripped to bedrock, most buildings on the island were destroyed, and NatVat was unrecoverable.

Since the twin disaster and assault, Borinquen has been abandoned by both Aztechnology, who announced nothing could be salvaged, and the Caribbean League, who lacked the resources for the massive rebuild that would be needed. Fully half the island's population either vanished in the hurricane (killed outright or swept out to sea) or fled to the mainland afterward. Six years later, less than twenty-five percent of the island has power, agriculture is at best subsistence, and feral gangs prowl at the edges of the few remnants of society. The vast ruins and low population have made it a haven for a swollen number of pirates that now hunt the Caribbean.

BOSTON

(NEMAQZ-NORTHEAST
METROPOLITAN AXIS QUARANTINE ZONE)

Boston, and several surrounding metros, were all cut off from the rest of the world when some superbug broke loose from a corporate lab. Oh, wait! That was the bulldrek line they fed us out of the gate, before they had developed a suitable PR campaign for what really happened. Now we all know that an outbreak of rapid-onset CFD was released by the escape of an adult western dragon, Eliohann, who was being experimented on in order to cure his comatose state. Not really a less scary story but they had better persons to pin the blame on (NeoNET), a sad tale about trying to save a famous dragon (Eliohann), and a new threat (Monads) for everyone to focus on. The quarantine is mostly lifted, but the scars remain.

BRANE DEIGH

The powerful and enigmatic Lady Brane Deigh, often referred to simply as Lady Brane, has served as the Queen of the Seelie Court since 2043. Lady Brane came to prominence in the public's eye when she became the wife of, and too soon thereafter widow of, then-president of Tír na nÓg, Liam O'Connor.

Lady Brane Deigh is a master diplomat, as is right and proper for the ruler of the fae, and she is believed to be a magical adept. Although Lady Brane Deigh clearly possesses magical prowess, it is not known exactly what her abilities are, as she regularly keeps them under strong masking.

Lady Brane is the keeper of the Arcana—powerful objects rumored to contain the power to rule the court—and was one of the notable recipients of a part of Dunkelzahn's estate upon his passing. Dunkelzahn willed Lady Brane a set of antique path cards, which are a divination tool similar to tarot cards, but centered around the Elven Ways and Paths. Hundreds of other notable artifacts grace her chambers; the Lady Brane is a noted collector and aficionado of artifacts.

Lady Brane is often the subject on countless gossips' tongues, as are her movements, opinions, rulings, clothing, and attentions. So it came as no surprise when I learned the rumors surrounding the Seelie Court Queen run about as contradicting and nonsensical as I've ever heard. It seems the courtiers are more content to discuss than to investigate, and any number of outlandish fallacies are trotted around the halls of the court as truth. As the cloud of rumor appears to confuse even the heads of other factions within and without the court, I begin to wonder whether the rumors aren't planted by a careful hand. Regardless of their truth, I hope our Queen will continue to be the subject of furious gossip for years to come.

BTL

A spinoff of the cyberdeck technology that gave us the Matrix also gave us BTL (Better Than Life) chips. Little virtual adventures for your mind, plugged into a hot sim rig and slotted right into your brain. In there, you can do *anything*, chummer ... taste the sky, fly through sound, sleep with the prettiest people, or kill your boss a hundred different ways. Each one's a whole new ride, and they're so much better than the drekky world around you that a whole lot of us prefer them over the real deal. Each chip's a single ticket—they burn out as you experience them, and when they end, you can only get that high back by buying another. Rich, poor, or anywhere in between, anyone who has a bad life has an option to enjoy a better one for a reasonable hourly rate.

As you can imagine, BTLs (also known as "Beetles") are psychologically addictive and outlawed in every civilized nation. Of course, in most corporate regions, the opposite is true, setting up a nice tourism industry but also having yet another mood-altering option to keep the workers in line. So what if they burn out in a decade? Toss the withered near-corpse into the street and hire somebody else to do their job—the ex-employee's no longer your problem.

Oh, and there are much weaker versions of BTLs, simple simchips or simsense broadcasts, that dominate all the media. They're not (as) addictive and can't take you as far as the real deal, but they're legal, cheap, and often come in background versions that don't burn out. You can fill yourself with fake happiness to get through the day at a job you hate, strap on a new brave personality to try and get that raise that the unaugmented you is too nervous to ask for, instantly learn kung fu, and a million other varieties that ultimately owe themselves to BTLs. It's our dirty little secret.

- ▶ It's not that a BTL is addictive. It's that any escape from the pain of life is worth chasing.
- ▶ Turbo Bunny

- > Hey TB, you sound risky. Call me.
- > Butch

BUSINESS RECOGNITION ACCORDS

The lynchpin of the world. They are the tools of our oppression and perhaps the most critical thing keeping the world from dissolving into total chaos. Civilization would likely shatter without them, but the elimination of the Accords is likely necessary to move to a world that is not our current hell.

Sound dramatic enough? Good, because these things deserve all the seriousness you can muster. The basics of this Faustian bargain are simple enough. By signing the Accords (or the BRA, as it's usually called), governments essentially sell their sovereignty in exchange of billions of nuyen in tax revenue annually. They grant extraterritoriality (see separate entry) and let corps issue their own currency, and they support the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank's control of the nuyen. In return, they get some small degree of authority on the corps, primarily restrictions on what corps can sell outside their corporate borders (e.g., no ultra-hot simsense, restrictions on some of the more addictive drugs, that sort of thing).

BUTTERCUP

The Sixth Worldiest of Sixth World creatures, Buttercup gets huge street cred for being a free spirit sitting on a corporate board (namely, Evo), but then immediately loses it because she's a corporate board member, and screw them. She also is a partner in Gaeatronics-Amalgamated Productions, a holding company with interests in energy, entertainment, and construction, because why not?

Despite all these corporate bonds, Buttercup might be the closest thing this world has to an heir to Dunkelzahn's legacy. The Big D was instrumental in building Buttercup's empathy for metahumanity when he made her live in the form of an impoverished ork for a year, and since then she has consistently been a voice for metahuman rights and equality, insofar as she can be in the megacorporate confines. Want a reason why Evo has been on the leading edge of Monad acceptance? Look right at Buttercup.

Speaking of Monads, Buttercup hasn't had the luxury of advancing many non-Monad-related progressive goals in recent years because Evo's involvement in the cognitive fragmentation disorder crisis has left her struggling to stay afloat while also leveling punishment on the factions within the corp that spearheaded their AI experimentation. Anyone who has been on the receiving end of that wrath will tell you that "progressive" doesn't mean "gentle."

Buttercup has long taken on the appearance of a young Japanese girl, and if anything, the challenges of recent years have made her ramp up the carefree nature of her personal style. She leans on bright colors from the warm part of the spectrum, as if part of a conscious effort to appear welcoming and kind. Some people call it a sign of her genuineness, others call it a calculated PR move, as if corp people don't do both all the time.



CALIFORNIA FREE STATE

Once upon a time, when the United States was a thing, California was the land of Hollywood and orange groves. And then the Native American Nations took back most of their lands, leaving Seattle and California as West Coast territories. Well, Cali thought it deserved independence. Turns out they got kicked out, and like most Hollywood dreams, they gave in to disappointment. Tir Tairngire to the north and Aztechnology to the south each carved off a slice of territory. Japan's General Saito occupied San Francisco for awhile, then the PCC absorbed Los Angeles. CFS has more or less stabilized—and it's still all about the dreams of stardom (even without L.A. as a part of their nation)—but now you get to row down the canals of flooded cities and listen to the paranoia of the next OC Patriot about who is gonna invade next now that Hestaby has flown the coop. Have fun!

CANTON CONFEDERATION

Besides being known for its *dim sum*, the portion of southern China now called the Canton Confederation was one of the economic powerhouses of the People's Republic, centered on the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone. After the collapse of Communist China, the Confederation prospered on its own despite a relative lack of megacorp involvement and shared a brief rivalry with Wuxing. That all changed after Crash 2.0, when the Wireless Matrix rollout forced the Confederation to contract Wuxing for the upgrades. That gave Wuxing the opening they needed to expand their influence on the mainland, and the Canton Confederation is now almost entirely Wuxing's puppet.

CAPTAIN CHAOS

Cap was the sysop of the Shadowland BBS—the Matrix place where shadowrunners went in the 2050s and '60s to discuss and share info related to their trade. He was a member of a North American neo-anarchist collective, and he was a journalist before that and became quite the decker as well. Most importantly, he was a symbol of hopeful anarchism and resistance in a fraged-up world. In the dragon Dunkelzahn's will, Cap was given a program called JackBNimble. Rumor persists that JackBNimble was a program that uploaded and protected Cap's mind on the Matrix after Crash 2.0 killed his meat body.

CARIBBEAN LEAGUE

If you don't laugh, you'll cry. Read up on the history, but the Caribbean League has always been a mish-mash of small groups trying to hold it together. Some of these groups have money, some have people, some have drugs, and some have sold out.

There have been three main developments in the League. First is that the anti-corp feeling that was deeply rooted in Borinquen has seeped into the other league cities. Okay, mostly that's because some pirates have settled down throughout the League and become upstand-

ing citizens, but also, the League has been screwed hard by the corps in the wake of VITAS.

This has led to the second development: the League is sticking together better with time. Don't get me wrong, the League is just full of people who have very different worldviews, but most of the time they are all busy getting stuff done that the actual members of the League haven't gotten around to fighting, and over time this has meant the whole region has slouched into an arrangement.

And this kinda happened at the same time as the third main thing: All the people surrounding the League got weaker—but only for a time. The CAS has overcome some recent significant problems, and their recent move into Florida shows that they're ready to be bold. At least that's the only neighbor to worry about—Aztlán hasn't had the resources to get their feathery claws in for a good few years, and Yucatán is only now beginning to get on its feet.

Of course, the corps have not forgotten what's down there, and it's cheap for them to send a few deniable assets in to cause political ructions, but the League knows all about ructions, it's good at them, and it never seems to be really heavily affected.

You just know they are going to screw it up by inviting one of the big players in, and the recent attempted CAS takeover of portions of Florida are a sad indicator of where things might go.

CELEDYR

Celedyr is a nerd. Yes, everyone gets hung up on the “great dragon” part, but consider this: From the start, Celedyr's primary interests in the Sixth World have revolved around communication, especially languages and the Matrix. He was a major shareholder in Transys-Neuronet, which is famous for its expertise in programming and neural interfacing (there's a reason they were able to develop the first working cyberhand). Despite having very little direct involvement in the corporate world before that point, Celedyr was also the driving force behind the merger between T-N and Erika during the development of the wireless Matrix. When those two corps joined up with Novatech to form NeoNET after Crash 2.0, what position did Celedyr take? R&D chief. Even his fellow great dragons think he's a nerd—Celedyr took over the Loremaster position from Lofwyr after the Great Dragon Civil War a few years ago.

Of course, nowadays most people know Celedyr for his involvement with CFD—as in, being responsible for it. Celedyr was experimenting with digital intelligences, looking at ways to store biological consciousnesses in digital form and place digital intelligences in biological form. One of his facilities held artificial intelligences for testing, and those captives were some of the designers of CFD, constructing it as a vehicle of escape and survival. When the truth about CFD came to light, the media crucified Celedyr. Even Transys-Neuronet publicly condemned and broke ties with him in a failed effort to save the company; their stock's currently worth about as much as anything they say in public. Since the Corporate Court dismantled NeoNET, Celedyr's been holed up in Caerleon. His Knights of Rage are still active in hunting down ancient artifacts, and it's not likely Celedyr's actually given up on his interest in the Matrix, but smart money is that he'll

stay off the grid for a few years (or decades) until his name isn't radioactive anymore.

CHANGELINGS

Freaks unite! I'm a freak, too, and proud of it. It's taken most of my life to get to this point, but I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere. My mom said when Halley's Comet passed over, some drek about it pulled magic out from where there hadn't been any before, and that's why some of us were born with extra bits. Like, I have feathers.

The bullying was really bad growing up, and I'm just grateful my mom was able to move us to another neighborhood. Because now I know I'm beautiful and I don't cringe at the word *preen* anymore. My friends are great—they've got gills and fur and extra limbs and change colors, and I wouldn't trade them for anything.

Things aren't great for everyone, though. We're super lucky where I live. There have been some awful rumors floating around. There's the usual—isn't it sad that these have become the usual?—story of everyone around a changeling freaks the frag out and abandons the kid. Too often, that story doesn't end in just abandonment—it escalates to abuse or even murder. Every one of us has a story. If it's not ours, we're lucky as hell and rare as real chocolate.

But there are more concentrated spots of evil. For example, somewhere in Europe—I want to say eastern Europe?—people have said that there's someone offering bounties for proof that they've killed a changeling. Like, a hand or a head or something; it's really horrible. In the interest of full disclosure, me and my friends are actually thinking of flying out there, hunting down those sons of dogs and seeing how they like it. We'll let you all know how it goes.

CHICAGO

Perhaps no other city in the world has seen its fortunes shift as often, and as radically, as Chicago. At the cusp of a new lease on life, this town has change in its DNA and grit in its bones. The old social contracts that once held sway over the population here were torn up, and have yet to be replaced with anything new, let alone anything better. In many ways, Chicago is a divining rod for the fate of the Sixth World. Chicago has experienced everything this new and vexing world has to offer, usually more than its fair share, and sooner than everyone else.

For over thirty years, Chicago has been a hotbed of shadowrunning activity, bursting with life and soaring to new heights, and the next second falling to lows previously unimaginable. It takes a special kind of person to love this city, and a crazy one to stay here. But they exist, and they survive, just like Chicago. After Operation: Takeback began in 2075, corporations flooded back into Chicago to clean up, reclaim old property, and reboot Chicago as a corporate city. For years, things went as designed, but Horizon's representative Martin Tate was discovered to have been working with bug spirits to create a dragon/wasp spirit queen hybrid, and a second invasion of insect spirits almost overtook the city. Narrowly averting a neutron bomb from Ares, the bugs were destroyed by a loose coalition of military, Chicago assets, and shadowrunners. Now, Chicago is truly bug-free; Truman Tech, newly independent as an

AA once again, is the hometown corp; and the Changing City is free to choose its own destiny.

CHILE

Whenever someone calls a country a “nation of contrasts,” it’s because they’ve never been there and they’re surprised to learn the millions of people within its borders don’t conform to a single stereotype. So of *course* Chile is a nation of contrasts, dumbasses. It’s got plenty of smugglers thanks to its long coastline, an unhealthy amount of narcotics trafficking, a genius cohort of innovative hackers, a burgeoning collective of witches in the Chiloé Archipelago, and more.

CHINA, GREATER

An umbrella term for the region historically known as the People’s Republic of China. Includes the modern-day territories of Beijing, the Canton Confederation, Henan, Manchuria, the Republic of China (the mainland one; see that entry for details), Shaanxi, and Sichuan. Sometimes extended to include Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

CHINA, REPUBLIC OF

Made up of the former Hebei Province and city of Tianjin, and the birthplace of Goubuli steamed buns, the Republic of China has branded itself the successor to the pre-Communist state. Naturally, that put them at odds with the *other* Republic of China—the one based in Taiwan, founded by politicians fleeing from the very same Communists, who had vanished and resurfaced in the years since. Now, both Republics are entertaining offers from Tan Tien Corporation to reunite with Beijing—but only if the other gives up its claim to be the “real” China.

CITYSPEAK

The language of the streets, no matter which streets you’re on. It’s a bastardized combination Japanese, English, and the stuff mumbled by gutterpunks after they get hit on the head a few times. While that might not sound promising, the language has a speed, flow, and efficiency that few other languages can match, and even a poetry if you know how to speak it right. It started as a Seattle-based lingo, but much like Seattle runners, it’s spread to any place where shadows exist. It also has infiltrated pop culture and normiespeak. If you’ve said things like drek, chummer, or *omae* in regular conversation, you’ve said your first words of Cityspeak.

CITY SPIRITS

Though it’s possible that the city spirits no longer wish to make themselves known so readily as they did once before, they haven’t vanished. Walk through the winding lanes of Constantinople, the thoroughfares of Beijing, or the alleyways of Métropole, and there will echo, through the strata of the ages of culture, people, and actions, a particular flavor/timbre/shade of spirit you’ll encounter nowhere else. Hermetics may refer you to the background count or the geomancy of ley lines, and though these certainly are contributors, no amount

of measuring or classification can encompass a city spirit. As easy to measure as a dream.

CLINE, GARY

Something about the CEO of Horizon Group just doesn’t sit right with me. You could probably say the same about a lot of corporate heads, especially those running the Big Ten, but Gary Cline, a semi-retired action-sim star, is a different level of unsettling. He’s got a winning smile, dashing good looks (something especially worth noting due to him being an ork), a flamboyant style, power, fans, fame, fortune—you name it. The world is his oyster. So what’s wrong with him?

This is a textbook case of “too good to be true.” For starters, go look at Cline’s simography. It’s longer than my rap sheet (which is saying something)—sim flicks out the wazoo. But ask yourself, have you *seen* any of them? Or, more to the point: Have you seen *any* of them before Horizon stepped out onto the corporate stage? That’s because those films didn’t exist until after the fact. They were backdated, and the public was merely told they were popular back then. And what do you know, it *worked*.

But why would they do something like that? Just to prove that Cline’s powerful new mega could? Or is there something else at work?

My vote is that he’s a confidence man engaged in the most elaborate long con I’ve ever seen, and “Gary Cline” is a painstakingly crafted persona with a terrifically intricate backstory. He’s not actually an action star. Clever effects artists painted his face over a C-list actor, Horizon crafts a compelling and believable biography, and *voilà!* A star is born.

Hell, he might not even be an ork, as far as I know. But even if he is, you *know* he’s had some work done to make him look more human to breeders. More palatable to Horizon’s clients and customers. Less *trog*.

Fraggin’ sellout.

COGNITIVE FRAGMENTATION DISORDER (CFD)

Cognitive fragmentation disorder—or CFD, as literally everyone who isn’t writing an encyclopedia article calls it—is what happens when a great dragon goes full mad-scientist, takes the plot of a cheesy B-list horror trid about AIs downloading themselves into people’s brains, and goes, “Hey, that sounds like a great idea!” Yes, seriously. It’s every bit as absurd as it sounds ... but a *lot* more horrifying.

The world at large only found out about CFD a few years ago, but it started over a decade before that. Back in the 2050s, a dragon named Eliohann got a datajack—which everyone had thought was impossible, so it was a pretty big deal at the time. With his brand-spanking-new datajack, Eliohann could experience the Matrix the way metahumans do—including eventually getting his mind trapped in the Matrix during Crash 2.0.

The great dragon Celedyr over at then-NeoNET wasn’t having any of that, though. He began studying digital intelligences—AIs and “e-ghosts” of people who had been connected to the Matrix during the second Crash, or croaked in various other traumatic ways—to find ways to transfer consciousness into a physical storage medium. Eventually, Celedyr’s research (now called

Project Imago) crossed paths with a top-secret Evo program called the Dickens Project, which was trying to turn “mind uploading” from transhumanist fantasy into reality. (For anyone who heard about Evo’s whole “fake Justice Hino” scandal in the early 2070s: yeah, it was *that* Dickens Project.)

In the early 2070s, word started leaking out about the research, which involved detaining and torturing digital intelligences in various ways while Celedyr and Evo worked to refine the “downloading” process. A group of shadowrunners broke into a lab outside Albuquerque that Celedyr owned, where some of the experiments were carried out. After that run, several of the runners on that team (including former Smoker’s Club leader Jonathan Riser and the legendary decker FastJack) were suffering blackouts and strange personality shifts, like they’d suddenly caught dissociative identity disorder.

It took two more years and a lot of digging before anyone could discover the truth: The runners on that team were some of the first victims of CFD. The digital intelligences being held prisoner for Project Imago had found a way to get themselves downloaded into nanites that could overwrite organic brains. FastJack, Riser, and the others had been exposed to those nanites, and the blackouts and “personality shifts” were those digital personalities taking over their new host bodies—the Matrix/nanite equivalent of being possessed by a spirit. The digital intelligences didn’t stop there, though; they used the nanites they controlled to sabotage nano-manufacturing facilities, spread the infection to new hosts via augmentation clinics, and even made their existence known by taking the entire planet hostage with orbital weapons platforms, supposedly to protect themselves.

Information on CFD spread through the shadows long before it reached the rest of the world, as usual. In fact, shadowrunners did most of the legwork, investigating CFD and trying to find a cure while the corps covered their asses. The entire CFD crisis came to a head with the quarantine of the Northeast Metropolitan Area, better known as the Boston Lockdown. Project Imago finally succeeded in writing Eliohann’s mind back into his body (with a few unexpected side effects), but Eliohann broke out of the lab during the procedure, showering Boston with CFD-bearing nanites. After an early attempt to cover it up as “viral encephalitis,” the corps caved and admitted what had happened.

AFTERMATH

As usual, the victims who suffered the worst of CFD were ordinary people; see the entry on Monads for that. On the macro scale, the highest-profile victim of CFD was NeoNET, the architects of a disaster so huge that even the entire Corporate Court couldn’t cover it up—or at least, Celedyr was, and the rest of the Big Ten used it as an excuse to get revenge on Richard Villiers for White Monday. At this point, it doesn’t really matter what the reasons are; NeoNET is gone, and recently-merged Spinrad Industries and Global Sandstorm took its place as Spinrad Global (or Spin-Global, or “SpinStorm,” as some people call it). On the other hand, Evo rallied from the initial bad publicity and actually came out ahead (once again proving that there will be no justice in the world unless the system’s

torn down), thanks to bleeding-edge tech they developed after offering the Monads safe haven and full corporate citizenship.

As of right now, CFD itself is contained and is slowly being eliminated. The immediate threat of infection is gone; many Monads left the planet with the launch of their space ark (Deep Space Exploration and Colonization I, or DSECI), and most of the ones that stayed agreed not to spread CFD any further as part of their deal with Evo. The corps have also released a couple of different types of cure, all of them at least partly developed by shadowrunners, and are actually offering it to corporate and national SINners for free. Boston is still in shambles, but the NEMA’s been cleaned up enough that they were able to start rebuilding. The nanotech industry, on the other hand, was almost destroyed. They’re trying to make a comeback, but expect it to take a while; nobody with any sense willingly puts nanites into their body anymore.

COLLTON, ANGELA

Let’s forget the fact that Angela Colloton held the rank of major general in the UCAS Army. Completely discount the notion that she successfully fended off a military-backed coup d’état against the UCAS government in 2064. And just ignore that she was elected president of the UCAS for three consecutive terms starting back in 2068. Just blast all of that out of your memory for a moment. Use a few BTLs if you need to. I’ll wait.

Okay, you done? Good. Now let’s talk about what *actually* matters here. Let’s talk about her actual biggest claim to fame—or in this case, infamy.

Angela Colloton single-handedly managed to piss off her nation’s biggest defense contractor: Ares Macrotechnology. This is like when your Shiawase Cyber-5 is acting up due to a hardware fault, and you call up their tech support line, and instead of acting all civil over the commlink, you swear blue streaks at them. You do that, and they’re just flat-out not going to help you. This is basically what happened with Ares. Their faulty Excalibur Battle Rifles hospitalized countless UCAS servicepeople, and Colloton called them out on it, publicly. Then, to worsen matters, she attacked them on their lax handling of certain bug spirit hives. And things got ugly. Tensions escalated on both sides of the fence until Ares just picked up their ball and went home with it—“home,” in this case, being Atlanta, the heart of Colloton’s not-so-friendly southern neighbor. The UCAS got hit with massive litigations due to being in breach of their defense contracts with Ares, and all of the Ares military advisors working with the joint chiefs skedaddled. Things the UCAS still owes Ares money for—guns, tanks, etc.—got repossessed (and probably resold to the CAS Army).

If we get into a war with the CAS—Ghost forbid—then we are utterly fragged.

So for all of us living in the UCAS, I just want to say: “Thanks, *Colloton!*” Thanks for fragging this up for us.

COMBAT BIKER

Can’t decide if you want to watch motocross, a gang fight, capture the flag, or jousting? Chummer, have I got the sport for you!

It used to be how go-gangs settled their differences, stunting on one another, whacking folks off their bikes with sticks, shooting each other a lot, and just, y'know, go-ganger things. Some corporate execs decided to monetize it, though, and decades ago they slapped logo-covered armor on the psychos, granted teams corporate sponsorships for all the gas and gel rounds they could ever want, gave them a drone-mounted flag to fight over, and tridcast the whole thing. Reputable!

CONFEDERATION OF AMERICAN STATES (CAS)

Don't think just because the Confederation of American States is in North America, they're like their neighbors. The CAS may border the UCAS, but even hundreds of years ago, they weren't the same. Most people stereotype those differences as slavery, racism, and conservatism, but while those exist, they're symptoms of larger cultural mores, not the heart of the people themselves. Further, changes in demographics have swept away any accuracy those old generalizations might have had.

First, racism still exists. And it is bad. But where isn't that true? In the UCAS, orks and trolls are routinely manipulated out of wealthy neighborhoods, targeted by police, and underrepresented in elected office and media. No one needs to be reminded Tír Tairngire, Tír na nÓg, and the Zulu Nation have all been fascist-level elf supremacies. Corporations are no better. Among AAAs, non-humans in top positions are so rare as to make news when and if they happen. So, are there racists among the CAS? Absolutely. Just like everywhere else. But while the rich, old, racist humans still exert an unbalanced amount of influence here, they're now the minority. CAS citizens have a pragmatic acceptance of all metahumans. They exist, they are neighbors, and they aren't going anywhere. Shop owners, farmers, and neighbors have either gotten over themselves or moved in favor of a functional society.

- Third option: They just pretend really well and secretly support racist groups.
- Clarion

Non-intuitively, the CAS also differs in their acceptance of magic. In much the same way race has been handled, the CAS initially resisted it, but have since learned to accept it in a much more integrated way than most other places. The southern states now routinely use mages and shamans, not just for corporate or government security, although that still happens, but more often to help crops grow, keep livestock healthy, and generally maintain status quo, freeing up other resources to play catch-up to Aztlan and the UCAS—to great effect, I might add. While the UCAS struggles to remain relevant, the CAS is on a sustained economic upswing.

For better or worse, shamans are more abundant in the CAS than most other forms of magicians. While more research could definitely shed light on the particulars, the CAS's easy integration of faith, legend, and tradition with normal life allows the fantastic to exist alongside the mundane with an odd ease that even the most outwardly tolerant societies have yet to achieve.

While the CAS has been slow to mature as a Sixth World nation, their growth has not been forced, nor has it

been prescribed by well-to-do leaders, which has allowed a more organic balance to arise. It took them decades to recover from the first Matrix Crash, and their pride (and economy) are still wounded from Aztlan's invasion of Texas. And yet the CAS boasts certain boons not present elsewhere. Stronger food production means lower lifestyles eat more real food than poor in other places. The Confederated States produce and consume the largest amount of rice, pork, and chicken on the continent. Sweetheart deals on distribution from CAS-based corps like Kong Wal-Mart, coupled with government-subsidized long-term leases, give Confederation agri corps the equivalent of extraterritoriality without ERLA oversight.

With the exception of the DFW megasprawl and Atlanta, sprawls in the CAS spread out, rather than up, in concentric rings of money and poverty. Exactly opposite of Seattle, cities in the South take up much more land, but are generally less than three stories high.

While every AAA megacorp has a presence here, their North American headquarters tended to be either north, south, or west of the CAS, leaving A- and AA-rated corps to gain much more of a foothold as the largest corps spent money and political capital wedging themselves into other nations. Some of the strongest AA corps, such as Lone Star, DocWagon, and Kong Wal-Mart have their HQs in the CAS, and those corps have spent billions lobbying CAS senators and representatives to keep AAA corps from muscling their way in and ruining their abnormally favorable contractual arrangements.

In addition to a weaker AAA presence, the government is also weaker in the CAS. Decentralization means that the average person runs into the government more often, but they aren't nearly as monolithic or all-powerful as they are elsewhere. When the CAS split from the UCAS, much of the federal power of the old USA stayed in the north and was never replaced. The authority most nations hold at the national level is left to each individual state in the CAS. As a result, each state has its own localized identity and version of realpolitik, and they are often in conflict with one another over corporate favor, imports, exports, and culture.

The recent presidential election indeed proved to be a referendum on outgoing President Ramsay McMulkin's Technocrat Party. After McMulkin wrapped up his second term, CAS citizens were clearly disappointed with the lack of concrete results. McMulkin promised to get back parts of Texas lost to Aztlan and bring jobs and megacorps to the South. Instead, parts of Texas were lost to the PCC, and McMulkin was unable to convince any AAA corps to base in the CAS, despite Spinrad Global and Ares suggesting plans for expansions.

As a result Estelle Patterson, Senator from Arkansas who ran on the New Nationalist platform, won the vote and is leaning into a new direction for the CAS. Former President Aaron Franklin made outreach efforts to minority groups, which at the time were seen as weakness and resulted in McMulkin's rise. But the winds of change have been blowing strong since the CAS hired Horizon to craft a new media branding strategy. Focusing on the CAS as a place of honor and southern hospitality, the plan seems to have worked, perhaps too well for President McMulkin's legacy. CASians were emboldened by this new voice, and the New Nationalists organized to capitalize on it. Honor, tradition, and hospitality have always been sacred here, but McMulkin overplayed his

hand by *speaking* according to the marketing campaign, but *acting* according to the script defined by his corporate masters. The result was the people remembered their best selves and turned their ire toward corporations that haven't represented their interests.

Patterson, continuing former President Franklin's turn with the New Nationalists, chose an inclusive way forward, but don't think for a minute that because she spouts inclusion that she isn't dirty as a drek shovel. But, especially with the inclusion of an ork VP in Trayvon Grey, she represents an important symbol if the CAS truly wants to paint itself with brushes of tradition and honor rather than the comfortable and historical brushes of racism and intolerance.

- > The campaign to ditch the only-eight-year-old flag and racist Matrix sculpting in the CAS public grid also proved popular as ballot initiatives.
- > Big Tom

Of course, McMulkin wasn't letting his legacy be defined by loss, so the lame-duck president made sure to deliver what can only be promises he made to his handlers when he moved the CAS army into Miami and declared Florida once again unified under the CAS. This followed months of sanctions leveled at the Caribbean League for harboring and aiding pirates, and the threat that if the League can't police its waters, it will be done for them. The Corporate Court has been strangely silent about the affair, simply saying it was a national matter, not a corporate one. That the Caribbean League is virtually powerless to strike back likely means this is the new normal. Meanwhile, CAS-based corporations have wasted no time in buying up South Florida property and bringing along their corporate security as well. Miami-based corps seem unfazed by the developments, leading most to conclude they knew it was coming. They welcomed the backing of the far more stable CAS government.

- > Just to be clear, racism and intolerance aren't going away, even if Patterson is elected.
- > Mr. Clean
- > True, but it gets funky sometimes in the CAS. Elves are actually the bottom rung of society in many tusker-dominated areas. Funny thing is, they care just as much about Southern tradition as the white humans do.
- > Wolf

As of November 2080, the CAS consists of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

CONGO TRIBAL LANDS

This is perhaps the best place on earth to attempt to try out neo-anarchist ideals. It is vast, with a range of climates and people, but it lacks any sort of strong central authority. It has a capital, of sorts—a group called the Kobikela named the Kinshasa-Brazzaville sprawl as the capital in 2069. As a coalition of shamans and Awakened non-human sapients, they have decent power, but

they have not been able to translate that into a strong central government. They make pronouncements from time to time, and the people within the nation generally ignore them. Enforcement apparatuses are not strong enough for the government to make any real headway.

Which is a good thing. Because by and large, the tribes of the Congo are functional. They welcome meta-humans. They respect one another's traditions. They look to resolve disputes over land and resources through negotiation first, violence last, if at all. They have military strength—the reputation of the Congo Freedom Force, an upstart mercenary unit, is on the rise—but it's directed at maintaining what they have, not at conquest.

I don't want to get too rose-colored here—after all, it's still a land inhabited by metahumanity, which means the same flaws you see among the rest of us rear up there. Sometimes tribal leaders get greedy and selfish. Sometimes they display authoritarian tendencies and look to conquer their neighbors. It happens. But the dynamic between all the tribes tends to be self-correcting, so excesses by any one group tend to be pulled back to the norm. It's what we always talk about, and it's happening.

Which means, of course, that it's endangered. These lands were absolutely rocked by VITAS, so it is one of the least densely populated on earth. That means the land is not ravaged by exploitation, but it also makes the nation vulnerable. Multiple AAAs (notably Evo) already have a presence, with an eye on the nation's resources. Shedim are rumored to be gathering just outside of Kinshasa, and no one wants to know what for. Powers seem to be coalescing to sweep the land's independence away. But they have tried before and not succeeded—maybe the Congo can continue to hold out, at least for a while. Maybe.

Now a caution—if you go to the Congo to live a neo-anarchist life, do it right. Do it as a guest. Follow the lead of the people you join. You're not there to show them the way or to lead them on the path of global revolution. You can watch and listen. After all, they're the ones who have made it work.

CONSTANTINOPLE

The Free City of Constantinople is a thriving metropolis of just shy of twenty million people as of 2080. The city spans the Bosphorus Strait at the southern end of Turkey, is a central hub unofficially connecting three continents and a stop on the Iron Silk Road connecting the United Kingdom and the Canton Confederation, and has been an important hub of commerce for centuries. The city declared and gained its independence from Turkey in 2042. Constantinople also holds the world record in most congested city traffic (forty-three years and going!), so keep that in mind (along with the narrow, winding streets) when choosing what vehicle to bring along for your job.

CONSUMER PRODUCTS

The great need for distraction, backed by the power of marketing, has led to an ongoing consumer culture and a never-ending need for new and improved consumer goods. From this season's new fashion trends to the year's shiny new cars to the "it" toy of the holiday season, people work themselves to the bone in or-

der to buy things that they only think they need. The constant churn of work for pay, and pay for things, is what keeps the blood of the economy in circulation. Megacorporate stars dress in megacorporate clothes to shill megacorporate movies that feature megacorporate product placement, and you can read all the hottest gossip in megacorporate magazines while waiting to get a new look at a megacorporate body shop. They push the idea that there's a void in your soul, a disease that has vague symptoms, or roll out new features that make last year's thing obsolete and you must buy buy buy if you want to keep up.

- NERPS! It combats receding hairlines! NERPS! It'll brighten your tushs! NERPS! It'll increase your watt-kilometers! NERPS! It's what all the kids have to have for Kwanzaa this year! NERPS! For stopping that falling-out-of-bed feeling! NERPS!
- Bull
- ... drek. Now I want some NERPS.
- Slamm-O!

CORPORATE COURT

You know how sometimes you imagine there's a secret group of people meeting together to plot the fate of the world and make sure things work out to their advantage? Well, that's happening, and this is the group. Formed after corporate warfare started cutting too deeply into profits, the Court exists to smooth the path forward for the largest corps in the world. Never make the mistake of thinking they have any other purpose, including anything resembling justice.

The Court is above us all both literally and figuratively, as it is based in the Zurich-Orbital Habitat. It designates corporations as unrated, A, AA, and AAA; AA and above are considered megacorporations.

The Court has thirteen seats. Seven of them belong to representatives of the original founding corps of the Court. Those seats are sometimes called "golden tickets," because they guarantee AAA status. Here are the current holders of the ticket, with the source of their ticket indicated in parentheses if it's different from them:

- Ares
- Aztechnology (ORO)
- Mitsuhama
- Renraku (Keruba International)
- Saeder-Krupp (BMW)
- Shiawase
- Spinrad Global (JRJ International)

Traditionally, other representatives from the AAA corps also get a seat. There are ten such corps right now, three who are not listed above, so Evo, Wuxing, and Horizon get a seat. That leaves three seats up for grabs, and they're quite a prize, as having double representation on the Court makes it that much easier to sway. As of this writing, the extra seats are held by Ares, Mitsuhama, and Saeder-Krupp. With Ares's recent troubles, their extra seat is likely the most vulnerable.

The Court's powers have been downplayed from time to time, and it's true that the individual corps tend to wield more might outside the Court than in

it. But don't dismiss how the Court can shake the world. It can make a formerly mighty corp ripe for acquisition, elevate a smaller corp to a status thought beyond its means, or focus the ire of the most powerful entities on earth at a single target. Suffice it to say that if you have drawn their attention, you have gravely erred.

CORPORATE SCRIP

Every AAA (and even some of the AA-rated corps) has its own private currency that is no different from national ones, except that it can usually only be used to pay for things at stores owned by the corp that issued it. Banks will exchange it for nuyen, but the exchange rate sucks. Oh, and they track every red cent from the moment it's issued (and who it's issued to) to where it is spent. Never take corp scrip unless you can get it in paper form. I hear Ares Bucks are better than two-ply for wiping your ass.

- The advantage to corp scrip is that you can generally get a higher payout from a megacorp Johnson, anywhere from an extra ten to fifty percent. If you know exactly what you want and have the connections with that corp, it can be worth doing. But as noted, they can follow the money pretty closely unless you jump through some hoops. Personally, I advise against it, but the risk could be worth the reward. Just note that most banks charge at least a twenty percent service fee to convert corp scrip over to nuyen.
- Mr. Bonds
- For some reason, I never get tired of calling Renraku yen "Yenraku." It's also worth noting that if you operate out of Europe, SK loves to try paying in Krupp Marks whenever possible, with their Brakhauses pushing hard to pay in it instead of nuyen. They're frequently called "Crap Marks," and no one but SK subsidiaries will accept them, preferring the nuyen.
- Cosmo
- I should also mention that Aztechnology doesn't have its own corp scrip, instead using the Aztlan peso. However, you should be wary taking AZT pesos as payment, as they get complicated. The short version is that there are two types of pesos, libre and normas. Libre can only be spent at Aztlan or Aztechnology businesses or converted to normas, while normas can be spent or exchanged for nuyen freely outside of Aztlan/AZT. Aztlan pesos libres are tracked closely, and it's a crime to spend them outside country and corp, so beware. For more in-depth information, see the old Aztlan datadump if you can find a copy of it floating around the Matrix.
- Mr. Bonds

CORPORATE SCRIP NAMES AND CONVERSION RATES TO NUYEN

Ares: Ares Dollar (12A\$:1¥)

Aztechnology: Aztlan Peso (40Azt\$:1¥)

Evo: Evo Ruble (24E:1¥)

Horizon: Horizon Dollar (4H\$:1¥)
Mitsuhama Corporate Technologies: Mitsuhakin (1M:2¥)
Renraku: Renraku Yen (5R¥:1¥)
Saeder-Krupp: Krupp Mark (4.5KM:1¥)
Shiawase: Shiawase Okane (1S¥:1¥)
Spinrad Global: Spinrad Escudo (10Sp\$:1¥)
Wuxing: Wuyuan (8W¥:1¥)

CORPORATE SINNERS

In today's society, slavery is legal. You are bought and paid for and owned body, mind, and if possible, soul. Of course it's not *called* slavery, but it amounts to the same thing. I'm referring, of course, to corporate SINners. Sellouts who have traded their freedom for the chains of corporate "freedom," or those born into it and too cowardly or too ignorant to throw off their chains. Corp SINners more often than not live in corp housing, are paid in corp scrip that only has worth in corporate stores, and can be transferred anywhere in the world on the whim of their corp masters. They don't get a say in this. And with their SIN tied to the corp, they can't even quit to find another job. They have to jump through their masters' hoops, play their games, and hope they can climb the corporate ladder. And when you have a corp SIN, you trade in your national SIN, but that doesn't mean your voting rights in your country of residence are gone. It's just that the corp usually uses them on your behalf. Well, on their behalf.

And that's where the CorpseSlaves come in. As pathetic as a corp SINner is, at least they're working, trying to make something of their life, even if it's not really their own anymore. The CorpseSlaves, on the other hand, are a thousand times worse. These are the dregs that have sold themselves, sold their lives, all for the vote. Every AAA mega, and even most AAs and some As, have entire legions of these CorpseSlaves that they've bought and paid for. They provide a crap doss to live in, a monthly stipend that's just barely enough to keep them in cheap booze and stuffer meals, and somewhere on the corporate payroll they're listed simply as "Labor" or some such. It costs the corp almost nothing, and they get just enough to barely survive on, not having to work, not having to do anything. And the corp gets more voting power. It's disgusting, and I'll never understand how someone can sell their very soul like that.

- This is something that's really taken off in the last ten or fifteen years. The corporations have always done it, but it's become an industry at this point, blatant and brazen. Some countries have tried to stop it, but they just don't have the power at this point, and well, the corps own most of the votes.
- Mr. Bonds
- Some of the corps have been building low-rent colonies, for lack of a better word, in Z-Zones in many major cities. The land is cheap, they bulldoze it, and then build up what can only be loosely called apartment complexes utilizing anything from mobile homes, shipping containers, old train cars, cheap modular buildings, and so on. They have basic plumbing, basic Matrix access, and that's about it. They're a step up from living like a squatter, but not by much.
- Old Crow



- ▶ They're also fragging deathtraps. They're built on the cheap, and frequently built far too high. I was on a run down in Phoenix and there was a CorpseSlave colony made up of converted train cars stacked ten to fifteen tall. A couple gangs started mixing it up, and a large tower of these came crashing down, killing twenty-seven people and injuring over a hundred.
- ▶ Pistons

CUBA

Cuba—tourist hotspot, neo-communist paradise, playground of the rich and famous, and home to about a trillion (okay, maybe 8.7 million) people too poor to fight the resorts and the new beachfront properties. Millions of fisher-folk displaced. So, if you get the chance to do a run for any of the fancy resorts out there, jump at it, and then burn them from within. Maybe they weren't the first to shove the locals off their land, but they deserve every ounce of venom we have for them.

Other than the corrupt having control over the island, the people of Cuba are hustlers. They have to be—the top industry is tourism, so everyone can get in on it, and the gap between the haves and have-nots widens daily.

CURRENCY

A credstick is about the size and shape of a old-fashioned disposable pen. There is a display that usually shows how much is currently on the stick, and a small clickable wheel allowing a holder to thumb an amount to transfer via a credstick jack that can be found in most point-of-sale machines and commlinks. The machine then has the other person's bank confirm the nuyen as legitimate and transfers it to a bank account. This system is protected by high-end encryption that requires a room full of computers to process, with only the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank providing the hardware and software to legitimate financial establishments. A pair of credsticks can also transfer directly to each other by thumbing the cred to give, and then tapping or touching sticks on the metal bottom of both credsticks to directly transfer the cash without any need for a bank. There are also certified credsticks, where the cred is loaded on to the stick with no trace as to where it came from. Certified sticks have no identifiers—if you hold it, you own it. They're an easy way to pass along money without an electronic trail, but also an easy way to lose money if you leave on in your pocket when you're doing laundry or something.

Physical currencies still exist and are preferred by some runners and Mr. Johnsons. The most infamous, and one of the few still using cloth for its bills, is the United Kingdom and its bank notes depicting Queen Caroline. The UCAS has the dollar, alternating former prime ministers of Canada and presidents of the USA on them, ranging from the \$1 coin to the \$1,000 polymer bill.

CYBERWARE

Thanks to DNI and some serious advancements in energy storage and conversion, metahumanity was able to make the leap to augmentation through mechanical means. Limbs were the obvious big step forward, but we had long been working to replace biological parts with technology, starting with artificial hearts and kidneys.

Now we can replace and enhance everything but the brain, and even that part has an abundance of enhancement accessories that can be slapped on the base model.

We haven't managed to overcome the biological limitations of the metahuman form, but over the decades researchers have made systems that were more and more compatible. Never in the initial design, because this is still a nuyen-driven industry, and newer and upgraded models need to occur frequently to keep the cash cow fat.

CYBERZOMBIES

"Doctor, you know how if we put too much cyberware into a patient, their life force totally leaves their body?"

"Yes."

"What if we trapped their life force in their body like a bound spirit?"

"Who are you, and how did you get into my office?"

And that's how cyberzombies were invented.

You start with top-notch, implant-ready, conscience-light surgeons on staff, so you can just cram and cram and cram, piling augmentation atop augmentation past the point that the human body can actually tolerate it. But then you also need top-notch, binding-ready, conscience-light magicians on staff, so you can literally trap someone's spirit inside their own rotting corpse, a twisted process that then provides the zombie with some perversely resilient protection against further sorcerous attacks (shoring up one weakness of even the most cybered-to-the-gills razorguy out there).

The end result is a super-duper killing machine that's packing a ton of combat cyberware and bioware, making it capable of some truly inhuman physical feats. Just think of the top three street samurai you know and how drek-hoop scary it would be if one body housed all that chrome. Right? Right. So, cyberzombies are great for concentrating killing power into a single point, and metahuman-for-metahuman, they're hard for anyone or anything to beat in a one-on-one fight.

The downside—ignoring the social consequences and ethical ramifications, just like the corps do!—is the financial cost. Armies will never field whole regiments of cyberzombies—the profit just isn't there. The price of the 'ware is astronomical to begin with, and the required facilities (both mundane and magical) and trained staff (ditto) mean there's still just a handful of places on the planet where cyberzombification takes place. Given how sinister the idea is, and how bat-drek crazy a CZ ends up being for the rest of its pathetic life, that's for the best.

Kinda effed up that we know two of those places are the ultra-magical, long-lived, eleven nations out there, huh?

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic is a European country of about 12.4 million well-educated and accepting citizens. The last decade has tested the Czechs' acceptance, after Crash 2.0 brought an influx of immigrants seeking political asylum about fifteen years ago. The parliament mandated all immigrants who wanted to stay had to become citizens by 2075 or get kicked out, and the citizenry mobilized. The numbers in favor of the immigrants remaining were far higher than those in favor of their deportation. In the end, parliament granted a

grace period, and those who lobbied to let the immigrants stay mobilized themselves to help get the immigrants' applications and testing done, adding a little strength to the country's reputation for acceptance.

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DALLAS-FORT WORTH SPRAWL (DFW SPRAWL)

The DFW sprawl is the only other megasprawl in the CAS besides Atlanta that expands upward as well as sprawling outward. Since Austin was split, they've been the capital of Texas (and thus the center of much bitterness toward the central CAS government for perceived mistreatment of Texas and lack of support against Aztlan). They're tech-heavy and are one of the only CAS sprawls that welcome a cosmopolitan approach to corporations, especially benefitting from the presence of Saeder-Krupp and Mitsuhamas. While Ares focuses expansion more in Eastern CAS areas, DFW has been lobbying heavily to make Ares feel welcome. Behind the scenes, and you didn't hear this from me, Texas is offering Ares major tax breaks, under-the-table incentives, and straight-out prime real estate, basically *carte blanche*, if Ares will help them deal with the Azzie problem on the border. Keep your eyes peeled for Ares to become a down-home hero in Texas in the next few years, starting with DFW singing their praises loudest.

Ironically, many Aztlaners have been streaming to the DFW sprawl since 2035, and it has one of the highest populations of Aztlaners in the CAS. While the world focuses on other places of business, DFW has its fair share of corporate HQs. For example, Tandy Corporation, BeLTV, Ares' subsidiaries General Dynamics and American Airlines, Texas Instruments, United Oil, Armanté fashion, Black Cat Cargo Lines, Business Computers International, Dr. Pepper, Motorola-Hiatsu, and Spectrum Holofix Entertainment Systems all have their bases of operations in the DFW sprawl.

Fort Worth is home to the largest auction of real meat in North America, and you can still get a real steak there fairly easy. It ain't cheap, but it's good as heaven if soy is all you've ever had. The Dallas side smells bad and has too much crime, but you are far more likely to get sympathetic judges there than anywhere else.

DAMON

This adult western dragon loves playing in the realm of metahumans. He got trapped behind the iron curtain of the Boston Lockdown, and after the Corporate Court cleared the majority of the quarantine, he's stuck around to keep playing hero/Johnson in the shattered sprawl. Moving people, finding people, rooting out head case clusters, and getting a steady supply of what people need into the broken Hub are his primary specialties, but those inside talk about him as if he's the messiah. He can do it all with his network of connections, and

that's going to be a problem for the corps trying to take back Boston.

Despite a few years behind the QZ blackout, his connections around the world have refreshed with surprising speed since the Matrix blackout ended, expanding his sphere of influence and access to goods and services once more. Don't be surprised to find him as one of the main power players in Boston soon.

DANIEL HOWLING COYOTE

Born Daniel Coleman, Daniel Howling Coyote was the mysterious founder and leader of the Sovereign American Indian Movement (SAIM), which led to the founding of the NAN. In 2011, he led a massive walkout from a Native American re-education camp in Abilene, Texas. This was the first time magic was seen channeled by humans. In 2014, he helped form the SAIM, which later declared war against the anglos who stole Native land. As a part of this conflict, he issued an ultimatum for all non-Natives to vacate the Americas. When this was met with hostility, Daniel led his growing coalition of Native freedom fighters in what became known as the Great Ghost Dance in 2017. He served on the first Sovereign Tribal Council but later stepped down due to infighting.

Most in the NAN still consider him a saint, and he's revered wherever his name is spoken. To those outside the NAN, he is a boogeyman, a demon that brought down the United States. Truth is, he was just someone willing to stand up at the right place and the right time. The USA was out of control, nabbing natural resources, putting Natives in camps, selling out to corps, etc. It's a shame that his people fell into the same trap not too long after the NAN was formed. He performed a second, much less powerful version of the Great Ghost Dance in order to prevent a hostile great form spirit from invading our realm in the early 2050s, but after that, he went poof, and no one has seen him since. He's gotta be dead by now.

DANK WALTHER, ARTHUR

A case study in what happens when one person has too much money and a grudge. Dankwalther was a life-long Fuchi wageslave who was laid off in 2056, then fell so deep into BTLs that it took him three years to collect the thirty-four *billion* nuyen left to him in Dunkelzahn's will. He'd been living the newly rich life when he ran into Richard Villiers—his old corporate overlord—at a party. When Villiers snubbed him, Art snapped and started a crusade against Villiers, picking Novatech apart until Villiers was forced to take it public—on November 1, 2064. Need any more evidence of the casual cruelties of a world with extreme inequity?

DAVIAR, NADJA

From a neo-anarchist's perspective, Nadja Daviar kind of embodies everything that's wrong with the world. Yes, she came from fairly humble origins in Estonia, her family killed during the Russian invasion in 2030. Over the next almost-decade, she used her elven charisma and adept abilities to become a very successful war profiteer, then black-market accountant, and eventually parlayed that into a meeting with the great drag-

on Dunkelzahn in 2039. That was the start of the Nadja Daviar most people know: charming, manipulative, ruthless, climbing over others into the halls of power and locking the door behind her.

I'm sure most people know the story from there: Daviar became Dunkelzahn's Voice and the administrator of his multifaceted empire. When the newly elected draconic overlord—sorry, *president*—bought the farm in 2057, Daviar became the head of the Draco Foundation and the executor of Dunkelzahn's will, not to mention UCAS Vice President after Kyle Haeffner moved up to the White House. Good for her, I guess—real rags-to-riches story, but what'd she do with all that power? Zip. Squat. Nada. Bupkiss. Oh sure, there were the usual “social welfare initiatives” that corps and governments do to keep the masses in line, but a woman with the resources of a great dragon *and* a government at her fingertips should've been able to accomplish a lot more. What did we get instead? The same thing we always do: the people in power trying to hold on to their power while fragging the little guy.

Daviar vanished mysteriously after the Second Crash and was missing for most of a decade, but now she's right back where she was, like nothing ever happened. Maybe this time she'll do something good with what she's got, but I'm not holding my breath.

DE LA MAR, DANIELLE

Described by a shortsighted few as a “useful idiot,” Danielle de la Mar has had more of an impact on our world than nearly any other single person (or dragon). For most of her life, she was content to spend her billions hosting grand events, fundraisers, balls, and indulging decadent living with the Grand Tour. An heiress herself, she came into even more money when her husband divorced her in 2071 for a younger woman. Afterward, de la Mar became a tireless advocate and agent of change in opposition to a free and open Matrix. Many credit her ex-husband's affair with her hate for freedom on the Matrix, as it started online, but that isn't true. Don't ask me to reveal sources, but the truth is Danielle de la Mar was ultimately responsible for introducing her husband to his paramour and the divorce that followed. She's the definition of Machiavellian.

Vowing to “protect innocent users from being inundated by all that is ugly in the world,” de la Mar built a coalition of unlikely allies from corporations, national leaders, conservative groups, dragons such as Lofwyr and Ghostwalker, and members of the Grand Tour. She used her lobbying firm, A Responsible Matrix for Prosperity Group, to worm her way into being not only the spokesperson but also the gatekeeper for the new Matrix, and she oversaw the protocols of its creation.

This new Matrix was built on the foundation of the power of one hundred technomancers, although this remains unknown to nearly everyone on the planet, even the most powerful. Since the one hundred are now dead, de la Mar clearly feels she has gotten away with the deception and has now moved on to new ventures. She has a new trophy husband, Desmond Elm, and has championed the improvement of the Global SIN Registry.

DENVER (FRONT RANGE FREE ZONE, FRFZ)

The city was a stop before crossing the Rockies in the era before being able to fly right over them. It was initially built up around rails and mining, and as those two waned, the people of Denver showed their resilience and adapted to new ways of surviving. Life at a mile high ain't easy, and the people of Denver embody that.

And they'll need that resilience with recent events.

Let's make a quick rundown across this century. Denver, called the Front Range Free Zone, now encompasses cities from Colorado Springs in the south to Boulder up north, along with Aurora and out past Golden to the east and west respectively. It played a huge part in the dismantling of the United States and rise of the Native American Nations. It was first used as neutral ground for a treaty, and then split into sectors for the various participants to govern together. They had a few issues over the years, including the sectoring process damaging the Spirit of Denver, Zebulon. But nothing came close to the arrival of Ghostwalker in late '61. He pretty much took a dragon-sized drek on the treaty and claimed Denver as his domain with an assertive hoop-handing for Aztlan's sector, forcing them to beat feet. Things never got much better with the Zone Defense Force (a.k.a. Ghostwalker's army) keeping tabs and ignoring borders while GW made Denver a haven for free spirits, in the literal and figurative sense. Spirits have far more rights in Denver than anywhere else, and GW has very little problem with shadow-runners keeping the sector's squabbles lively. Sure, he ate a bunch of runners, but that was to make a point not to direct your efforts his way.

Since its creation, the FRFZ has been a hub for global espionage. Six, and then five, and finally four nations all within a few kilometers of one another made ducking in and out of sight a breeze for a skilled operative. This was fine with GW. He simply inserted his pawns into the game and kept everyone else under his wary gaze.

The corps fared well, but not too well, with abundant opportunities to play the market and work against one another and the nations of the world all in one place. But a dragon always hovered about in the back of their minds, ready to eat an exec or two to prove a point, keeping things muted.

And now ...

Frag, fraggedy, fragging, frag! Denver is different. The FRFZ is Ghostwalker's personal fiefdom after he declared it so and put the nations on notice. It was a tense month after he told the sector governments to scram, and Denver went absolutely bonkers with strange rifts popping up all over the city. The rifts discharged all sorts of chaos, from cute to crazy to killer, and seemed to embody the madness in the city. The sector governments couldn't manage a coordinated refusal, and after a short but tense stand-off, everyone pulled out government assets, including their militaries, and left the remaining citizens and property to the dragon.

Ghostwalker now rules as a single sovereign, with the Zone Defense Force, and his own personal force of drakes, acting as his enforcement arm. He hasn't settled on a police force contract, but it's down to the big two, Lone Star and Knight Errant, though Lone Star is the current favorite with their new connections to DocWag-



on. Whoever gets the contract is likely to have a smooth start, but nowhere stays calm in the Sixth World for long. The government isn't likely to change any time in the near future, but Ghostwalker has set up district blocks and set them to selecting representatives. While they'll have no official power, they'll be a little closer to the dragon's ear (and subsequently his jaws).

Since the takeover, it's gotten pretty calm. GW has brokered lucrative deals with most of the megas to operate within Denver, the reassignment of SINS has been relatively uneventful, and the gangs have been calmer than usual after GW ate the leader of the local Ancients club for associating with a certain clown-faced elf. Local politics are shifting, and GW, despite some issues with temperament, seems committed to maintaining Denver's place as a hub of international relations. This has been complicated for several nations who have been reluctant to re-engage due to the method of reclamation.

The future is wild here in the west. Denver is rife with opportunity for some revolution, regardless of which side you decide to stand on.

DENVER DATA HAVEN/ THE NEXUS

I know everyone always blathers on about the wonders of JackPoint, but if you want the truest and most hard-hitting Matrix truths out there, you need access to

the Nexus. While a bit freer in its allowed commenter membership, and therefore full of slim facts and outright falsities, it holds hidden truths buried in the massive compost pile of chaos.

Favored by Ghostwalker since his arrival, they're taking some risks recently by working to keep the world informed of the atrocities and insanity that are occurring under Ghostwalker's reign. Both the host itself and its core sysops have found their way onto Ghostwalker's naughty list since he declared himself sovereign dictator and they decided to rediscover their revolutionary roots.

DETROIT

Once known as the Motor City or Motown, Detroit was the nexus of the mighty North American car industry for decades ... until it all went to drek in the late twentieth century. For years afterward, Detroit languished until some slag from the GM Corporation named Nicholas Aurelius started buying up businesses in the area under the umbrella of the newly formed Ares Industries and decided to set up HQ there. Soon, business and industry were booming and the Motor City's star was on the ascension once again. A few short years later, Ares Industries became Ares Macrotechnology, the megacorp we all know and love today!

As the years passed, Detroit—under the guidance of Ares—weathered the Awakening and became one of the

dominant industrial centers in North America and helped thousands of refugees from the Ghost Dance War find work and new homes. Through various corporate-sponsored programs, Detroit was eventually cleaned up, fixed up, built up, and became a shining beacon of corporate benevolence! Of course, not everyone believed the hype.

Eventually, Ares bought up most of Detroit's choice real estate and businesses. Mixed with corporate extra-territoriality, the local and UCAS government officials became nothing more than figureheads meant to pay homage to the city's *real* masters. Detroit may have cast off its long-held reputation as a beacon of failure and urban decay through Ares' corporate reconstruction efforts, but all the gloss and shine they put on the city is only a façade.

Despite the PR, Detroit isn't the corporate utopia the PR department at Ares wants you to believe it is. Mottown's shadows are as hard and run as deep as any other major sprawl on the planet. Being centrally located at several major highway intersections and with access to several major waterways, Detroit is a major hub for smugglers and features a thriving black market on par with sprawls such as Seattle, Denver (before it went to drek), Hong Kong, or Casablanca. All the major players are there as well, some hiding in plain sight, while others keep to those deep shadows. If Detroit knows one thing, it's how to keep their shadows hidden.

Paradoxically, while Knight Errant works overtime to keep Detroit's relatively squeaky clean image intact, Ares Arms and various other subsidiaries are known to pump metric ass-tons of material into the local black markets to keep these shadow markets active. At the end of the day, Detroit is about business, pure and simple.

Not everyone in Detroit is hiding out or swallowed the corporate pill. Despite Ares' best efforts, a select few businesses (some that go back before Ares was a thing) have defiantly resisted, sometimes violently, being bought out or absorbed into the corporate fold. These places serve as small oases in a desert of corporate appropriation, and they'll be the first ones to give Ares the middle finger every chance they get.

Geographically, Detroit is broken into several districts. Downtown, of course, is the center, where Ares planted their HQ; this is where most corporate biz is done. Belle Isle is considered the most bohemian, where the social and civic-minded gather. As in years past, Windsor is the sprawl's playground, where tourist and locals alike flock for fun. Dearborn is known locally as "king of the hold-outs" and home of Ford Motors, one of the few businesses Ares couldn't buy up or drive out. Oakland County is a mix of several areas including Auburn Hills. Once a dumping ground for Chicago refugees, it's since become the "artsy" district and home to several sports teams.

That's what it is now. With Ares packing up and moving out, who knows what it will be in a year.

DOCWAGON

We all both love and hate seeing DocWagon blazing onto a scene. Best known for their service contracts and the image of armed medics breaking into the middle of a gunfight to scoop up and extract a patient, the AA megacorp also deals in everything to do with biotech. Services, 'ware, research, drugs, medical tech, you name it, if it has to do with saving or enhancing lives, DocWagon has a piece of that pie.

They are headquartered in Atlanta and now fall under the OmniStar megacorporate umbrella after a smooth merger with Lone Star and Manadyne. Through the merger they gained the magical resources of Manadyne, and they share roles as leader and follower in contract gathering with cities and corps around the globe with Lone Star. Expect extensive growth here and intense competition with rivals in the medical service industry, while being backed by Lone Star to damage the reps of rivals. All without risking lives, of course.

THE DODGER

The Dodger is a legend in the Matrix, plain and simple. He started out a wiz-kid in the Tír (good luck sussing out a birthdate or his actual age), training in the ways of Matrix wizardry (maybe literally?) on the budget of a Tír Prince, Sean Laverty. Eventually Dodger and his Fairlight Excalibur sauntered up to Seattle, where he ran with Sally Tsung, Ghost Who Walks Inside, and Kham and his crew (if none of those names ring a bell, you're too young for me).

With enough raw Matrix talent to get away with talking like a headliner from an off-Broadway Dickens troupe, Dodger was slicing up the Renraku grid when he met his new girlfriend, an AI. Now, this wasn't some AR-overlay body pillow type of girlfriend, no—I mean an actual artificial intelligence. One of the first of them. One of the most powerful.

After she vanished taking down that other zany 'raku AI, Deus, Dodger went dark for a while. Not just off-the-grid dark, but brooding dark. Angry dark. Willing-to-do-anything-to-get-his-girl-back dark. He spent the better part of a decade wearing entirely the wrong color of codeslinger hat, and helped literally write the book for the wireless Matrix alongside the GOD and every megacorp. The whole time he was scouring the 'trix for his lady love, with a single-minded focus coupled with an unreal hacking ability that's got some people insisting he's a technomancer and she's his lost Paragon.

That said, plenty of the same folks tilted that the ol' Dodger wore a white hat have also been coming across security flaws and back doors that shouldn't exist. Rumors abound, but if you meet Dodger's ebon-cloaked avatar and he's got a twinkle in his eye, it's probably because he's feeling terribly clever for pulling one over on de la Mar and her GOD buddies.

DRACO FOUNDATION

The leaders of the world's greatest treasure hunt, now in its third decade!

So Dunkelzahn died—you probably heard about it. Like all great dragons, he had a considerable hoard when he died, and unlike all great dragons, he developed a plan to share it with others before he died. His will is a bewildering array of straight-out bequests, weird challenges, and odd puzzles. "To Aden, I leave the Shroud of Shadows." Sure, we get that one. Direct and to the point. "To Aithne Oakforest, I leave the Rose Crystal, in hopes of soothing old wounds and healing the rifts they have caused." Wait, hold up. Which old wounds? What rifts? And how will the Rose Crystal soothe them? "To the first party to create a perpetual motion machine without the aid of magic, I leave the heretofore undis-



covered notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci.” That has to be a joke—right? You don’t just go breaking the laws of physics, and Dunkelzahn knew it. So no one will ever win the notebooks. So do they exist? Did Dunkelzahn look at them? And wasn’t perpetual motion one of da Vinci’s interests? What’s in these notebooks? What goes on here? “To Robert J. Hemedes, I leave a small token of my esteem, to be distributed by the Draco Foundation.” Who? What is the token? And what, pray tell, is the Draco Foundation?

That gets us to the heart of the matter. The will contains 213 such bequests. Some, like the transfer of the Shroud of Shadows to item, are one-time, easily fulfilled matters. Others, like the perpetual motion quest, or the search for the ancient Russian crown jewels, are impossible, or close to it. Still others are ongoing—a pledge of cooperation to the great dragon Arleesh, a 1 million nuyen on blood mages. All of this requires someone to oversee the work. That someone is the Draco Foundation.

Headquartered in DeeCee, the Foundation has considerable assets at its disposal. How considerable? Hell if I know. The Foundation got whatever was left of Dunkie’s hoard after everything was given out, and if you consider a dragon’s hoard to be nearly infinite, then subtracting billions of nuyen from near-infinity leaves ... near-infinity. So just assume they can afford what they need, including high-powered runners from Assets Inc. The Foundation looks into any odd magical phenomenon that catches their attention, and even though they’re only open to the public once a month, they are

surprisingly adept at uncovering information very few people know about. They’ll often work hand-in-glove with the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research in investigating these phenomena, and the two of them were said to be jointly working on some sort of research base in Antarctica, though the purposes of this and the reasons for the location were well hidden.

Nadja Daviar, Dunkelzahn’s former voice, is board chair. She does not involve herself much in the day-to-day operations, but she keeps plugged in enough to know of the Foundation’s major work and get especially involved in the things that catch her attention. Rex Coll is the executive director; he helped clean house after Daviar’s return from her mysterious absence and was expected to be a short-timer, but he seems to have found a place he likes, so he is looking into sustaining an organization rather than stripping it for parts. It’s always easier, of course, when you have the interest from a huge pile of nuyen to sustain you in perpetuity.

DRAGONS/DRACOFORMS

Dragons (or dracoforms) are lizard-like beings ... blah, blah, blah. You know what dragons are. The big, powerful, magical, rich overlords that mess with your life, most of the time without you knowing it’s been messed with. The colorful deathbreaths that will kill your great-great-grandkid ninety years from now because you said something about Hans Brackhaus’ hair one day on your MeFeed. Most of what we know for

sure about these overweight, scaly control freaks comes from what Dunkelzahn told us on his twelve-hour interview back in 2012 or on his talk show, *Wyrms Talk*. Of course, he's dead now, likely a hit by the dragons who opposed us knowing the truth! Dragons see us as slaves to build their hordes, and many of them have lived for thousands of years, biding their time until they finally put us all back in our subservient place. There are a few that seem to be at odds with that "dragons first" culture among them, but whether that is for selfish reasons remains to be seen. When in doubt, trust not. Never deal with one, that's for sure.

Although most people think of western dragons when we mention dracoforms, there are other types, including: eastern dragons, western dragons, feathered serpents, leviathans, fire drakes, ice drakes, sea drakes, humanoid-drakes, freshwater serpents, saltwater serpents, wyverns, aitvaras, gorgons, and chimeras. This list is not without controversy, however, with taxonomists of good regard on all sides. Of these, western dragons, eastern dragons, feathered serpents, and leviathans have particular sub-classifications as young, adult, and great, each with its own peculiarities not found in other dracoforms—at least, not yet. Eastern dragons have a sub-species known as *sirrush*.

EASTERN DRAGONS

These dracoforms are native to Asia. They tend to have a longer, serpentine shape with four limbs and no wings. They often have horns protruding from above their eyes and whiskers extending from their snouts. The color of their scales varies, but green and red are prominent. Despite having no wings, they are proficient in flight as other dragons are. Known great Eastern dragons include: Lung, Masaru, Muchalinda, and Ryumyo. The *sirrush* variant is similar to its Eastern parent but has a shorter tail and longer limbs, with a narrower, deeper head, lacking whiskers. The most typical colors are brown, grey, gold, and terra cotta. Known great *sirrush* include: Aden.

WESTERN DRAGONS

The western dragon is native to Europe and some parts of Western Asia. It has four limbs in addition to a pair of bat-like wings. It has an often-horned head and a long neck. Its forelimbs have opposable digits, while its hindquarters appear to function as paws or feet. Approximately half the species have spikes or dermal growths along the spine. Bony, dermal armor is often present in addition to the typical scales, which may be of any color, although usually solid, except the underbelly, which is almost always simply a lighter shade of its base color. Known great Western dragons include: Alamais (dead), Celedyr, Dunkelzahn (dead), Feuer-schwinge (probably dead), Ghostwalker, Hestaby, Kaltenstein, Lofwyr, Nachtmeister (dead), Rhonabwy, Schwartzkopf, and *Sirrurg*.

FEATHERED SERPENTS

Native to the Americas and Africa, these dracoforms have a long, serpentine body with feathered wings and either no other limbs or a pair of hind limbs. The body may be covered with either feathers or scales, often in

multiple dazzling colors. Head shapes range from serpentine to those similar to western dragons. Known great feathered serpents include: Arleesh, Hualpa, Kukulkan, and Mujaji.

LEVIATHANS

Also known as sea dragons, leviathans appear to be native to salt-water depths. They have no wings, but possess four webbed limbs that, while short, allow for incredible speed and dexterity underwater. Their heads are long and flat and have something like hair resembling kelp growing from the dorsal ridge. Sea dragons have scales that are usually blue or green in color but are much smaller and finer than their cousins. Known great leviathans include: the Sea Dragon.

DRAKES

Man dragons! Meta dragons! Mini dragons! No matter how you think of them, they boil down to metahumans with some SURGE/UGE-type DNA code that Awakens near puberty, or occasionally when exposed to immense expressions of dragon magic. They become capable of shifting into a mix of metahuman and dragon, though much smaller than even the smallest adult dragon. They Awaken in every variety, though I don't know anyone who has ever met a leviathan drake before.

Sound cool?! Well, you're a fraggin' idiot. The great dragons think every drake belongs to a great, and they work hard to get every single one that pops up into indentured servitude, or outright slavery if they can pull it off, and if the drake annoys them enough.

DUNKELZAHN

Dunkelzahn (which, for those of us not versed in the Germanic languages, roughly translates to "Dark Tooth") showed up on our doorstep and into the public's consciousness in January 2012. Witnesses and news reports—naturally agog for weeks and months after his appearance—took particular notice of how fascinated the great dragon was with our world. It is said he spent quite a lot of his initial appearance marveling gleefully over an automobile. We as metahumans spend an inordinate amount of time worshipping our own images and creations; to have a creature as dazzling as a great dragon (remember, no one had ever seen his like before) be so fascinated with our technology was a tremendous compliment. We were smitten.

Not much is known of Dunkelzahn's life before we met him. He has sat for interviews—a level of great dragon accessibility that has never been equaled—and has said he believes he was born circa 13,000 B.C. Other than that, and a few notably cryptic comments, he has said little about his life prior to his appearance in 2012.

During the years from then until his assassination, which we'll get to in a bit, he worked wonders. Dunkelzahn was invested in metahumanity in a way that his skeptics found disingenuous. Over the years, he turned many hearts, though, and fought for the rights of metahumans around the world. In 2042, Dunkelzahn made himself better known to the world at large when the trid show *Wyrms Talk* debuted. Dunkelzahn used the show to talk about the world and his thoughts. It was the ve-

hicle through which Dunkelzahn became the darling of the UCAS and the vehicle through which he announced his candidacy for the UCAS presidency. Little wonder that “Big D,” as he came to be colloquially known, was elected president of the UCAS, the country that he said in previous years took him in, worked in concert with him on some of the issues nearest to his heart, and helped him. For all those things, he said he would be eternally grateful—a word not often heard gracing the snouts of dragons.

Metahumanity was close to his heart, and we were better for it. Dunkelzahn was a generous and forthright soul, but he was also never one to trifle with. Metahumanity is full of schemers, jealousy, and bad blood. There were plenty of people in the country who were horrified at the idea of a great dragon becoming our president. Stories of draconic machinations often won out over the simple reality that Dunkelzahn really did care about metahumans. But we’d never get the chance to find out how much. Dunkelzahn’s term as President became the shortest in history when he disappeared in an explosion that targeted his limousine parked outside the Watergate Hotel on the night of his swearing in. We would not discover the assassin, although there were many worthy suspects. What is perhaps most concerning is that Dunkelzahn’s body was not recovered. He literally disappeared.

Even upon his death, Dunkelzahn was both generous and not one to be trifled with. He willed millions upon millions of nuyen to favored contacts and organizations for his pet projects. He also put a massive bounty on the heads of blood mages and toxic shamans. He bequeathed hundreds of his possessions to individuals and organizations around the world—and planes, in some cases.

Dunkelzahn will be remembered as a leader for the ages. We are poorer for the loss of this truly great dragon, but with the declarations in his last will and testament, his beneficent influence lives on.

DUNKELZAHN INSTITUTE FOR MAGICAL RESEARCH (DIMR)

They have the money and knowledge of a dragon setting them up and an insatiable curiosity driving them forward. The only thing keeping them from unlocking the mysteries of the universe is that those mysteries are drekking *hard*. Established by Dunkelzahn’s will, DIMR covers every aspect of magical research you can think of, from education to field work to metaplanar exploration. They have an ongoing rivalry with the Atlantean Foundation, but that usually (but not always) shades more to the friendly side than the unfriendly one. Honestly, the board members fight with each other more than anyone outside the organization.

The biggest obstacle the DIMR has faced in recent years is the fact that they are headquartered in Boston. Protecting their base became a major concern, as more than a few head cases became suddenly interested in delving into DIMR’s archives once they gained their new personalities. With the high amount of field operatives they have, the work kept going forward, but it was definitely hindered. With the quarantine lifted, they are working at return to fully normal status.

Director Thomasin Martyn is well into her eighties but showing no sign of slowing down—it helps to have

access to every anti-aging treatment money and magic can access. She stays in the position because she was seemingly born for it. She has the combination of theoretical knowledge, charismatic leadership, and administrative skill to keep the organization moving ahead, even when under siege by a hundred head cases. Of note are reports that she seems especially animated lately, as if she is working on something especially important.

- DIMR has seers on staff, so whatever she’s preparing for could still be in the future.
- Elijah

DUPREE, AINA

Aina is one of the most influential people you’ve likely never heard of. An immortal elf who has existed for thousands of years, she is loved or hated by some of the most powerful people on the planet. With her longevity and extreme magical ability, she could have controlled nearly any organization, nation, or corp she wanted, but instead chose to live a more humble life until a few decades ago.

In another age, she had the misfortune to be haunted by a powerful terror. It wormed its way deep into her life, and they were even romantically entangled for a brief time, to her everlasting shame and guilt. The terror, Ysrthgrathe, tormented her and they had a son, Thais. But that was long ago. In more recent times, Ysrthgrathe attempted to cross over into our world and was stopped by Aina and her ally Harlequin at Crater Lake. After this, Aina became vice chairperson of the Draco Foundation until she was presumed dead in 2073 after protecting DeeCee from the magical backlash that occurred when the Watergate Rift was closed.

A few Unseelie chums of mine let me know that in fact, Aina did not die as suspected, but was taken by the elf *stitch* witch Alachia and held prisoner in a dungeon on a far-off shadow dimension. She was sought by the former Eolai (leader) of the Unseelie Court, Lord Gwyn, who referred to her as the Ebon Queen, to replace him in the court. With the help of Harlequin and a team of unnamed shadowrunners, Aina escaped and has taken her place as Eolai over the Unseelie. Lord Gwyn’s fate is unknown. What this means for Seelie/Unseelie relations is unknown, but if her past actions are any indications, the powers that be won’t like it. Aina is a unique spot of hope on a bleak landscape.

- I love how all that speculation was presented as fact.
- Frosty

DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD

“What is your favorite color? What is your quest? What is your name? Why didn’t your father ever love you the way you wanted?” It’s all fun and games, taking a trip into the metaplanes, isn’t it? The laws of reality become subjective to the metaphor of the moment—you can lose your soul in a card game, and your eldritch discoveries might just drive you past the point of madness. But before you get to all that fun stuff, you get to have a little heart-to-heart with the mother of all gatekeepers.

The Dweller on the Threshold isn’t ... well, it isn’t a lot of things. And it’s hard to say just what it is past where

it is and what it does. The “where” is easy: It’s in the name. The Dweller exists at the edge of the astral where it begins to meet the metaplanes, where/when/whatever that ends up being. Unless you’ve got some big mojo that gives you access to a direct astral gateway, you’re going through this guy/gal/monster/metaphor first.

Confused? You should be! Because the Dweller, insofar as anyone knows, appears as something different to everyone, and if you are making return trips, it probably looks completely different each time. Maybe it’s something funny. Seriously, it won’t be. It’ll make you face something awful inside yourself that you probably hate or fear. Don’t answer its questions or pass its test? Back on your ass to meatspace, and good riddance!

Some astral physicists like to theorize that the Dweller isn’t so much a presence as an internalized metaphor for the struggles and conflicts of the applicant for a metaplanar travel visa. Maybe it’s a test built into the barrier, or even inside ourselves, that makes sure we’re in the right frame of mind to handle a world of perspective-based reality. Who put that barrier there, if anyone, is anyone’s thesis paper project. Dragons? Elves? Spirits? Atlanteans? Evolution? MIT&T grant, here you come! Or at least a good post on your local magical conspiracy board!

Of course, there are others who conjecture that the Dweller is, in fact, some kind of as-yet-unknown spirit type, or even a manifestation of a mentor spirit. Maybe it feeds on answers, or collects them. Or it really wants to protect us. Or the metaplanes. Or... well, “or” ad infinitum.

As far as anyone knows, the Dweller won’t hurt you in any (meta)physical way. You pass its test or you don’t. But staring down at the first person you ever killed, the smoking gun still in your hands, the sound of their children crying? That can do a number on you. And if it wouldn’t, it’ll be something that shakes you. Maybe it was Mommy’s drinking problem, or your worst failure, embarrassment, or fear. Most of the time, the question is one you don’t want to answer. To paraphrase an old flatvid: “Kind men find out that they are cruel. Brave men discover they are cowards. And the worst run away, screaming.” Plenty of would-be archmagi have ended up shaking wrecks, and more than a few headshrinkers are grateful to the Dweller for the cred.

But maybe you’re one of those rare, rumored “hero” types. Street skinny says a noble cause will get you a bit more introspection versus confrontation, clarifying your goals and strengthening your resolve before sending you on your merry way. Is that the voice in your head, or does the Dweller really respect you? Who the hell knows. Maybe heroes are just myths, like immortal elves or the return of Twofer Tuesday Soylushes at the Stuffer Shack.

E

EGYPT

You probably already know most of what’s going on in Egypt from watching *Desert Wars* reruns at four in the morning. Some of you might have even flicked across to the History of the World channel by accident once and seen how it has grown and changed.

I’m here to tell you what you haven’t seen on the trid. If you want history, I’m sure there is a file around here somewhere you can read. With *Desert Wars* blowing up and earning a bit of state income for Egypt over the last couple of decades, who should come sniffing around but the corporations? Obviously their snouts are good at sniffing money that should be in their pockets. Anyway, they are moving in big time, bulldozing slums for corporate compounds and making a mess of things. The national officials used to be all about the Islamic-old religion conflict, but they have all been beaten down with piles of cash. Some people in the state are fighting back against the onslaught of the corps, but it’s just slowing the juggernaut. You’d make some friends if you went on a corporate sabotage blitz.

Speaking of friends, the other thing to come out of Egypt lately is the Coptic Church. A few years ago they decided that technomancers were as much a part of metahumanity as anyone else, and that they would shelter technomancers like they would any other vulnerable person. Turns out that having the bare minimum of human decency is enough to get you heaps of super-hacker converts. Now a modest church with stagnant numbers has the best cyber-army this side of Aztechnology, and they haven’t yet worked out what to do with it.

Maybe you can help them decide.

It’s got to be better than messing with whatever has started stalking the ancient necropolises.

EHRAN THE SCRIBE

Ever accidentally watched a tridshow documentary or listened to a hermetic buddy babble on, and heard the term “Sixth World” to describe our post-Awakening selves? Yeah. Eهران the Scribe coined that term. This elfy-hooped motherfragger literally named our whole era!

Or maybe you’ve come across the anti-conspiracy meme making the rounds, when someone answers a wild claim with “not YET,” or “YET here we are,” or “have you made it YET?” Those reference the Young Elven Technologists, who are a group of (you guessed it) elves, who were at the time (that’s right) fairly young, and also (mm-hmm) kind of nerds.

Their policlub is still around, but in all the right circles they’re mostly known for a speech Eهران gave, where he describes the cycle of magic, the ebb and flow of mana, and how confused and short-lived humans are (yeah, really). It was all supposed to be an elven secret—the transcript I’ve read says so, really clearly—but secrets don’t last long in this Matrix era, and the whole thing’s a hoot. He claims he knew Da Vinci and everything! Ah, good times. So, “are we there YET” normally gets slapped onto someone’s wild, unverifiable, claim as a means of poking fun. Sure, buddy, being a Prince of your brand-new nation isn’t enough—you’re also, y’know, a bazillion years old, and know everything. Thing is? He’s probably right—it’s generally been accepted since then, and only the joke remains.

These days? He’s still doing know-it-all mage stuff via the scholarships in his name at a half-dozen different thaumaturgical schools (you get three guesses what metatype happens to win them the most often), and with his influence at the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research (time will tell if DIMR/dimmer turns into a meme, too).

ELDER GODS

The ancients spoke in fearful tones about vengeful powers that existed before the gods they followed. Often called Titans, Old Ones, horrors, or primordial entities, these “Elder Gods” represent the forces of chaos and uncreation that were influencing the world before humans kept records of such things. And yet, somewhere in our collective memory and dreams, they remain.

These Terrors, for lack of a better term, are altogether alien to metahumanity. Their goals appear to be completely malignant. Contrasting with this, various Elder God cults have arisen in the past generation, which seem to disagree on what these Terrors desire, how best to appease them, and what benefit, if any, there is to serving them. Titus Sloven, though thought dead, has reappeared recently at the head of one of the largest Elder God cults now known. He himself is reclusive, but his followers have been popping up in major cities on every continent.

Descriptions are not readily available for any specific Elder Gods, but before he died, Dunkelzahn set Ryan Mercury loose to deal with something he called “the Enemy,” describing them as metaplanar entities capable only of hatred, corruption, and destruction. This year, a user on ShadowSea called Pícaro described a metaplanar rift opening in the undercity of Tenochtitlán, releasing a number of tzitzimine before it was closed due to the efforts of Pícaro and a previously unknown great dragon named Kukulcan. This remains unvalidated, yet consistent with other reports. It would also explain why lesser terrors have been reported in Aztlan, CalFree, the PCC, and the southern CAS. Notes passed on via anonymous sources within the Zulu Nation claim that in the Fourth World, roughly five to ten thousand years ago, the arrival of bug spirits acted as a harbinger for lesser terrors, which in turn heralded the coming of these greater terrors into our world, whereupon vast, unimaginable destruction of civilization and culture went unchecked until the cycle of magic turned. I’m stuck between giving up this unverified info and possibly holding back something that could help. But here it is. Be careful.

ELIOHANN

An adult western dragon most well-known (in history files) for being the first dragon with a functioning datajack. Drek just went downhill for him since then. Knocked into a coma when caught on the Matrix during Crash 2.0 in 2064, Eliohann spent over a decade comatose before he was unpleasantly awakened by an experiment involving CFD-coded nanites that somebody managed to sabotage. Yeah, not bright in the first place, we know, but blame Celedyr—damn dragon has more curiosity than common sense. Eliohann erupted from a lab under the MIT&T campus in Cambridge, spread a terrible plague of fragged-to-ghost nanites across the Hub, a.k.a. downtown Boston, and flew north, though not until after he trashed the Green Monster at Fenway (you’re welcome, Slamm-0!).

The latest and greatest rumors coming from the NE-MAQZ cover the creepy tale of him living in a lake near Salem and being worshipped as some kind of god by the CFD-infected locals. It’s likely bulldrek according to better sources who have him lairing in the region, working with local covens and legit Monads, while warning

the world of a return of Deus (though he never uses the name). This one is more believable, as other info has pointed to Deus-code being the reason the nanites that trashed Boston got fragged in the first place.

ELVES

It takes an elf to truly understand elves—or at least, that’s what the worst among us will tell you. They’re the same ones who’ll say that we’re the “superior metatype” because we’re more charismatic, more graceful, and on the whole, the most “successful” of any non-human metatype. Orks at the head of an AAA megacorp? Elves have our own mega, and have been executives and Corporate Court justices throughout several AAAs. Dwarfs and trolls have their own nations? Elves have four, and large portions of at least two others, not to mention the elves who have held high political office in “human” countries. The Great Ghost Dance? There are elven magicians who can make Daniel Howling Coyote look as mundane as a rock (a normal one, not a True Earth reagent or something), and we Awaken more often than other metatypes. Really, elves are the epitome of “anything you can do, I can do better”—and any time that’s patently untrue (like trying to arm-wrestle a troll), we blow it off as not being “naturally suited to it,” like *they* are.

The unvarnished truth? Everything I just said is technically correct, but as I hope you’ve all realized already, the spin is pure metaracist bulldrek. Yes, the average elf is a little quicker and more coordinated than the average human, and noticeably better with social interactions—the same way that the average dwarf has a little more self-control than your average human, and is noticeably less likely to catch a cold or get food poisoning. (And we could have some long discussions about how our social abilities are at least in part due to the way people react to us due to social conditioning, but that’s a discussion for another time.) We might have more magicians and adepts, or we might just be better at spotting them because everyone expects it from us. And yes, some of us walk around with our noses turned up to the tips of our pointed ears—but some of us understand that “different” and “better” aren’t the same thing, and that we’re not as different as some people (both elves and non-elves) like to think.

ETHIOMALIAN TERRITORIES

When VITAS first erupted across the world, no continent was as hard-hit as Africa. Some estimates put the loss of population as high as half, an unimaginable level of trauma passed on to the survivors. With medicine being stolen by warlords or shifted to other areas to enrich corporate coffers, the survivors turned to ancient ways and shamans in desperation. In Ethiopia, the priests of Addis Ababa were by far the most successful in combating the plague, taking survivors from any African nation into their borders. As neighboring states of Somalia and Eritrea collapsed, Ethiopia absorbed them, and later slivers from other failed states, becoming the Ethiomalian Territories. Much as the Black Plague reshaped Europe by concentrating scattered wealth into the hands of a small number of survivors, so too did VITAS enrich Ethiomalia.

Today, the secretive nation is ruled by priest-kings and is known for some of the most advanced medical technology in the world. Culturally, the memories of VITAS remain strong and the populace wear breathing masks at all times, often stylized as simple gas masks while the wealthy wear more exotic African totemic masks. Touching the flesh of strangers is strictly forbidden. Indeed, flesh is seen as a mortal weakness, and cybernetic replacement is the norm, even for otherwise healthy persons.

The Ethiomalian Territories famously claim that no ghouls live within their borders and they have execution-on-sight orders to maintain this status. For decades, rumors have swirled that either they have a vaccine for the ghoul condition or have some sort of superweapon trained on Asamando—the two nations have no diplomatic contact, and while they should be natural enemies, they keep one another at arms' length, suggesting some back-channel arrangement.

EUROWARS

So named because there were actually two separate conflicts, which occurred back-to-back in 2031–33 and 2034–36. It all started with the Russian invasion of Finland and Poland in 2031; they'd been losing ground to the shapeshifters in what would become Yakut, and decided to make up for lost territory by pushing west into Europe. The Finnish front stalled out fairly quickly, but Russia was able to occupy Poland, the Baltic countries, and even parts of the eastern Allied German States by 2033. Then, the now-infamous Nightwraiths (no, we *still* don't know who they actually were) launched decapitation strikes with near-invisible bombers against hawkish leaders on both sides, and lacking anyone who was seriously interested in leading it, the Russian offensive ground to a halt. An armistice was signed in early 2033, and the fighting gradually wound down—or would've, if not for the Great Jihad.

While Europe was tearing itself apart, Islamic nations around the world had been trying to come together, but only got as far as forming “secular” and “religious” factions (for lack of a better term). The “secular” nations formed the Federation of Islamic States, while the “religious” camp became the Alliance for Allah, led by Mullah Sayid Jazrir. With Europe in shambles, Jazrir decided it was the perfect time for the faithful to wipe the infidels from the earth (or something) and launched a three-pronged attack into Europe via the Balkans, the Caucasus, and across the Strait of Gibraltar into Spain. The jihadis managed to strike into the heartlands of Europe, from Madrid to Hungary and the Crimea, and would've kept going if Jazrir hadn't caught an assassin's bullet in Istanbul in 2035. It was only because of Jazrir's death that Europe broke the invasion for good, and even then, there were sporadic outbreaks of fighting for years afterward.

EVO

Nowadays, everyone knows Evo for their world-class augmentations and being the Official Corporation of Weird, but how did it all start? Back in the 2030s, they were called Yamatetsu, and they started as a Japanese/Filipino shipping company. As the corp grew,

they developed a rep for meta-friendly products. In the 2040s, they literally fought their way into the ranks of the Corporate Court, backed in a corp war by Ares, Az-technology, and Saeder-Krupp (who wanted to break the power of the other Japanacorps).

After Yamatetsu reached the Corporate Court, things got weirder. A Japanese exec named Hideo Yoshida arranged enough corporate shenanigans to both replace the founding chairman, Tadamako Shibano-kuji, as chairman of the board, and oust the Filipino contingent from power in Yamatetsu. Yoshida and his chief crony (or as they like to call it, “President/CEO”) Saru Iwano steered Yamatetsu away from those pernicious foreign influences and the distasteful policy of treating *kawarubito* (metahumans) like actual people, bringing them in line with the rest of the highly conservative and patriotic Japanacorps—or at least, they tried.

Two major events in 2050 put a halt to Yoshida's plans. First, Shibano-kuji retook the chairmanship of Yamatetsu's board and doubled down on the company's meta-friendliness by both catering to metahuman customers and installing a record number (translated: “more than zero”) of metahumans in management positions. Then, Buttercup stepped in. Buttercup was a mystery investor who'd grabbed a good ten-percent stake in the company and the board seat that came with it during Yoshida's coup against the Filipinos. She was also a free spirit, as she revealed to the rest of the board, supposedly in the middle of one of many vocal arguments between Shibano-kuji and the embattled Yoshida.

Buttercup's revelation sent shockwaves through not just Yamatetsu, but the entire Japanese corporate-political complex. Letting metahumans take leadership positions was bad enough, but having a free spirit on a corporate board was unthinkable. That was the beginning of the break between Yamatetsu and the rest of the Japanacorps, accelerated by Shibano-kuji's increased acceptance of metahumans in management from 2056, and his death in 2059, when his son Yuri—an ork!—replaced him on the board of directors. Buttercup and Newton Chin (another director, who was as beholden to Buttercup as Tadamako had been) both threw their support behind Yuri as the new chairman.

Predictably, when the news got out that the new Yamatetsu chairman was an ork, their share price dropped like a rock. Investors scrambled to get as far away from the “deviant” Japanacorp as they could. The conservative faction of the Yamatetsu board literally told Yuri to frag off or die, and when he refused to do either, they had an assassin put a bullet in him. Even that didn't dissuade Yuri, though; in fact, the assassination attempt was what triggered Evo's move to Vladivostok, once Yuri and Buttercup had weaseled enough of the board into voting to accept it. Buttercup convinced Ramon Dizon, head of the remnants of the Filipino faction of Yamatetsu, to join the Shibano-kuji-Buttercup-Chin bloc, while also buying up enough shares in Yamatetsu to give her a whopping forty-three percent ownership. The conservative Japanese faction had no choice but to cave to the demand, and the company headquarters moved to Russia.

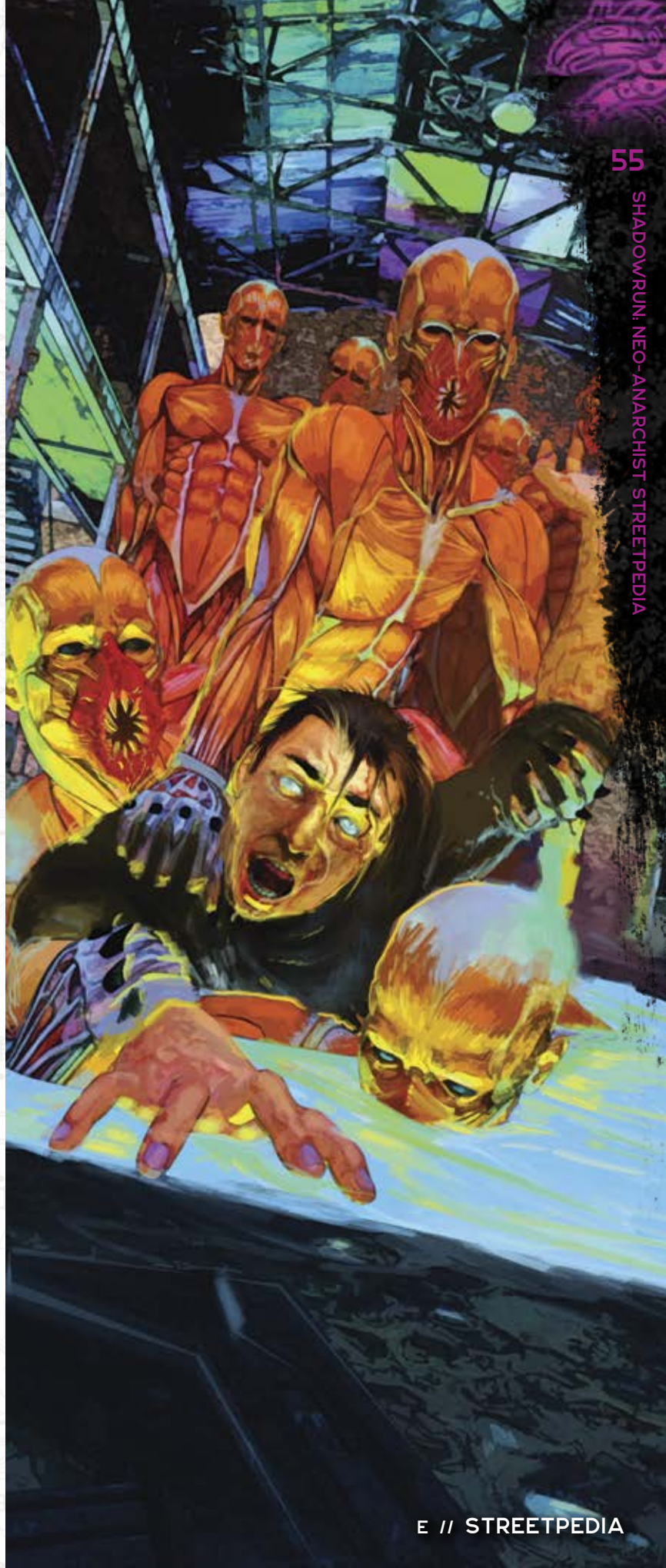
2064 brought the announcement that Yuri Shibano-kuji was suffering from Methuselah's Syndrome and was aging abnormally quickly (even for an ork) as a

result. Combined with Crash 2.0 cutting Vladivostok off from the rest of the corp and Newton Chin passing away the same year, Yuri's announcement gave the Iwano-headed Japanese faction the chance to run amok, both within and outside the corp. Some of the more radical members tried to take over pieces of Ares and the newly-collapsed Cross Applied Technologies in the wake of the Crash, and even got themselves involved in ongoing or just-finished wars in Poland and Central Asia. Luckily for Shibanojuji, the upheaval and Newton Chin's death had given him and Buttercup control of fifty-one percent of Yamatetsu's voting shares. When Vladivostok was re-connected to the rest of the world and the shiny new wireless Matrix, Shibanojuji called the corp to order and blamed Saru Iwano for the mutiny in Yamatetsu's ranks. Iwano, in the finest Japanacorp tradition, committed seppuku as penance (or to avoid having to bend a knee to an ork, you decide).

With the corporation now firmly in their control, Shibanojuji and Buttercup began transforming Yamatetsu into Evo. They appointed a former Russian astronaut named Anatoly Kirilenko to replace Iwano as CEO (and act as Evo's liaison to the Vory v Zakone) and drafted a corporate policy they called the "Terms of Unity" that became the foundation of the sunshine-and-rainbows-we're-all-equal policy we now call EvoCulture. In the second half of the 2060s, they reinforced their "we welcome everyone" image and expanded their operations worldwide, including into several Awakened nations.

In the 2070s, Evo took their controversy international. First it was the company's open acceptance of technomancers when they appeared on the scene in 2070, alongside the AIs they'd been courting since the Crash at least. Then it was the "Fake Justice Hino" scandal, where it was discovered that Corporate Court Chief Justice Yoshiko Hino was actually dead and Evo had replaced her with a very convincing AI. *Then*, the knowledge Evo had gained while creating Fake Justice Hino went into another program called the Dickens Project—which we now all know was Evo's contribution to what would eventually, in partnership with NeoNET, become CFD. The Evo board also appointed the naga Ysil as the second "sentient non-metahuman" megacorp CEO in history, but with CFD threatening to overrun the world (including former-CEO Kirilenko, who had gotten infected with it and was later killed, which is why Ysil was promoted in the first place), most people in the shadows didn't even notice.

Fast-forward to the present, and Evo looks like they've gone back to their deeply divided (one might even say "fragmented") origins. This time, instead of Filipinos/metahumans/Buttercup vs. Japanese hardliners, it's more like biological vs. digital. What everyone at Evo seems to have forgotten in the rush to have a naga CEO is that most naga are Awakened supremacists. Ever-increasing numbers of stories have leaked out about Ysil's disdain for (and sometimes outright bigotry toward) anyone who hasn't touched or been touched by mana in some way, especially AIs and Monads, who she sees as imitations of people at best. Given that two of Ysil's competitors for the CEO job were an AI and a Monad, and that the Monads who stuck with Evo have been instrumental in helping the corp bounce back from the fallout of CFD, Ysil's attitude is causing a lot of tension. There's also the "small



matter” of the Corporate Court’s investigation into Evo’s involvement with CFD, which only began after the NeoNET case was closed. Any revelations from that will probably cause even more fault lines—if the corp is even still around, now that former NeoNET CEO Richard Villiers has not-so-secretly kicked off an all-out shadow war against them.

F

FASTJACK

Ask any decker who the best decker in the history of the Matrix is, and they’ll tell you it’s ... okay, they’ll probably tell you it’s them. But if you press them, the *other* name you’ll hear is FastJack. He got famous on the old Shadowland BBS for pulling off hacks that no one else could, fought Jormungand during the Crash, and stepped into Captain Chaos’ massive shoes when he founded the JackPoint data haven. FastJack vanished into the Matrix in 2075 when he got infected with CFD, but reliable sources have spotted him in the years since.

FEUERSCHWINGE

Here’s one dragon we don’t have to worry about. Feuerschwinge was one of the great dragons, but went down in history as the first of her kind killed by metahumanity. First seen over the Harz Mountains of Germany in May 2012, she immediately began rampaging through towns and villages. The German military spent four months hunting her, finally bringing her down over the SOX on September 16, with thousands of smoking corpses in her wake. Her body was never recovered, and the location of her lair is still unknown. Good luck, chummers!

- > Feuerschwinge’s alive. She ...
- > Plan 9
- > Nope.
- > Snopes
- > But ...
- > Plan 9
- > PLAN 9 HAS BEEN MUTED
- > Nope.
- > Glitch

THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation is what exists below the architecture of the Matrix. Most users don’t even know it’s there, let alone what it is. The Foundation is the ground on which the ocean of the Matrix lies and the stuff of which hosts are made. Hosts are connected to the Foundation by a “small ‘f’ foundation” particular to that host. As to what the Foundation is made of? Well, that is hard to wrap your mind around. Danielle de la Mar and her team brought the new Matrix protocols online in 2075, and it astounded ev-

eryone. But they didn’t know exactly how it worked. The truth is, de la Mar had tortured and forcibly networked a gestalt of one hundred technomancers, using their brains and connection to the Matrix and the Resonance to power the Matrix we all started using in 2075.

It is now believed that the gestalt’s connection to the Resonance tore open a breach into both Resonance and Dissonance realms, permeating the Foundation, and creating the Resonance and Dissonance wells that have been popping up throughout the Matrix for years. Once established, the breach provided unlimited processing and storage power for the Foundation, and thus, the Matrix. In return, all data from the Matrix bled through into the Resonance realms. At some point, unnoticed even by de la Mar, the One Hundred died, and yet the Foundation persisted. It is now a hybrid space between the sum of all metahuman digital data, the Resonance realms, and Dissonance realms as well. This explains why the Matrix, which only seemed infinite before, may quite literally be never-ending.

The corporations use technobabble to explain how the Matrix is hardware-free and completely virtual, but it isn’t. The Grid Overwatch Division is still able to manipulate the top layers of the Foundation, but no one controls it, and it is becoming wilder every second.

FOURTH WORLD

The Fourth World refers to the period of Earth’s history, roughly from 8238 BCE to 3113 BCE (as per Eهران the Scribe), in which the mana cycle was in flow, like it is today in our Sixth World. Approximately every five thousand years, magic cycles through an ebb and flow, infusing and defusing the world of magic in a succession of ages. Of course, the world has had more than six of these ages, but to those who discuss such things in detail, the First Age is the beginning of what these experts claim to be able to know anything, speculative or not, about.

While there are clues to rudimentary civilization during this period, virtually nothing in our current archaeological record suggests there were vast civilizations, perhaps equal to our own, that rose, flourished, and died during this period. And yet that is exactly what some organizations, such as the Atlantean Foundation, suggest happened. They claim when the mana level was last high, floating cities, magic-powered war, and great kingdoms covered the planet. Dragons, of course, would have knowledge of this, but none of them have bothered to share or corroborate any of it. However, it is worth noting that no dragon has denied or offered an alternative understanding, either.

My only source for much of this only goes by the name Stardust, who I name only because that cannot be his (her?) real name. But this elf has produced sufficient evidence and artifacts from an era clearly not our own that I am personally inclined to believe it. Further, Stardust connected many dots for me in regards to the formation of the Tírs, the existence of extremely long-lived elves, bug spirits, and terrors. The elf told me of a proto-Mayan ork civilization led by a great feathered serpent, whose people rode to war against terrors on the backs of wyverns. He spoke of a vast dwarf kingdom, a clan of long-lived humans who would become the Black Lodge, a great threatening empire that covered more than Genghis Khan’s territory, and of fallen cities and individuals both demonic and heroic, even of an ork na-

tion, all which began in the Fourth World. I still struggle to believe any of this, even in my best moments, but I was convinced by a trinity of explanations.

First, catastrophe. When magic receded to a level that was unsustainable, many of this world's constructs collapsed. Further, great batteries for the storage of magic may have ruptured, causing untold damage to everything around them. Apparently, right in the middle of the Fourth Age, there was an attack from extraplanar beings that drove most of these civilizations deep underground as well. In addition, natural disasters of all kinds have plagued civilization and have erased much of what was once known.

Second, confirmation bias. When scientists of the Fifth World began to explore our origins and history, they had no reason or evidence to support magical societies or vast empires. This acceptance of common knowledge has persisted into the Sixth World, even though new evidence has entered into our lives. Many in the scientific community are loathe to admit when one of their hardest claims, one which would upturn entire fields of study, may be wrong.

Third, conspiracy. Great dragons, immortal elves, and other, darker groups, all have a vested interest in keeping the general population in the dark about what exactly happened during the Fourth World. If you want an example, just check out what happened to Dunkelzahn. He was more forthright than anyone else who claimed to be alive then, and what happened? They killed him. There are wonders ahead in our age that the powerful want to keep for themselves, so they are withholding what they know, squashing any information, and killing messengers, just so they and they alone can profit when the time comes.

But if you look hard, you'll find the evidence. Similar legends in cultures separated by continents. Pyramid-like structures designed to focus magic all across the world. Monoliths, such as those at Stonehenge, the Easter Islands, and serpent mounds in the Americas, all now known to channel mana, point to far more that we don't know about the so-called Fourth World than what we do.

FRANCE

After ratifying the BRA in 2071 and being slowly gobbled up by the corps, France took an unexpected turn last year. In 2078, the remains of the nobility lost the last vestiges of their power when the "Betrayal of Vincennes" triggered the so-called Neo-Revolution. This fall led to a complete regime change and the birth of a 7th Republic in '79. Or rather a "cyber democracy," where the congress is "drafted" from the eligible population, brought together to conduct a single vote! Like jurors, but the whole process happens almost instantaneously over the Matrix. But don't worry, chummers, the whole process is secured by Marianne, so we're good, right? I guess you are wondering what the frag Marianne is, eh *mon pote*?

Marianne is a Consensus-like Matrix system, handling an ever-growing share of French daily life. Tourists and local SINners like it, but it is a pain in the hoop for us. Marianne has access to most systems across the country, especially in Paris. It can draw data from nearly any device in the region, save a few private ones. Marianne, and thus Neo-PD, can see and hear literally the whole city. If Renraku can't handle something, Aztech-

nology comes to the rescue (via their subsidiary Dassault). With the purchase of Esprit, the Azzies became the top mega in the Land of Wine and Cheese, letting Dassault act as if they own France. That makes Paris a deadly place for runners who don't know how to blend in. Luckily, France is rather open-minded. With so many metas and transhumanists on the streets, we are able to find ways to mimic the locals. Or if you're especially tasteful, you may convince them to mimic you.

To make matters worse, since '78, the Mist has been acting up again, randomly engulfing new areas while vacating others clear. Once the Mist leaves a region, the area is changed in weird and mysterious ways. *C'est la merde!*

FRANKFURT BANKING ASSOCIATION

Known as Frankfurter Bankenverein AG in the Allied German States, the Frankfurt Banking Association is not your daddy's bank. This AA mega's got their fingers in pretty much every major financial institution that isn't already owned by Wuxing or one of the other AAAs, so there's a good bet FBA either already owns your daddy's bank or is in the process of trying to acquire it (via whatever means necessary).

Also, don't let the name fool you. Assuming FBA operates only in Europe (since Frankfurt is in the AGS) or that they only offer financial services (since, naturally, "Banking Association" is the other half of their name) is a good way to run into trouble when dealing with this conglomerate. FBA has a major presence across Europe, throughout the Middle East, and in most major cities across the globe. And if you're just looking at banking services, then you'll expect FBA's enemies to only hire deckers for datasteals and currency-manipulation jobs—but FBA also controls legal, law enforcement, and security subsidiaries, among other things, so there's a job for every kind of runner.

FBA used to be owned by the great dragon Nachtmeister until he was killed back in 2062. So just be aware that whatever you get hired for—whether for or against FBA—you'll have to contend with all the backing that a deceased great dragon's wealth and influence can bring to the table.

Recently there's been talk of FBA trying to acquire or merge with Proteus AG and AG Chemie in order to try taking on the big boys, so the FBA we all know and loathe may not exist in the same form in the near future. Will such a merger work? Ghost only knows. But the bigger and more important question we peons should be asking ourselves is, "Do we *want* this partnership to work?"

FROSTY

She likes to present herself as an ordinary shadow-runner, but Jane Foster is far from your typical elven mage. She's the daughter of Eهران the Scribe (of "cycles of mana" theory fame), got a ring of some kind from Dunkelzahn in the Big D's will (smart money is that it's a focus or something), and was involved in both the "Artifact Rush" in the early 2070s and whatever caused the explosion that closed the Watergate Rift. Oh, and she was in the middle of the Aztlan invasion of Denver;

there's footage floating around the Matrix of her intervening in the fight between Ghostwalker and some elf in clown makeup.

- > Huh, this wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.
- > Frosty

FUCANGLONG

If the stories about him are true, Fucanglong is an eastern dragon who was imprisoned by the legendary Chinese emperor Qin Shihuang, buried under the earth alongside the famous Terracotta Army. The earliest verified accounts we have of Fucanglong's existence come from photos taken in Shaanxi in 2074, but the locals had been talking about "the Old Man of Xi'an" for at least a decade prior. According to local accounts, the Old Man of Xi'an wanders the countryside granting people boons, like a priceless artifact sword over two thousand years old. Beyond those things, Fucanglong keeps a low profile, probably to avoid Lung's notice.



GAGARIN BASE

The big question here is, "What's left of Gagarin?" With the Monads bailing in bulk and most attention being focused elsewhere in space, no solid intel has come from Mars, but we are, and always shall be, those who speculate based on rumor and hearsay!

Gagarin remains an Evo asset churning out advanced science research with the help of Monads and AIs that chose to stay behind for their own reasons. The mined materials and facilities used for the production of DSE-CI have left an extensive complex and series of already excavated locations that will soon be used for a large Martian colony, with estimates on a population capacity near 100,000, with more potential growth once more labor resources arrive.

The problem is going to be convincing anyone to go there after the initial Gagarin Incident where the Monads took over, but Evo is full of adventurous and open-minded individuals, along with plenty of nutbags and head cases ... pardon the pun.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Guys on one side, gals on the other, and a whole great big mess of metahumanity scattered somewhere near 'em: that's gender. Thanks to the physical variations found in the five most common metaraces, to say nothing of the dazzling array of physical and mental differences between changelings, augmented people, bio-clinic options, genetech mutations, shapeshifters, nanite-infused bodymods, the Infected, metaracial variants, artificial intelligences, sapient spirits, dracoforms, and on and on and on, the world is filled with a wonderful spectrum.

As for sexuality? There are orientations toward all shapes, sizes, flavors, and outlooks, all ready to be appreciated by many, ignored by others, and if all goes right,

left to love at their own pace and preference. That's not always the case, and for every group out there built up to support someone for how they look, think, feel, or love, there are others dedicated to tearing them down.

Bottom line is: Keep an open mind. We've all got bigger things to worry about than the genitals of the chummer next to us. Focus on the cause, focus on the nuyen, focus on the gig, focus on survival, focus on jacking in, running out, initiating up, or the drek going down. Focus on whatever you gotta focus on, *omae*, but don't worry about the junk of whoever's in the next bathroom stall or who your teammate has a crush on. The Sixth World's got enough problems that are actual problems.

GENEWARE

Forget adding or modifying parts from the outside! Why not tweak them from the inside out?

CFD is a hell of a reason, but it's past its threat phase, and genetic manipulation for personal enhancement is getting to be all the rage once again, because it seems and looks more natural than any of the other enhancements. And, even better, it does very little to affect the body's overall bio-integrity, since it's being changed at a genetic level.

As a fair warning, the current enhancements are mostly coming out of Evo. They're well-known for this kind of thing already, but recently most of their tech jumps are coming from their resident Monads, leaving those in the shadows a little leery of conspiracies.

GHOSTWALKER

Ghostwalker was like the Christmas present no one wanted. He came on the scene like a white squall in 2061, when his astral form erupted from the Watergate Rift (the site of Dunkelzahn's "assassination"). He beelined it to the Front Range Free Zone, called Denver more commonly, with a massive army of spirits in tow and proceeded to earn some goodwill by beating up on the Aztlan sector and kicking them out of Denver.

He burned all that goodwill by proving he was a dreksack and declaring himself top dog of the Mile High City. He let the other sectors stay but basically ran them like puppet leaders for over a decade and a half before he got super pissed and decided the whole place was his—lock, stock, and tons of smoking craters.

Along the way he actually disappeared back into the Watergate Rift for like a year between '73 and '74, giving Denver a gasp of freedom (well, as much freedom as anyone manages these days) before returning during the Third Treaty of Denver Summit and declaring himself, once again, dick-tator of Denver—but the sectors remained.

Back to that super-pissed moment, which occurred in early '79, when Ghostwalker declared all of Denver his and told the governments they had thirty days to beat feet. Some crazy drek and military posturing occurred, but in the end they booked it, and Ghostwalker is the latest great dragon to claim himself a kingdom.

Other than his new political position, there are three important points to know about old pale scales (he's ivory white), worth including in this little article:

1. His Voice (most of the Great Dragons have one) is Nicholas Whitebird, a male ork of some years. Ghost-

walker has taken to leaving Whitebird and the Matrix communication he fosters behind, instead sending out mass telepathic announcements. It's brutal, nearly unavoidable, and he often sends them at inconvenient times.

2. He has some serious spirit mojo. It's not just about summoning them but more about a strong familial relationship. He protects them in his city and even had a relationship with Zebulon, the City Spirit of Denver. Events around the great expulsion are rumored to have destroyed Zebulon, but that's a story for someone else to tell. Ghostwalker has since increased his protection of the city's spirit population and offers bounties on anyone caught summoning or binding a spirit within his domain.

3. He and the infamous Harlequin do not get along. In fact, they're bitter enemies and hate one another, with the clown-clad-caster making frequent appearances within city limits just to piss off GW. Local resistance forces have taken the visage of Harlequin as part of their efforts to raise his ire and hopefully shaping his choices with his anger.

GOBLINS

Short version: Scrawny, hairless dwarves who are Infected. With that out of the way, let's get to speculation and cutting-edge research.

Corporations hate admitting fault, and really hate taking ownership for things where they can't predict the consequences. This is one of those events Shiawase wants nobody to know about. A subsidiary of Shiawase, Purinsu Ribon, was working with HMHVV-infected DNA to try to cure CFD. Their research mostly came to naught, but due to goblins' natural ability to transmit but not experience diseases, research on that particular species was progressing. At the height of CFD fear, Purinsu Ribon felt confident they had the cure perfected, but their control case (codenamed: Gong) escaped. Fearing that the subject's mutated CFD infection would spread rapidly, they released the retrovirus, as yet untested, into the air around Osaka, Japan. This had zero impact on the rates of CFD worldwide, in Japan, or even in Osaka. It had another consequence, however.

There have been no new cases of HMHVV-Infected goblins since the incident took place. Goblins who have been Infected for years remain HMHVV goblins, but those more recently Infected have shed many of their traditional Infected traits. They no longer drain Essence from victims, they no longer regenerate, sunlight no longer affects them, etc. They have even gained the ability to procreate, producing HMHVV-free offspring in one case. In effect, any dwarf Infected recently by HMHVV no longer becomes an HMHVV-goblin, but a non-Infected goblin. And the communities of goblins worldwide are now talking about what appears to be a new metatype. A kind of a goblinization 2.0, I guess. Scientists are now studying this new goblin DNA, and they suggest these changes might even be latent traits and not completely new. When this goes live, watch Shiawase scramble to distance themselves. But you heard it here—it was them.

GREAT GHOST DANCE

I was in Seattle in August 2017 when Mount Adams, Mount Hood, Mount Rainier, and Mount Saint Helens blew up at once. I was only a little one, but I remember it so clearly; I thought the world was coming to an end. The sky turned black as midnight as the volcanoes—I'd discover later—spontaneously erupted, spewing ash into the air. I know I wasn't the only one who thought the world was ending: the adults lost their minds. It wasn't until much later I learned this, and the freak weather that continued thereafter, was a result of the Great Ghost Dance.

Daniel Howling Coyote was a leader of the First Nations' people. In 2014, he claimed responsibility for the eruption of Redondo Peak, which buried the town of Los Alamos. The UCAS didn't understand the full extent of his power, but they knew he was a risk. By August 16, 2017, it was clear that a death warrant was about to be signed. President Jarman had assembled his forces and was making ready to give his extermination order. They put a bounty on Howling Coyote's head, but the weather kept running the officials off his trail. Everything culminated in 2017, when Howling Coyote and thousands of shamans participated in a sacrificial ritual called the Great Ghost Dance. The power unleashed and the uncertainty with which the UCAS government viewed the ritual terrified officials. They knew they could not compete when the very ground beneath their feet betrayed them.

The Great Ghost Dance accomplished Howling Coyote's goals. On August 18, President Jarman officially countermanded his orders and called for a negotiated peace with the Natives. On April 25 of the following year, the First Treaty of Denver was signed, ceding half of North America to the Natives, leading to the formation of the Native American Nations (NAN), the eventual collapse of Canada, and ultimately the formation of the UCAS from the remnants of the United States and Canada a decade later.

The Great Ghost Dance has been called many things, depending on who you ask. It was the world's first and largest blood magic ritual. It bore the Awakening more abruptly and violently than modern magical scholarship believes would have happened had the Dance never taken place. It's been called a magical act of terror. Regardless of others' labels, the world was forever changed, and the powerless had new ways to grab power.

- The Great Ghost Dance was not without cost. Hundreds of the dancers who participated lost their lives, nobly giving their very last breath to the song, while the land itself cracked and groaned from the magic drawn forth. Weather patterns have never recovered with incidents in the Ute Nation (now part of the Pueblo Corporate Council) being particularly disrupted. Flash floods, hail in August, fifty-five-degree heatwaves in January, blood falling from the sky, rain rising from the dirt ... over time, it's slowed down, but there's no way to know how long it will continue.
- Elijah
- Trading lives for magical power? Blood Magic by any name. A pox on whomever showed them this Way.
- Glasswalker

- > We send young men and women to die in war. Is it any worse to pave a road to victory with a thousand teenagers under a hail of lead than to dance it with hundreds who give their lives willingly to magic?
- > Frosty
- > Ute Territory? Isn't that out near Yellowstone-ish? Wonder if the Great Ghost Dance has anything to do with the Yellowstone Anomaly?
- > Kia
- > The Sleeping Giant stirs. Pray he can be lulled back to slumber.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

GRID OVERWATCH DIVISION

The Grid Overwatch Division, or GOD for short (of *course* they did that on purpose), is a law-enforcement arm of the Corporate Court overseeing Matrix laws. Other than that, what to say about the Grid Overwatch Division that hasn't already been said? I don't fragging know, they just bite. And I mean that in the literal and the figurative sense. These fraggers watch from on-high for any blips in the system that show them someone's not playing by their rules. And by "blips in the system," I'm talking about you and your crew. Whether you've been decking the same space for too long, whether you've conducted yourself in a less-than-legal fashion, whether you aren't freaking registered, they'll find you.

Somewhere up in the gleaming skyscrapers and orbital structures, far above the teeming masses, floats the headquarters of GOD. Presumably, there sit hundreds of employees, faithfully scouting the Matrix for law-breakers, unregistered folk, artificial intelligences, and probably plenty more that we aren't seeing. Good luck getting inside; the Matrix defenses are the best in the business, and if you're looking to head in physically, you'll be hard pressed to even find the place.

Getting the attention of GOD means bringing heat down on you. If you're lucky, they'll just eject you from the Matrix with security protocols designed to leave a splitting headache as a reminder to not mess with them. If they're really serious, though, these fraggers will pull up on you in a big, armored vehicle, with law enforcement in tow. They have exceptional abilities when it comes to finding you—not just on the Matrix, but where your meat is sitting. They'll probably just kill you, but if they take you into custody? No one's going to hear from you again. You'll disappear.

So keep an eye on that overwatch score ticking away while you riffle through the guest list of Evo's latest red-carpet event, or GOD will be knocking on your van door. Who am I kidding? They'll rip that thing right off to get at you. They won't be cordial, and they won't offer a warning. They might just decide to dispense with you quickly—after all, killing you makes you cost them and their prison-owning buddies that much less. Death is cheap.

With every boogeyman, there seem to be as many rumors as facts floating around. There have been rumors of captured hackers who've ended up working for them. As much as I hate to say it, I believe this one. Not every runner has the strength to stave off pressure, and GOD's got a ton of resources to make you feel the heat.

They will not hesitate to use your social circle against you—including contacts, friends, and family. You may find yourself in a position where you wish they'd killed you instead.

What it comes down to is this: If you're on a job and your decker tells you that you've been made, get the frag out.



HALLOWEENERS

Everyone knows the Halloweeners. They're the premier thrill-gang in the Seattle Sprawl. There are a few affiliate 'Weeners in Denver and Boston, but Seattle is their main stomping ground—specifically Downtown, where they burn stuff. The Jackal's Lantern bar in the Redmond Barrens, and the neighborhoods surrounding, are where they lay their costumed heads and recruit.

They started out as punks in 1950s-style Halloween costumes, robbing the rich. Their lieutenants are called "ragers," and most of them started as deranged punks in the rank-and-file. After being nearly exterminated by wars with Renraku and the Ancients, the Halloweeners have been steadily rebuilding their ranks. Neighborhoods are divided up between ragers. The gang is becoming more diverse, attracting new blood while staying below the radars of the corps and avoiding damaging wars with other gangs. This can all be attributed to the leadership of the mysterious Nightmare, who literally fought to take over the gang from all other challengers once their old leader, Slash and Burn, was killed. He's always seen wearing black leathers, a skull mask, and orange bandanas on his arms. He is absolutely a force to be reckoned with. A close source tells me his aura is masked fairly powerfully and looks like it is on fire when viewed without the disguise. Second-in-command is Absinthe, a physical adept of no small ability, who acts as a go-between with Nightmare and other ragers.

It isn't hard to spot a Halloweener in Seattle. They're the ones torching the city while dressed up like it's October 31. Anything goes for their costumes, but black leathers and an orange splash usually suffice until you gain some street cred. Certain ragers have particular themes they impose on their underlings, like ghouls, mythological creatures, historical figures, or Carn-evil's brutal clowns around the Jackal's Lantern bar.

The Halloweeners' symbol is a flaming orange-and-black Jack o' lantern, and you can find it somewhere on almost every member.

HARLEQUIN

By now, more than a few people have encountered the elf known as Harlequin, whether hired by him, wronged by him, joined a short-lived gang at his behest, or watched him fight the dragon Ghostwalker in Downtown Denver. Maybe you only heard tales about him, which might be the best way to encounter him—at a distance. This information won't stay up long, as every previous attempt to post it has been ripped down within minutes, so download it while you can instead of trying to read it online.

I've heard his aliases include Har'lea'quinn, Caimbeul, and the Last Knight of the Crying Spire, but the more common names he goes by are Harlequin, the Laughing Man (online), or simply "H." His hair is usually dyed bright red, and according to all sources, he always appears in some sort of jester's motley face paint, most often white face with red diamonds over one or two eyes. His left ear is prosthetic. The colors may vary depending on mood. He has painted himself this way since at least the Renaissance.

He may be one of the most powerful individuals on the planet. He seems to be one of these immortal-type elves who muck about with normal people's business on the regular. His attitude swings radically from charming to depressive to vengeful to haughty, but he always seems to need the attention of all around him. On frequent occasions, I am told he has saved the world, but more often than not, this means he has placed others in harm's way for the sake of the world. He is a liar through and through, never telling more of the truth than he must to have his will done. Whether this is justified is up to the individual observer.

His motivations are often opaque, but by some accounts, he has protected our world from powerful extraplanar beings intending to do us harm. President Dunkelzahn aided him in this task on at least one occasion, to mixed effect. In Dunkelzahn's will, Harlequin was gifted the armor worn by King Richard the Lion-Hearted and the fabled sword Excalibur, although the sword may be a joke, a metaphor, or simply lost, as it was never retrieved.

Approximately six years ago, Harlequin was present with a handful of other powerful elites at the site of the former Watergate Rift. There, some powerful artifacts were brought together and used by Ghostwalker to close the rift. The magical feedback from this would have destroyed those present, as well as a great deal of DeeCee, had not Aina Dupree intervened, evidently killing her. Apparently, Harlequin was close to Ms. Dupree, as this event caused him to lose control of a great form spirit with his likeness and make plans to strike back at Ghostwalker. Manipulating Denver gangs into a "Jester's Army," Harlequin beset downtown Denver, culminating in a one-on-one brawl with the dragon. It was apparent both were hurt, but before the dragon landed a killing blow, the fight was interrupted by Jane "Frosty" Foster, accompanied by Eهران the Scribe and a mysterious figure.

Harlequin was silent for many years after that, besides some always-disrespectful banter on JackPoint, but most recently, watchers in the Seelie Court whispered he laid a trap for the Court's Queen Alachia. I have heard nothing from any source regarding Harlequin since—but the content in this volume about Aina Dupree may have his fingerprints all over it.

HAWAII, KINGDOM OF

There is no place in the world where you can find both beauty and abominable despair like Hawai'i. We all know it's a series of volcanic Pacific islands, once a kingdom, then a state of the United States, and now a "kingdom" once again, but that's grade-schooler stuff. Wait, I hit the kingdom with some air quotes ... why? Because no matter what, in this modern connected world, it's hard to run anyplace with a single monarch



Daniel
Martin

in charge, so Hawai'i is run by both King Kamehameha V and an elected legislature. Though it was run by Kamehameha IV alone for a few years until he disappeared at sea. But that's not really the reason for air quotes. Hawai'i is really run by the megacorps, and in particular the Japanacorp, Evo (which, early in its life, was the Japanacorp Yamatetsu), and Maersk.

During its return to independence from the collapsing United States, the nation established extensive connections with several Japanese corporations, especially Yamatetsu and Renraku. It also had connections to Ares that seemed strong at the start but quickly frayed and then snapped. Renraku maintained support through its own trying times and focuses primarily on boosting the primary economic activity of Hawai'i: tourism. Evo supports the culture and military of Hawai'i through MetaErgonomics and Yamatetsu Naval Technologies, while also keeping them healthy and safe by providing their medical services via CrashCart. Shiawase and MCT are also all over Hawai'i now, and the thin connection to Ares has faded into distant memory after the nation no longer needed the threat of dropping sticks from the sky. Maersk is a major player as one of the world's shipping leaders, and Hawai'i is a major stop and hub for Pacific shipping. All of these corporate players in one very small place means a lot of work for runners and Johnsons.

Culturally, there is a massive divide between those living under the thumb and eye of the megas and those who have slipped off to the quiet parts of the islands, the jungles and valleys, in order to live the simpler life. It seems an idyllic life, and corporate sheep occasionally come for a visit, but it can't be promoted as it doesn't fuel the bottom line. The remnants of ALOHA, the Army for the Liberation of Hawai'i, have shifted to a more culturally based group of revolutionaries and seek to push the corps off the islands of the *kama'aina* (the actual residents).

HEAVENHERDS

The Heavenherds are a "tribe" within the Zulu nation. Those who have firsthand knowledge, however, know they aren't a tribe at all, but a group of powerful Awakened individuals appointed for some grand purpose. Whether this purpose serves the Zulu nation or whether the reverse is true is hard to discern. We know they've existed since before written history and wield magical knowledge and techniques far beyond the AAA corp mages. In the past, they worked with Universal Omnitech, giving Thomas Roxborough cybermantic secrets to preserve a body from natural death. Since, they've kept to themselves, sharing their secrets only with Izolo Inc., keeping drek in-house, as it were.

HENAN

Deep in the eastern heartland of China, Henan (along with its neighbors Shanxi and Shaanxi; it makes more sense in Chinese) is the cradle of Chinese civilization and the home of the Luoyang Water Banquet (twenty-four different soups!). It also became the last bastion of Chinese Communism after the People's Republic of China collapsed. Henan's kind of a mixed bag for neo-anarchists; the communist regime is as anti-corp as ever, but they're also as oppressive as ever. Plus, Lung

doesn't much like them, so you might find yourself on the receiving end of an angry great dragon.

HESTABY

Another fraggin' dragon. If not for that, she might almost be a decent person. She woke up in 2053, in California, and immediately stepped in between the forces of Cal Free and Tir Tairngire as they fought over the Mount Shasta area, pushing the Tir forces back north. She then took over the area as her own. I mean, really, who could stop her? Kind of ironic that less than ten years later, she took over the Tir Council of Princes position that Lofwyr left open when he decided he was bored with them. She puts on a good show about wanting to help the average metahuman, touting peace and equality between regular folk and dragonkind and good stewardship of the earth.

- > Yeah, she's a real disciple of Dunkelzahn, alright.
- > Haze
- > At least one of the great dragons is trying to be.
- > /dev/grrl
- > You don't get sarcasm, do you?
- > Haze
- > I get good results when I trace icons. Does that count?
- > /dev/grrl
- > HAZE HAS DISCONNECTED
- > Nice!
- > Slamm-O!

Hestaby and Lofwyr got into this huge argument that turned nasty back in 2073, now colorfully known as the Great Dragon Civil War. She hit Lofwyr's holdings hard but was careful not to harm any metahumans in the process. When all was said and done, the Great Dragon Assembly put her on trial for taking metahumanity's side over her own kind, stripped her of her hoards and rank, and exiled her from dragon society entirely. But don't make the mistake of thinking she's a has-been. She's been quietly active, gathering resources and people, rebuilding her influence. To what end, you ask? Revenge, politics, profit, the betterment of metahumanity? The first three are far more likely, but her fans hold onto the fourth like it's their only hope.

HONG KONG FREE ENTERPRISE ZONE

Split off from China for the second time after the Communist collapse, Hong Kong's been plugging along pretty much the same as it has for the last two hundred years and change. Wuxing and the Triads are the reigning masters of Hong Kong on the corporate and criminal fronts (as if those two are different!), but other regional powers are trying to move in. Despite all that, Hong Kong's a pretty friendly place for the neo-anarchist crowd, espe-

cially if you're a smuggler or looking to pick something up from one at the Kai Tak Night Market.

HORIZON

You're probably used to the idea that a corporation—especially a megacorp of any tier—lies through their teeth/tusks/texts/whatever. That's pretty much a given; hell, it even applies to almost anyone who wants to make some scratch. Lies *sell*. That's the whole point of them. But Horizon ... hoo, boy. They've made prevarication a fragging art form.

They could found a school called Charlatans University, intended to teach people how to lie effectively, and then take thousands upon thousands of nuyen from their clients, not teach them a damn thing—which is essentially theft—and their students would praise them for the incredible life lesson that the whole experience taught them instead of suing them.

Horizon doesn't just talk out of both sides of their mouth. They have a third side of their mouth they talk out of, and maybe even a fourth or fifth, depending on whom you ask.

On the surface, Horizon is a Los Angeles-based AAA mega that specializes in PR, marketing, and media—but that's not all they do, not by a long shot. (And if you think of them as just the “PR megacorp,” then congratulations, you've fallen for just another one of their lies.) But make no mistake—their biscuits and gravy is in the business of shaping the mediascape of reality so that reality (or at least the perception thereof) matches what they want you to think you want it to be. Confused yet? You should be. Because the most pernicious lie is the one you believe without even realizing where the belief came from. For example, a high-profile corp exec—who happens to be a Horizon client—could go out in the middle of New York City, shoot down someone in cold blood, and Horizon could make you believe not only that this was all a big misunderstanding, but that said exec was the *real* victim in this whole fiasco. They essentially weaponize victimhood, but the real trick is they'd get you to think that you already believed all of that before Horizon told you what to believe.

Horizon basically started as this humanitarian think-tank with lofty notions of social responsibility, and through some incredible luck—and maybe more than a little bit of nudging from shadow folk—they snatched up enough dough and assets to land a spot in the Big Ten. (It still sits at the bottom spot, but even the lowest layer of the *crème de la crème* is still, well, *crème*.) What really gets people worked up about Horizon is their on-the-surface commitment to social responsibility and inclusiveness, even to a level above Evo. How can you ever regret supporting a corp dedicated to cleaning up the environment or helping the homeless or eradicating childhood diseases? (Let's just temporarily ignore the fact that Horizon often makes money off the efforts they promote.) They've even got this wiz internal rating system, the Horizon Internal Persona (or the “HIP” system for short; isn't that just charmingly clever?), which lets your coworkers rate you as both an employee and a metahuman being. And if you have a high-enough HIP score, then gratz! You just earned yourself a promotion by being such a wonderful and diligent person. A true credit to society and to Horizon's decadent scam machine. No need to even sweat your way through a bulldrek job interview, no sirree!

The thing to remember with Horizon is two key words: *Pretty sells*. Horizon's office buildings, their media blitzes, even their fragging sim-star CEO, Gary Cline, are all façades that are, admittedly, wonderful to behold. To most people façades are, well, shallow, but Horizon revels in them. As long as Horizon can dress something up in enough glitz and glamor, people will flock to it, take pictures of it, share those pictures everywhere, thereby using them to help people define beauty and stature. They can put enough lipstick on a pig to somehow make you forget that you're even looking at a pig, and if you do discover you actually bought a pig, they can convince you that you can totally have a luau and pig roast for all of your friends. What an unexpected silver lining! There's no wrong answer with this mega.

Even major snafus like the anti-technomancer sentiments that led to the massacre in Las Vegas back in '74, or the allegations that they had something to do with the birth of the AIs that proliferated CFD, or the shenanigans precipitated by the utter collapse of Consensus 1.0—all of those were mere bumps in Horizon's surprisingly well-paved road. They came and went with only a modicum of lasting damage to Horizon's public goodwill, and then they were largely forgotten like yesterday's donuts or recalled like a distant memory and then waved off without any lasting consequence. I mean, a conscientious mega that supports so many humanitarian and social-welfare programs and offers so many good services and products is surely allowed a few foibles and benefits-of-the-doubt along the way, neh?

Stop that, chummer. Stop it right fragging now. They've already got their hooks into you, and those hooks are damned difficult to remove. Believe me. And I've got the literal scars to show you for proof.

The anesthetized general public might've forgotten some of the heavy criticisms thrown at Horizon over the past handful of years, but we in the darker side of the shadows haven't. A knife in the back with a smile is still a knife in the back.

If you want to hurt Horizon's bottom line—and I know there's a good many of you folk out there who do—then do whatever you possibly can to peel back the veneer. Ugly 'em up a bit. It might not accomplish a lot in the short term, but it may eventually show enough people that the emperor is indeed naked.

So here's a few suggestions for rubbing dirt on “pretty.”

Horizon proper: Dig up some dirt on Gary Cline. Horizon's always-smiling CEO is hiding *something*, but no one can crack that impeccable square-jawed persona (see his entry here for some hints).

Dawkins Group: Investigate *anyone* going by “Mr./Ms./Mx. Dawkins.” This is the most common alias for agents in Horizon's super-secret Dawkins Group, an elite team dedicated to destroying any meme, individual, or organization that would cast Horizon or its subsidiaries in a negative light. Of course, the more this information spreads, the less this alias will be used. Act quickly.

Pathfinder Multimedia: Set up a review-bomb campaign for any and all Pathfinder simsense releases. I'm talking armies of agents and scripts that can downvote a “review” of major releases faster than Pathfinder can respond. People won't buy low-rated duds, even if they're CalHot chips.

Charisma Associates: Acquire some of Charisma's client database and proliferate the juiciest tidbits. I'm

not talking about the good PR things that Charisma crows about in the media. You're gonna want to look for the dirt that clients hire Charisma to make disappear, and sometimes the methods Charisma employees take are just as questionable and/or illegal as what they're trying to erase.

HUALPA

The great dragon Hualpa is best known for founding the nation of Amazonia. (Of course, by "founding," I mean "driving out the Brazilian government and kicking out every undesirable to create a nation populated by more Awakened denizens than metahumans." Same diff.) His primary goal has been maintaining Amazonia as a haven for the Awakened, especially those who have been ostracized or terrorized by their home nations. If you're not welcome in Hualpa's domain, he—or one of his agents—will make that painfully clear before you can ruffle his feathers any further.

The biggest affront to Hualpa's less-than-welcoming border policy came in the form of the Az-Am War. Don't listen to what the Azzies claim kicked off the conflict. Hualpa sent those operatives into Aztlan to put a stop to Azzie pollutants that had started contaminating Amazonian land. Aztlan caught the operatives (who forgot the cardinal rule of deniable assets: "Thou shalt not get caught"), acted all mock-offended, declared war, (mortally?) wounded the great dragon SIRRURG, and then won that war.

So yeah. Hualpa didn't react well to the "bad guys" winning. He signed Amazonia's surrender without a word and then disappeared from the public eye. All I gotta say is, you don't mess with dragons or their allies. They've got a long, long memory, and they regularly develop plots no one can anticipate. Besides, of course, other dragons.

Because of this, I'd bet nuyen to noodles that Hualpa is concocting some long-game revenge scheme right now. All the hearsay in and around Bogotá hints at something going on in Amazonia. I don't think Hualpa's ready to blow open the powder keg of war and come out raging full bore from his lair at Kuelap, but keep an eye out for the little things—and not just in the region Aztlan claimed in the war. Minor tremors usually precede a massive quake.

HUMAN NATION

Look, we could talk about human tribalism, and the power of bonding together over a common enemy/scapegoat, and how negative behavior at the top of society validates increased negativity at all levels, and there would be some validity to all of it. But let's just be direct here: Assholes gonna asshole. And few organizations on earth allow you to asshole like the Human Nation. They are built on the hate of the other (specifically, the ork/troll/dwarf/elf other, especially those first two). They're happy to take direct action, going on rampages beating every meta in sight, but they're even happier to screw up systems so that all metas, everywhere, have a harder time of it. Did a ork kid get in a fight with a human kid at school? They'll work on "zero tolerance" policies that get ork and troll kids punished and expelled quicker than humans. They'll campaign for longer jail sentences

for orks and trolls and also look at criminalizing poverty whenever possible. If they can't make every individual hate metahumans. They'll make systems hate them. They are bullies who never learned anything more—it would be pathetic and sad if it weren't so destructive.

HUMANIS POLICLUB

There are dozens of hate groups out there, but Humanis is the largest and the one with the most acceptance by the ignorant masses, draping itself in the flag of patriotism (regardless of the country they are in), religion, and "traditional values." Millions buy into their hype about "protecting the purity of humanity" and all that shit. At the end of the day they're modern Nazis—nothing more, nothing less. Give them nothing except a punch in the face or a bullet to the brainpan.

- ▶ Easy to say, but unfortunately far too many of these groups are well-funded, well-armed, and militant as hell. Humanis isn't quite on the level of mass-murdering and terrorism as, say, Alamos 20K, but they're still quite violent and pro-active. There are hundreds of metahuman deaths that are directly attributed to them each year, and they are probably responsible for ten times that number—some of their victims are incorrectly attributed to other crimes, or the victims are simply SINless and go unreported and unrecorded.
- ▶ Clockwork
- ▶ Probably one of the few times I agree with Clockwork. I have a standing bounty on proven Humanis members in Seattle. They will all pay for what they did to Rebecca.
- ▶ Bull



IMMORTAL ELVES

The easy, mostly useless definition: Immortal elves are long-lived beings whose existence pre-dates the Awakening. It seems they can be killed, but left to their own devices, they tend not to die.

The complicated version: Immortal elves force us to contemplate what we understand about the nature of the world and wonder if we know anything about it at all, really. In the common conception of the world, the Awakening is a hard line between a world without magic and a world with it. When pressed, people might say that the Fifth World is a low magic world rather than no magic, and it is that low ebb, rather than absence, that allowed the immortal elves their ongoing existence. But once that possibility is allowed, the questions that come with it get trickier and trickier. What could these elves do with their magic during the Fifth World? We have indications that the great dragons slumbered through the Fifth World—did they ever stir? Wake long enough to, say, make a few stock transactions that would benefit them when

magic finally came back? Did the immortal elves talk to them about these things? Or to each other? Did they know when magic was coming back? Did they prepare for it? Could they influence the switch in any way?

The more you ask these questions, the deeper the rabbit hole gets. How much are they plotting? How much are they controlling? Are they looking out for anything more than their own prosperity? If so, what?

Want to know how much power they have? The next paragraph is going to list the names of several known or suspected immortal elves. I'm going to check on this document every step of the way, from editing to layout to proofing, to make sure the paragraph stays in. If the paragraph after this is not full of names, then they somehow managed to get past my efforts and get those names edited out.

The names should have been just above this sentence. Were they there? Or did they take them out while leaving the rest of this entry in place, just to taunt us? If that's the case, that should tell you something about the kind of people we're dealing with. And it leaves us with one more question—if they took out that paragraph, what other last-minute changes did they make?

Or is this whole entry just messing with you?

INDIAN UNION

The entire world, packed into 3.3 million square kilometers. It's all here—undeveloped countrysides that still manage to be polluted by uncaring industries, massive cities with the ultra-rich, the super-poor, and the bewildered classes in between trying to climb to one without falling to the other, wild lands full of critters that have not been and possibly should not be discovered, huge stretches where agribusiness reigns, glamorous entertainment capitals, towering financial districts—it's all there. New Delhi is the political capital, while Mumbai is a global entertainment and media powerhouse. And Kolkata is a divide—on one hand, it's the financial capital, and on the other, it's the place where, if you tell other runners that you managed to come out of there, they'll tip their metaphorical caps and immediately give you a whole basket of street cred. The Ganges benefits from the veneration of the people and a fair amount of magic—the last time Halley's Comet swooped by, it purified large stretches of it, despite the best efforts of the corps to keep it dirty.

In general, the comet affected the IU more than it did other places, a mystery that academics are still trying to figure out. One theory is that the Union leans toward a higher-than-average magical presence. The aforementioned Ganges, the training grounds of Varanasi that turn out highly skilled mages of at least two different traditions, and the Golden Triangle of Orissa all burst with mana and are ripe for study—or, if you're a corp, exploitation. The higher magic of these spots might have mixed with whatever the comet did to make the effects more powerful here. Magic is important in the Union, and the nation's government has a significant amount of innate respect for the value for these landmarks, which has helped preserve them. But we all know that nothing stays saved for long.

Renraku has a serious presence in the Union, as do Saeder-Krupp and Shiawase. The biggest homegrown



corp is Kolkata Integrated Talent and Technologies (KITT), which has expertise in just about any business-to-business area you can think of, including finance, research, management consulting, software consulting, or any other kind of consulting that might come to mind.

INFECTED

The basics? Infected are metahumans (and some other metasapient, now) who have contracted the human-metahuman vampiric virus (HMHVV), a metamagical retrovirus that mutates its hosts into monsters from legend, like vampires, ghouls, banshees, and more. They aren't undead, but they have cannibalistic urges for flesh, blood, and most horrifically the metaphysical energy of the metahuman soul. Boy, we're saying "meta" a lot, aren't we?

The virus has several strains, which express in their own ways in different hosts. Summarized briefly, HMHV-1 (Harz-Greenbaum Strain, or ghilani vrykolaki viridae, for all the would-be PhDs in the room) turns humans into vampires, elves into banshees, dwarfs into goblins, orks into wendigo, and trolls into dzoo-noo-qua. Any of those has a slim chance of becoming a regular vampire, but that's a one-way street, so you could be a dwarf vampire, but not a human goblin. There's also a sub strain, 1s (Bruckner-Langer, ghilani vrykolaki viridae sanguisuga), that turns humans into nosferatu. Type-1s are often considered the toughest of all strains, gaining regeneration, immunity to disease and poison, immortality, mist form, a suite of supernatural abilities, and quite often Awakening. Paired with that, they have the most devastating nutritional requirements, feeding not only on the blood but the soul of their victims. The experience is horrifying and addictively pleasurable, and if the victim is completely drained, they become Infected themselves. Fortunately, most of these guys don't care for competition, so they finish off the victim, usually smashing their brains out. For the record, that regeneration has a hard time rebuilding brain and spinal injuries, so aim for the head, yeah?

HMHVV-2 is way more diverse and freaky. Jaraka-Criscione strain, or ghilani moner viridae, doesn't have the same soul-thirst or regeneration or anything, but usually twists the host into something more alien. Sasquatches become bandersnatches, trolls become fomoraig, dwarfs into gnawers, orks into grendels, elves into harvesters, and humans into loup-garou. Chameleon skin, acid breath, knives for hands, command over rodents ... it's a damn mess.

HMHVV-3 is the most commonly encountered, and politically the most complicated. Krieger Strain, or ghilani wichti viridae, turns everyone into ghouls—blind, cannibal mutants who can see into the astral and find sunlight painful. They're probably the weakest of all the Infected, but they are also the most contagious. This strain passes through bodily fluids, so their claws, licked clean of their last meal, might infect you. Obviously, so will their bite. If that weren't enough, unlike strain 1s (though like strain 2s), ghouls can and do breed true, meaning there are some poor bastards born that way. And while some go feral, others are just as smart as before their change, bringing into question if they are still people or a menace that needs to be put down. Check out the entry on Asamando to learn more.

Infected have a troubled legal history, too. Which is understandable, considering they are victims turned into perpetrators. Here, ghouls arguably have had the easiest

and hardest time of it. They have their own nation, and for a little while, the UCAS even made them legitimate citizens with Order 182. Of course, it didn't last long, and ghouls now use the 182 as their name when they get all riled up and angry at the normies. Sure, some nations will take them in, like Aztlan or California Free State, but it's provisional and usually comes with plenty of strings attached. So they stay underground (often literally), seeking fresh meat and staying alive.

For the ones who want their grub with a side of ethics, buying the leftovers from a chop shop can put meat on the table. But that only counts for the ones that are in it for the special protein, like strains 2 and 3. Strain 1s might have eternal youth and mist form and regeneration, but it costs something extra—that irreplaceable special energy from a victim. Blood is just a detail for them as they suck out your soul, or something like it. You sure don't leave that behind when you get an arm lopped off for some chrome, so they have to take it from the source. And the scariest part? It feels good for the victim. No matter how terrifying or painful it is, the experience can be addictive.

The latest skinny says the Infected are experiencing a metagenetic renaissance (not that they asked for it). The virus is mutating, resulting in more variances, positive and negative. That makes hunting them all the more complicated (did we mention the juicy bounty most nations put on these bastards?), but it also expanded the prey and reproduction, so now there's Infected centaurs, naga, merrow, and other drek on top of our old friends, the semi-invisible bandersnatches that used to be friendly, fuzzy sasquatches. So HMHV-2 feels outdated. Maybe they'll change it to sapient vampiric virus, but that brings out all the arguments about what constitutes metahumanity and whether that implies that the virus, itself, is sapient, which is of course nonsense.

Now, unless you're some kind of crazy person who thinks that sounds awesome, you're wondering how to kill the fraggers. Might be some bounty money in it, if you're the proactive type. Or maybe your kid sister got the bite and she's trying to make the best of it and you want to help. Well, being infected may sound like a slew of supervillain powers, but they're glass cannons. Bring the right tools and tactics to the job, and down they go, especially if they are overly dependent on those powers.

First, all Infected have a problem with sunlight. Sometimes it's just an inconvenience, but it can go all the way up to actively burning. Either way is a great distraction to throw them off their game or keep them from casting, but the real benefit is that they can't use most of their special abilities. Regeneration stops, mind control interrupted, mist form erupts them back to regular, etc. Pick the right moment, and that can put them down right away. Now, don't assume any UV is going to work. The best stuff is real sunlight, something about both the light frequency and the metaphysical properties of that light. Artificial UV has to be pretty strong, and even then it's not as effective.

Second, most Infected have some kind of allergy. Vampires, for example, can't stand the touch of real wood. So wood-pulp chem rounds, wooden stakes, even a good cudgel can be used against them. Depending on what you're going hunting for, it might be wolfsbane, silver, or anything else. With their mutations, it might be more or less, depending. So as powerful as this stuff is, you have to do your research first. And make sure

it's the real thing. Those wood-pulp bullets need wood from a tree, not some synthetic drek. Pop a grenade with frags or some gaseous version of their chosen poison and enjoy the burn.

Third, magic. Infected are dual natured, meaning wards can slow them down or stop them. Spells usually punch right through, and regeneration won't kick in. For extra points, use a spell that focuses light, like old school laser or nova, and it'll do some extra damage. Two weaknesses in one.

Four, headshots. Look, not all Infected have regeneration, but they're the extra-scary ones, so it keeps coming back to that. They have a hard time regenerating spinal or brain damage, even if it's not an allergen, so a marksman can knock them out of the box quicker than you might think.

Five, and last I can think of, the good old-fashioned way. Full auto in the gut or a boot party can do the job, especially if they don't regrow limbs in seconds. Hack 'em, smack 'em, shoot 'em up, blow them away. They might be nocturnal predators, but I have yet to meet the beast that doesn't eventually fold from enough force.

So that's the spooky, scary lowdown on vampires and their kin. They want to eat you, and if they succeed, you just might end up one of them. They're the mirror, darkly, and one false move around them can mean finding out what's on the other side.

INVAE (INSECT/BUG SPIRITS)

More commonly referred to as bug or insect spirits, "invae" is a universal arcane label for any and all varieties of spirits that come to our plane in the form of one of Earth's many insect species. The invae are particularly invasive, as they reach across the astral ether to seek out and subvert a summoner to bring them a queen capable of perpetuating their numbers without the continued need of a metahuman summoner. They still need metahumans (as well as other species, but we seem most ideal) to bring over more of their kind in a demented spiritual trade involving cocoons and rituals.

Their forms resemble that of the species they reflect. Well, let's not sound stupid here. They actually vary up near the level of order and family, but most folks don't care about cladistics when getting paralyzed for later spiritual conversion. Back to the point, within each group, certain characteristics may vary by genus and species even within the same hive. They aren't really insects, you see—they're the spiritual manifestation of the summoner's view of insects giving shape to an entirely extraplanar spiritual entity. If the summoner thought tarantula hawks were the biggest badasses in the wasp family, then the warrior caste they summon would have its features, but if the summoner was terrified of bumblebees as a child, the hive's warriors would be fat and fuzzy. That shaping becomes pretty well-defined in the queen, so even after the summoner has been utilized or discarded, the trends tend to stick.

The various types tend to fall into two major categories—social and solitary—with a smaller third category we'll chat about later. Social varieties include those insects we think of as hive or colony builders, including ants, locusts, termites, and wasps. They tend to set up in a singular place and convert it to their home over time. The Universal Brotherhood was a collection of different hives and colonies around the world, while Chicago was

trashed by massive hives and colonies. Solitary types include beetle, cicada, firefly, fly, mosquito, and roach. They still create a nest where the queen resides, but each individual spirit tends to operate in a slightly more independent manner. If you see an ant spirit, know there are many more about, while a roach might be alone. In either case, run. Fast.

The third category only has one type: mantids. They're solitary, though they often work together, but they get a place separate from the others because they feed off the energies of other invae. Much like the mantids of our world are well-known for hunting other insects, so it is that the mantids hunt other invae. They still use metahumans as incubators, so they aren't on our side, but at least they help a little in limiting other bug spirit populations.

The spirits come in different species but they also come in different types with different roles in their little psycho-social circle. Arcanists (those who study the arcane) classify them as caretaker, nymph, scout, soldier, worker, and queen/mother. Caretakers are responsible for handling the incubation of hosts and such, especially among the solitary types where workers are less common. They're not the toughest, but they have a lot of skill at arcane protection, using wards to hide and hold off enemies. Nymphs are queens in waiting. Scouts do just that—scout. They head out into the world and locate the necessary resources with some level of stealth and subterfuge. Plenty of regular folks have probably met a scout or two as they are quite adept at imitating metahumans, sometimes even holding down corporate jobs. Soldiers are the warriors and defend the nest, the queen, and everything else that needs to be fought over. They're both a frontline force sent out to overrun and a rear guard holding the line in defense of their maker. Workers remind me of corporate drones. They're just there to keep the processes going, and if need be, sacrifice en masse for the greater good of the corp ... err, colony. The queen, sometimes called a mother, is a great form spirit summoned by the shaman who takes over the role of planar link for more of her kind. She's usually the biggest and baddest mother (pun intended) on the block. Reports from Chicago talk about a queen that used a dragon as her host, so they can get fragging wild. Different colonies and groups vary the numbers of each type by needs, but virtually all of them exist in every hive group.

ISRAEL

Whether Israel's doing better or worse in the last few years depends on who you ask. SpinGlobal's ascent to the Big Ten has a lot of people up in arms—the right-wing hardliners in the Knesset are stoking fears that an Arab megacorp on the Corporate Court is a major national-security threat. Israel's corporate scene has historically been dominated by Ares and the Frankfurt Bank Association, but Ares' troubles in other parts of the world have weakened their influence in Israel, leaving their allies in the FBA to hold the line against Saeder-Krupp's attempts to gain influence in the region.

ITALIAN CONFEDERATION

You think *you've* had a hard time lately? Try being the battleground between great dragons! The GeMiTo

sprawl was hit hard by the fighting of the Dragon Civil War. It was already a pretty feral city, right across the border from the other Italian states, and then shadowrunners, mercenaries, and other related thugs found it to be the closest place to spend their money and fight with the locals. It still hasn't died down. The rest of the Italian peninsula has banded together to beef up security on the border to make sure the fighting doesn't spill out.

This would be great if they had the money to do it. Originally they didn't, but then the nation tapped into some of the less licit flows of money within their borders, and security funding improved. Paying the money back is a problem for the future, but right now regular Italians are being drafted to play border guard in some of the most picturesque and corrupt parts of Europe. They are learning fighting skills, and in a year or two they will be coming home to unemployment and solitude. That is another problem to be worried about in the future, but a problem for right now is some growing tensions between powerful forces in the nation. The Mafia helped supply the security forces fanning out across Europe, and this has led to them being low on enforcers internally. At the same time, the Vatican is pushing more morality and loosening up its strictures. Normally the Catholic church and the mob get on well, many mobsters are catholic after all, but it seems Italy is being pulled in two directions.

There can never be a war between the church and the Mafia, many mafiosi are deeply Catholic, but there are hot-headed priests and foot soldiers who want to wear the big pants in Italy, and it's causing some problems in the trenches.

It'll probably cause even more problems when the border guards come home all angry and looking for something to do.

I love Italy in the Springtime.

IZOLO INC.

Izolo Inc. is an A-rated corporation headquartered in New Hlobane, Zulu Nation, Azanian Confederation, and is one of the most powerful yet reclusive corporation on the African continent. Its only known representative is Joseph Mnguni, and due to the extreme privacy Izolo operates with, no one's been able to figure out exactly what he does there. We do know that it is one hundred percent wakyambi, however. It focuses on genetics, biology, medicine, and magical applications thereof, dealing exclusively with a select clientele. Most interactions with Izolo from the outside come in the form of Joseph Mnguni hiring shadowrunners to retrieve ancient or magical artifacts by whatever means possible.



JACKBNIMBLE

JackBNimble is a computer program somehow acquired by the great dragon Dunkelzahn before his passing. In his will, the program was given to Captain Chaos, but despite great decking skill, the anarchist icon was never able to break the encryption to use it. For good or ill, the encryption was shredded in the events

surrounding the second Matrix Crash in 2064 when thousands of deckers, including Captain Chaos, were killed. In the years since, it has become apparent that at least one function of JackBNimble was to "save" the personas of those killed on the Matrix as programs. Its current whereabouts, or even its current state of existence, is unknown.

JACKPOINT

Famed host for releasing tons of datadumps on topics ranging from arms marketeers to zoological data on the Antarctic. Lead by Bull, Glitch, and Slamm-0! (commonly called the Triumvirate) after the loss of FastJack to CFD, they pull in and vet whatever data crosses their decks.

While focusing on the type of data that's valuable at street level, the site has tons of data for a more discerning palate, but none of it is actionable by any force but the shadows.

Tightly controlled membership was a primary trait for JackPoint for years, but recent issues have led to a loosening of the reins and more young blood joining the mix. Youth, as always, brings a mixture of enthusiasm, new thinking, and foolishness.

If you're using JackPoint right now to read this, we're honored.

THE JAPANESE IMPERIAL STATE

The Japanese Imperial State (JIS, or simply Japan) is the most powerful nation on Earth, not measured in military might (which is substantial) but in terms of finance, media, and overall influence, and has been for over half a century. The food riots that destabilized the world at the turn of the twenty-first century were well-contained there, and as the United States faltered, Japan (the second-wealthiest nation at the time) quickly stepped up to fill that void. Japan's scientific advances, such as the discovery of fusion power, genetically modified foodstuffs, and bleeding-edge medical care, kept them growing by leaps and bounds. While the United States turned inward, Japan's industrial strength and massive media presence revved up, propelling them into a stronger position that they have never relinquished.

The moment that the great dragon Ryumyo was seen on December 24, 2011, is often seen as the moment when Japan's Century began. National pride swelled, the economy boomed, and the world seemed to lay itself at the feet of Japan, which grew proud and powerful. The national constitution was rewritten, allowing the military to be deployed in support of the growing financial empire, leading to the reformation of Japan as the Japanese Imperial State, a nation that harkened back to an earlier era of expansion. The fact that the nation quietly shuffled its metahumans off to Yomi, an island prison, in order to keep the nation "clean" was simply a price for this great success.

This constant growth was maintained for fifty years, ending only with the arrival of Halley's Comet. When the comet drew near, the Ring of Fire blew, setting off catastrophic damage across the entire Pacific, but nowhere so badly as in Japan itself. Earthquakes, tsunamis, and more rocked the island nation, inflicting

hundreds of billions of nuyen in damage, thousands upon thousands of lives lost, and the ending of the reign of beloved Emperor Kenichi, who perished along with most of his family during the eruption of Unzen Volcano. The lone survivor was his fourteen-year-old grandson Yasuhito, an only child who became the new emperor at the start of 2062, heralding the start of the Gen-Yu Era. Military forces were recalled worldwide to help in the reconstruction of the homeland, but the damage to the national mindset was arguably greater than the physical cost of reconstruction. For the next fifteen years, the JIS lived in what is now called the Ghost Decade, where the people lost their drive, the nation was wracked by self-doubt, and the booming economy turned to bust. Were it not for the noble spirit of the young emperor, and later his bride Hitomi Shiawase, it is likely that the nation would have been trapped by depression for generations.

In recent years, a new outlook has spread across the Imperial State, one of hope and a reaffirmation of Japan's special place in the world. This great belief of unity and possibility is called Yamato Damashi (meaning the Spirit of Japan), starting roughly at the same time as the birth of Yasuhito's first child, his son Nashihito. It has continued unabated to this day. Reconstruction of the nation has finished, and the island emerged in a greater state than it began. Yomi Island is no more (by imperial decree), and the population has been reintegrated into Japan as a whole, acceptance of technomancers is growing, the economy is booming, and once again Japan looks to guide the world, now under the benevolent hand of the emperor.

- Who the hell wrote this? No mention of the racism? Yomi Island might be closed, but the "changed" are still persecuted. No talk of the Yakuza? A "benevolent" empire that grinds opposition beneath its heel? The subjugation of the Philippines and other "colonial" conquests of the Empire? This is ludicrous.
- Chainmaker

JETBLACK

If you have to ask, you really just got here. JetBlack is *the* urban legend, the one-man rock dynasty. One part Elvis, one part Trent Reznor, and every other musician you've ever loved, if you believe the hype. JetBlack was only eighteen when he took the world by storm with gloomy ballads in the '40s. In '48, his depression caught up with him, and he took the wrong turn down the wrong alley and died in some street violence. That could have been that, but true legends never die. JetBlack sightings skyrocketed, and rumors abounded. Some say he became a spirit of music or some kind of ghost, that he faked his own death, that it was only a double, or (the most popular one), that he's a vampire. Which, c'mon, vampire angst rocker? Duh. Supposedly he runs the Nightstalkers, he's a wizard, he worships dark gods, he drinks with Damien Knight every October, and he still makes music under a bunch of assumed identities. And if you believe any of that, I've got some gorgeous geodesic leases to sell you ...

K

KALANYR

On the surface, Kalanyr is a western dragon with variable coloration, but what goes on under that chameleonic hide is what concerns me. For years he lived on an irradiated patch of ex-Gaeatronics land near Seattle, and he's spent the last decade-plus funneling considerable resources to revitalize parts of the Redmond Barrens by cleaning up ash, tearing down condemned buildings, and funding new construction. And whaddaya know? Sonovaslitch managed to make a halfway decent dent in chasing out some of the deepest shadows in Redmond. But I wanna know *why*. I know he don't really care about the people he's helping in the Barrens. Is he just keeping his pets happy, or is there more to the story?

KARL KOMBATMAGE

Karl's a cultural icon and half the reason any regular citizen sees shadowrunners as plucky good guys (well-intended neo-a's like us are the other half). The show's been an action-trid staple for decades, with the titular combat wizard and his diverse crew branching out for adventures in VR sims, Matrix games, multiple seasons, multiple films, several spin-offs of varying popularity, and a whole line of Kombatmage-licensed replicas (including the Soul Window cybereyes, a pheromone-laced perfume and body wash line, and the startlingly effective Colt Black Mamba). Reboots, sequels, and signing tours abound (sometimes with real shadowrunners!).

KENYA

For centuries, Kenya has been the central pipeline of commercial traffic for east Africa, a fact that may very well have helped save the country time and time again—when the richest powers that be decide your hoop is worth investment when all hell breaks loose, you run with it. As a result, Kenya was better able to weather the hells of the Awakening, goblinization, and most recently CFD better than some of its neighbors.

Kenya is wholly in the hands of the Corporate Court, with all the income and restrictions that provides, despite its outward-facing appearance as a democratic republic, complete with presidential elections. The candidates are all corp vetted, so the populace never gets the chance to vote in someone who is not in corporate pockets.

The completion of the Mount Kilimanjaro mass driver has brought jobs for all sorts, but in particular for mercenaries. The local spirit population near Mount Kilimanjaro doesn't seem to appreciate the construction efforts that have taken place, and it's been a constant battle to keep them from completely disrupting operations. The mass driver got built, but the spirits keep coming. I don't think they're going to stop until the thing is destroyed, but I doubt the Corporate Court would allow that to happen. Expect much hiring of deniable assets.

Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, is also the city providing services to the Mt. Kilimanjaro mass driver,



and as such, is nicknamed “The Gateway to Space.” Nairobi has seen a marked uptick in space-tourism traffic, as well as the installation of several space-technology firms and manufacturing companies eager to save on transportation costs to the driver.

Mombasa, on the country’s eastern coast, is a port town and Kenya’s second-largest city. A broad, well-traveled highway connects Mombasa to Nairobi, but beyond the urban centers is wilderness, with all the benefits and detriments you find working therein.

KILIMANJARO MASS DRIVER

I’m not sure if someone was paying the spirits that screwed with this epic disaster, but if they were, good for them.

Quick basics: Coolhoop space launch system that was built inside a mountain and used an angular launch trajectory and massive magnetic propulsion to send payload into space.

Problem: Kilimanjaro has been sacred to many people, and the local manasphere was not happy when big machines started coring out its heart.

It took forever to get up and rarely stayed running on a regular basis since local spirits fragged with the workers and project near daily. Now it’s struggling to stay relevant with a pair of space elevators in operation.

KNIGHT ERRANT

Legally, a subsidiary of Ares. Morally, a subsidiary of fascism. Knight Errant is in an ongoing rivalry with Lone Star both for security contracts across the world and to see who can violate the most rights of disenfranchised people per hour. The fact that they named the corp after people of legend who wandered around helping those in need and righting wrongs is a cruel joke. The incentive system in which they operate couldn’t be more clear. They make money for closing cases. Jailing suspects is one way to do that, but killing them while arresting them is cheaper. Arresting people that the corp suits don’t like to see near them makes the suits happy. Arresting corp suits does not. And making the suits unhappy loses you contracts. So they treat the elite with kid gloves, and they treat the underclass like they’re a hammer and we’re a particularly stubborn nail. They have no viable definition of “justice” and no concept of solving problems through anything but force. Even when they’re well-intentioned, they’re wrong.

To make things worse, former Lone Star top gun Clayton Wilson sits at the top of this corp. The fact that he needed to find a new badge to hide behind should tell you loads about his character.

KOREA, REPUBLIC OF

Just when it seemed like the country was getting out from under the Japancorps’ thumb, the Second Crash

fragged Korea *hard*—and ironically, the post-Crash Matrix boom was just as bad as the bust that came before it. The country's technophilia meant the Korean grid recovered relatively quickly after the Crash, but people have been increasingly alarmed that BTL use is reaching a thirty-year high. Native megacorp Eastern Tiger lost a step when Mitsuhama became the driving force behind rebuilding the Matrix after Crash 2.0, and the military government (based in the Seoul-Incheon Megaplex) gives even the most ingenious rebels very little breathing room.

KRIME

Yeah, ghettorunners love Krime's stuff and commercials, but we have to face facts: They are still a corporation, with all that entails. The oh-so-street perception dims as soon as you see their facilities, where offices are offices and production lines are production lines. Just built to troll size.

And their target market is death. Shadowrunners, homeowners, some security contracts, and even the rare military contract prove that, time and again, Krime is an unapologetic ironmonger. It also protects its secrets closely, and few runners have come out of their offices without being severely beaten, or worse.

- One thing about well-treated and respected metahuman labor is that they'll fight to protect their jobs. And when most of them are orks and trolls with weapons available to them, that is some heavy beating indeed.
- Zhaganaash
- One of the job perks for Krime employees: a uniform armored clothing jumpsuit. I got one with my name on it when I invested in Krime.
- Kane

Finally, there are their financial and personnel records. CEO Gris has a perfect SIN as a citizen of Euska Herria. Absolutely perfect—not one missed bill, no parking tickets, no typos by bored civil servants, nothing. As for a money trail, you could put it up on *Ætherpedia* under suspicious transfers and purchases, as every subsidiary Krime owns seems to own each other in a massive tangled ball of chaos.

Those corporate records hold a ton of secrets. Who are those mysterious shareholders? How did they get the machine tools in time to take advantage of a shortage in machined parts when the nanofaxes went wonky? Where are they getting the money for the massive expansions that they have done recently, especially enough to want to build an automotive line that was obviously designed to fail as hard as possible to kick in a tax-break contingency?

Some of this can be explained away easily by continuing sales of Ares knock-offs to the Middle East, but not nearly all of it. No, they have continuing income from another source, one easily rich enough to make Krime a single-A corporation if they weren't hanging on to their unrated status as a point of pride. Some evidence points to Evo, or somewhere near Evo's headquarters in Vladivostok, while other partially deleted records seem to point the finger toward a few former AA-rated corporations who couldn't quite hold onto their status.

But however they got their initial (and continual) form of capital, business is booming for the niche corporation, far grander than anticipated by anyone. Their production, despite the rather lackluster training and ability of their workers, is increasing, but the growth of their target audience seems to be flattening out, reaching saturation.

- Only among SINners. Krime isn't exactly subtle in the fact that they also want SINless to buy their gear.
- Mr. Bonds

Despite what they say in their marketing, Krime is, indeed, a corp, with all that entails. They have secrets, they have paydata, and they have gear. They have security that understands shadowrunners better than almost any other corp out there, and know exactly how to deal with the shadows in a profitable way. Wake up, fellow runners, and smell the kaf. They aren't our friend any more than, say, DocWagon. They just figured out how to arrange things so that we pay them to not do runs against them.

KUKULKAN

Kukulkan is, or was, a great feathered serpent last seen in Tenochtitlán, Aztlan, and followed as a totem by some in Central America. If rumors are true, in the Fourth World, Kukulkan shepherded a pre-Mayan civilization of orks, joining them with draconic mounts called ka'alkan and leading them to battle terrors. If these tales are true, this might mean Quetzalcoatl and Kukulkan are one and the same. The last recorded sighting of Kukulkan comes from an ork runner called Pícaro, who said the dragon appeared to him then fought a great terror under Tenochtitlán, stopping it from crossing into our world, but getting itself dragged away for the trouble.



LACRIMA

The long lifespan of elves can be enviable to other metatypes, but there is a downside. What do you do when your mental facilities are hobbled but your body continues on, with little to no sign of failing? That's Lacrima, who has been Tír Tairngire's crazy uncle for more than three decades. He pops up on talk shows every few months or so, rambling on about a reality that's all his own, where dragons are actually aliens, spirits are collective hallucinations, and Dunkelzahn and Ghostwalker are actually the same dragon. He usually seems like nothing more than deranged entertainment, but then you'll get events like that time in July 2078, when he stopped in the middle of a sentence, stared at a camera, then said "The yellow rock opens a portal between the worlds, and shadows will form." Mere days later, the Yellowstone incident occurred. So you can imagine that heads turned recently when he did something similar in a recent interview, interrupting himself, staring forward, and speaking.

LESSER DRAGONS (KNOWN)

NAME	GENDER	DRAGON TYPE	TYPICAL METATYPE FORM	LOCATION	HOARD
Adalbern	Male	Western	Troll	Europe	Bragging Rights(?) ¹
Aelia Goldenscale	Female	Western	Elf	Eastern Europe	Unknown
Aesop (Psudeonym?)	Male	Sirrush	Elf	Worldwide	Unique and Untold Stories
Agni	Female	Feathered Serpent	Unknown	South America	Unknown
Alexandria the Scholar ²	Female	Eastern	Human	Worldwide	Vintage Books
An	Male	Sirrush	Unknown	Worldwide	Clouds (HOW?) ³
Ao	Male(?)	Leviathan	Unknown	Pacific	Unknown
Aparna	Female	Sirrush	Unknown	Worldwide	Salad Recipes(?) ⁴
Argon	Female	Feathered Serpent	Elf	CAS	Neon Signs
Bakunawa	Male	Eastern	Unknown	Philippines	Favors (Especially from Spirits)
Basil Hornedcrown	Male	Eastern	Elf	Worldwide	Credsticks
Baxia	Male(?)	Leviathan	Unknown	Pacific	Ancient Bells (Especially Bronze)
Beast	Male	Western	Troll	Worldwide	Death ⁵
Bebinn	Female	Western	Elf	Tír Tairngire	Unknown
Bhavanjot	Male	Eastern	Dwarf	Seattle	Automobiles
Bradán	Male	Western	Elf	Tír na nÓg	Personal Fishing Equipment
Cadmael	Male	Feathered Serpent	Elf	Amazonia	Vintage Weaponry
Caratacos	Male	Western	Orc	Worldwide	Automobiles
Chalchiuhticue	Female	Feathered Serpent	Dwarf	South America	Jade
Chandra	Female	Sirrush	Unknown	Worldwide	Silver
Chilong	Male	Eastern	Troll	China	Bragging Rights(?) ⁶
Concordia	Female	Western	Elf	Europe	Peace and Quiet
Dazhdbog	Male	Western	Human	Russia	Land and Songs
Drexel	Unknown	Western	Human	Unknown	Unknown
Ebren	Male(?)	Sirrush	Unknown	Central Asia	Trees
El ⁷	Male	Western	Human	Aztlán	Guitars and Guns
Elpis	Female	Unknown	Elf	Worldwide	Relics
Glaurung the Undying ⁸	Male	Sirrush	Orc	Europe	Unknown
Haring	Female(?)	Eastern	Unknown	Asia	Heirloom Seeds and Plants
Hatshepsut	Female	Sirrush	Human	Middle East	Buildings and Monuments
Hephaestus ⁹	Male	Western	Dwarf	Greece	Tools
Hong Rainbowsmith	Male	Eastern	Human	Hong Kong	Fourth World Relics and Art
Ixchel	Female	Feathered Serpent	Human	Amazonia	Lives(!) ¹⁰
Kemet	Female	Western	Elf	Egypt	Unknown
Naga Padoha	Male	Eastern	Dwarf	Bali	Mines, Ores, and Minerals
Nebelherr	Male	Western	Unknown	Central Europe	High Society
Nimue	Female	Western	Human	Europe	Historical Melee Weapons
Ninevah	Male	Sirrush	Human	Middle East	Unknown
Pryce (Psudeonym?) ¹¹	NB	Sirrush	Unknown	Unknown	Paydata and Favors (Fixer)
Tackaberry	Male	Western	Human	UCAS	Vintage Construction Equipment
Xoc	Female	Feathered Serpent	Elf	Chile	Unknown
Zmaj	Male	Feathered Serpent	Orc	Russia	Bragging Rights(?) ¹²

- 1 > Adalbern is not much more than a thug going around in various troll forms to pick up bar fights. What he really is getting out of this is unknown—and with dragons, that makes them dangerous.
- > Frosty
- > Matt Wrath thinks he might just love fighting. Matt Wrath loves just fighting for fighting's sake.
- > Matt Wrath
- 2 > Let me tell you, the poor reporter that had to tell her that the Library of Alexandria was destroyed years ago sure has recovered well from what was, so we're told, meant to only be a tail tap. Personally, I think dragons do, indeed, know their own strength.
- > Sunshine
- 3 > And so one sits in contemplation of the clouds while the clouds and wind move in contemplation of you.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- 4 > This is a joke, right? Right?
- > Zhaganaash
- > Never, ever assume that dragons are joking about their hoard.
- > Frosty
- 5 > Effectively, the Beast is one of the few people around who has a higher body count and bounty on his head than mine. I tried to collect once, but ended up getting the wrong lesser dragon and we ended up ... doing things. Damned mind magic won't let me talk—or write—about it!
- > Kane
- 6 > China's answer to Adalbern, perhaps? Or the origin on why getting bragging rights is their hoard—competition between the two?
- > Plan 9
- 7 > As in “the,” in Spanish. Currently not exactly welcome in his little part of the world for a variety of reasons, and buzzed turbo right fragging quick after the Aztlan army took down a dragon for good.
- > Zhaganaash
- > That is what he wants people to think. He's just biding his time, playing guitar.
- > Plan 9
- 8 > Undying is right. We have independent confirmation of three “successful” hunts on him, but no one has been able to provide a body. One of those who claimed to have gotten him was another lesser dragon!
- > Ecotope
- 9 > Thought, but not confirmed, to be an alias. Well, as much as any other dragon uses its “real” name.
- > Fianchetto
- 10 > Not as in killing, but holding lives hostage. Either in her cages or blackmailed into doing whatever she wants.
- > Frosty
- 11 > Online handle. Wouldn't have known they were a dragon if it wasn't for a team of company suits who decided to handle the “little data thief” and ended up fighting a fragging dragon. News footage caught parts of it, and all signs point at this dragon being Pryce.
- > Sunshine
- 12 > Okay, this is getting ridiculous—three dragons fighting over bragging rights? Was this table just made up by someone trying to grasp at straws?
- > Slamm-O!
- > I think it was just to fool with the proofers.
- > Marko

Here's what he said: “The army of the day will vanish and bring on the night. The return will be worse than the leaving.” Your guess is as good as mine.

LAGOS

There are some good resources on Lagos out there. It's a commercial, feral city, and you can make a lot of money there if you don't wind up dead.

In case you haven't heard, things have been a lot hotter than normal lately. The informal, unelected council descended into open warfare between its members a couple of years ago. Assassinations, power grabs, the whole business. It's still going on, and it's even going on while the council meets. A few of the original power players are still there, turning blood into profit and squeezing the city for fighters and protection. Shadow-runners have been flooding into the city to make a name for themselves, earning huge hauls to attack factions

and stirring up fires in this powder keg of a city. It's actually been slightly easier for the people on the street. No one wants to kill the golden goose, and all the fighting is so fast there isn't time to scorch the earth. The wisest of the mercs and runners who come to the city stay for the small-scale stuff, take a step or two up the ladder, and then cut and run while they are still breathing. The stupidest stay around just a little too long and get themselves killed and stripped for parts. Oh, and the second-hand cyberware market is being flooded by Tamanous. It must be surprising for the corps to have so many of their escaped corporate assets turn up implanted in random people in Lagos. A cyberdoc friend of mine even claimed that she was paid to implant the same set of cyberspurs into three people in one night.

The best thing is still the weird trust-based money system they have going on there—in all the blood, teeth, and chaos, no one is messing with the hawala networks.

LANGUAGE

The language of the Sixth World is changing, and this is good. In fact, it's one of the few things that the corps don't have nailed down. Forty years ago, lots of people were losing the ability to read, mostly navigating through the world using icons on a computer screen, but now the younger generations seem way more into reading and writing than us oldies. I'm convinced the corps are only allowing it so that we can read through terms and conditions on their products. In some of the safer barrens, there are even groups of people who get together and write out manifestos and poetry on the backs of old computer printouts and instruction manuals. Great for planning and almost impossible to hack. Easy to lose, though, and a molotov cocktail could take out a whole building of paper and plastic writings. Every media has a weakness.

Verbal language has evolved as well, but that's nothing new. Trying to slot in old jargon in any crowd of people will instantly reveal that you're an out-of-touch old person, or maybe someone who watches too many old trid shows, undercutting any impression of competence that you might want to build.

Of course, the corps have been doing this forever, probably even before the first Crash—manufacturing our language to sell things to us. This is the beating heart of the propaganda efforts of the corporations and their soulless overlords that want to wrap us in an unending bondage of our own desires. We can take comfort in the fact that even massive megacorps with trillions of nuyen can't control teenagers who want to call each other “Brugs.”

Also making a come back is sign language. The old national sign languages died out a while back, but there is an international sign language that's growing in use. Of course, most of the time I've seen it, it's been people on the trid saying something different with their hands than they are saying with their mouths. It's great for surreptitious communication if you've got the time to learn it.

LANIER, MILES

The black-masked enforcer to Richard Villiers' evil emperor, and one of the people who practically invented modern corpsec. He served as the head of security at no less than four AAA corps: Fuchi, Renraku (briefly), Novatech, and most recently NeoNET. In the early stages of the CFD crisis, Lanier bailed from NeoNET and skulked around the shadows for a while, digging up paydata to find a cure—and if you believe the story that he posted on JackPoint, he's also one of the first to have actually been cured of CFD. Now, Lanier's back with Richard Villiers, making life miserable for Evo.

LAVERTY, SEAN

Once a founding Prince of Tír Tairngire, Laverty never indulged in the soap-opera bulldrek of his erstwhile peers. Instead, he funded environmental projects and magical research (like refining the Awakened-finding Xavier exam), and set himself up in a secluded estate that he ran as a private school for personally recruited prodigies (like the artful Dodger, a decker who has to be seen to be believed).

After the chaos/coup/shake-up, Laverty high-tailed it out of one Tír and landed in another; by all accounts,

he's set himself up a secluded estate in rural Tír na nÓg, that he runs as a private school, etc, etc.

LITTLE ROCK

Saeder-Krupp has a strong presence in Little Rock, which means Goldensnout has his talons deeper into the CAS than a lot want. Since the lockdown happened in Boston, ports like Little Rock that are well away from the East Coast have seen increased traffic for North American distribution. That has meant Wuxing showing interest here as well. Wuxing hasn't had many North American sprawls open their arms quite like Little Rock has, so pay attention to the tensions between S-K and the Chinese factions here.

For the record, Arkansas still doesn't have a single major sports franchise, so all the energy for the combat biking, or urban brawl, or professional football gets funneled to the Razorbacks. But that may change soon. I heard manapits are going to become a major world sport!

LOFWYR

Lofwyr is a great dragon who, one day in 2037 at a board meeting of BMW executives, revealed his identity while also pointing out that he had managed to amass a clear majority gathering of company shares. The executives were shocked, to say the least, and Lofwyr took over the company. He turned BMW over into his baby-slash-empire, Saeder-Krupp.

Today, Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp are more or less interchangeable. Lofwyr has his talons in every pie, as dragons are wont to, and the organizational structure of S-K is more like a crosscut of a tree than your standard top-down silo. Much like the walls of more and more inner-circles, access to Lofwyr is heavily guarded. It's said he has a chamber within the headquarters that is a state-of-the-art surveillance room, filled with all the electronic paraphernalia a veteran megalomaniac could want.

We can't really know the mind of a great dragon, but we can surmise that whatever plans he may be carrying out, they're complicated and working with the long game in mind, meaning they're going to be rolled out over the next number of decades, possibly centuries.

As for his appearance and how he conducts himself, Lofwyr is crisp, cold, efficient, arrogant, and masterful. He typically presents an imposing metahuman figure when conducting business with metahumans, reserving his true draconic form for other, likely more important, engagements. In his metahuman form, he maintains the golden eyes of his natural, draconic form, which only serves to augment his already-imposing presence. He has been known to use the alias “Hans Brackhaus” when conducting business (when disguising his metahuman form, of course). Be wary if you hear the name.

For all the cold efficiency the dragon—and as an extension, his company—displays, it is moderately surprising that the company holds no prejudices against metatype or magical and technomantic ability within its employees. The only form of sentience that has not found employment with S-K has been sapient artificial intelligences. It is rumored that Lofwyr does not fully understand nor trust them.



Lofwyr is not the sort to lose control: he neither loses his temper nor does he openly address challenges. He is far craftier than that. Not only does he keep himself invested in all proceedings of his company, but he also has himself wrapped up in the proceedings of nations and dragons. His practice of ensuring he remains three steps ahead of any competition has resulted in a vast array of technological advances and boons, such as when he saved much of the European Matrix grids from the Crash 2.0 worm by using a kill switch he'd installed into all S-K-operated grids. A terrifying prospect for Europe, to have Lofwyr in sole control of the off-switch for their grids, but it worked out in this instance, and the alternative was terrifying enough to merit their thanks for Lofwyr's "interference."

In recent years, Lofwyr has spent much of his time addressing concerns centered on the dragon community, notably after Hestaby named Sirrurg a war criminal before the United Nations council. The affront of airing dragon business before metahumanity was too much for Lofwyr, and the dragons leveled their attentions upon one another, resulting in corporate sabotage, kidnapping, and murder.

There are rich and powerful people in the Sixth World, and then there are the people who make those people shake with fear and admiration. Lofwyr is one of those elite few, and he is likely to stay one for a very long time.

LONDON

Let's get this straight—London doesn't have an unusual amount of fog. It has smoke (hence its nickname, the Smoke). Back in the Victorian era, it had coal smoke, thick clouds hanging heavy just above the streets, swirling mists of pollution that seeped into every crack. Some buildings are still stained from that time. Now the smoke has many sources—manufacturing in Hackney, trash fires in Lambeth, long-smoldering building fires in the Undercity, to name a few. The streets of the sprawl are often narrow and twisty, the buildings are old, and the whole thing can make you feel claustrophobic. You know it's a weird town when people go underground, to the sprawling commercial district known as the West End Underplex, so that they can get free of the oppressive feeling of being above ground level.

There is no way I can communicate everything there is to know about London in an entry like this, so know this above all: London is a city of secrets. It has levels and buildings you might not see even if you walk by them every day, chambers and structures forgotten by age and the rush of current development, but still more than functional enough to provide shelter to secrets that survive and thrive. Jack the Ripper, the first modern serial killer, did his work in London, and his identity remains a secret. A mysterious large black cat used to prowl the Sydenham streets, and no one ever found out what kind of beast it actually was. The Pendragon emerged, perhaps saved the country from op-

pression, and then abruptly disappeared, without anyone knowing who he truly was or where he went. There may have been a vampire in Highgate Cemetery before the Awakening, or maybe it was ghosts, or maybe it was crazy kids and outsized egos. Who knows? In London, all alternatives are possible.

In many ways, this makes London a heaven for shadowrunners, because there are buried secrets on every corner, waiting to be discovered and monetized. In some ways, though, it makes it more dangerous, since the powers of the city are all too skilled at disappearing those who they want gone.

LONE STAR SECURITY SERVICES

They are the enemy, plain and simple. They're an AA-rated megacorp that pretends to be the law, but you know they only care about the bottom line. How can one protect and serve when all they are really worried about is profit and loss? Founded and raised in the grand state of Texas, they handle municipal police, private security, personal protection, corporate security, and prison operations all over the world. They arrest you and then make the money to hold you. If they could manage to get into the contract judiciary business, I'm sure they would.

Since I love spoiling surprises, I'm going to toss out the insider info that LSSS will definitely maintain an AA rating under the new umbrella of OmniStar, the new parent megacorp formed by the merger of Lone Star, DocWagon, and Manadyne. It was a Little Eight speculation come true, with Aegis Cognito choosing a different umbrella to sit under.

This means Lone Star can shoot you to keep the peace, then patch you up to keep you alive, then imprison you for your crimes, all while offering you time off for volunteering for medical and arcane experimentation programs. And in each stage, they profit. All of it will appear to most of the world as a series of separate pieces, but up there at the top, they're one big corporate family.

While they already had a solid division for arcane investigations—the Department of Paranormal Investigation—they'll be beefed up with Manadyne resources going forward. Access to labs and research could also boost their investigation assets, though trusting anything to cross corporate borders this early in the merger may be rare. It's a great place to sow distrust, though, so target that chunk if you get contracted for evidence tampering.

LOS ANGELES

The City of Angels was once true to its name, but then the California Free State “gifted” Los Angeles with free city status in 2046—and for the record, we all know they cut and run because LA was too expensive for too little in return. All but forgotten, the city's residents outside the enclaves where the rich walled themselves off faced a daily battle for survival as the city devolved.

In 2061, earthquakes brought down some of those enclave walls, and LA went insane—looting and rioting paralyzed the city. The Pueblo Corporate Council, LA's neighbor to the east, slid in to help LA get a handle on

things, and with the gratitude of city officials, annexed LA into PCC territory, where it remains today.

Founded a couple of years later by a gaggle of movers-and-shakers and led by trid star Gary Cline, Horizon took steps over the next decade that cemented their prominence in Los Angeles, including rolling out the first wireless grids and (ever-popular with the diaper bag set) Virtual Disney.

Then in 2069, simultaneous earthquakes rocked the coast, followed by a major tsunami. Over twenty sinkholes opened up in the ground around LA, and half of Los Angeles was under the ocean. Thousands died.

The city has devoted the past decade to recovery and rebuilding. Researchers found a huge network of tunnels beneath LA (and all along the coast) during the reclamation effort. They've dubbed it “Deep Lacuna,” and I've noticed a steady stream of magical research teams coming through the area. I'm no mage, but the sheer traffic tells me it's pretty important to them.

Horizon's put a ton of money into the city: Downtown is so sanitized now, you'd never recognize it if you were here in the fifties. You'll still find the high-and-mighty in their enclaves: Hollywood, UCLA, Studio City, and Fun City—that perma-1950s-white-picket-fences theme park of a neighborhood that creeps me right the hell out.

Anyway, the rebuild has made progress, and we're finally starting to find our new normal.

LUNG

He might not be all that imaginative when it comes to picking names, but Lung more than makes up for it in the complexity of his schemes; he's the epitome of “subtle plans that are twenty steps ahead of everyone else,” possibly even more so than Lofwyr. Lung is supposedly one of the oldest great dragons, having mentored both Ryumyo (who later became his rival) and Masaru in the past. He also has a reputation for being one of the most powerful magicians among the great dragons.

Lung spends most of his time on the sacred mountain of T'ai Shan, but his interests unsurprisingly extend across Greater China and beyond. He's widely known as the patron of the Red Dragon Triad (again, not great at names) in Hong Kong, and he has at least cordial dealings with Wuxing, if only because of their proximity to each other. He has his claws deep in the government of Shaanxi, home of Mt. Emei (where he originally awoke in 2012). His metahuman “daughter” Mei-Lung Choi (not his literal daughter; Lung refers to close metahuman confidantes as though they were family) runs a magical school for practitioners of the Wuxing tradition, also located near Mt. Emei.

- Lung's still after the Coins of Luck, of course, although I don't know how much progress he's made since the last time it's come up.
- Lei Kung
- What about the rumors that Lung's behind some of the more imperialist movements in China, like Tan T'ien trying to reunify Beijing and the Republic of China?
- Kay St. Irregular

- ▶ If he is, I wouldn't expect him to leave any evidence of it. Like the author said, Lung might even have Lofwyr beat in the "too subtle for you" department. If there's any sign he's behind a Chinese reunification movement, it's because it benefits him for people to think that, whether it's true or not.
- ▶ Frosty

M

M'BOI

Amazonia is ruled by Hualpa, but another great serpent handles the ceaseless work of keeping the many other dragons in line. That dragon is M'Boi. During the war against Aztlan, he acted as an enforcer, taking other dragons to task for interfering with the war effort, often to lethal effect. With the war lost, along with Bogotá, Amazonia can not seem to afford to antagonize Aztlan, so much of M'Boi's efforts are focused on keeping some of the more aggressive dragons from sparking further open conflict. There is little doubt that he works actively against Aztlan through more subtle means.

MADAGASCAR

Who the frag knows?! They've got no government, only various pirate crews. The massive (575,000 square kilometers) interior of the island is impenetrable from aerial observation and no walk in the park from the dirt, with no reason to go in other than finding bizarre ways to get yourself killed. Rumors put dinosaurs, dragon lairs, secret bases, and ancient hidden cities in the jungle, but nothing concrete has come out in decades. VITAS is still a fear with how badly it wracked the island, dropping the censused population from twenty-two million to about two million, and the rapid regrowth and shifting of the jungle makes it a mystery that doesn't want to let you unwrap its secrets. All the more reason to look, right?

MAERSK

Would you believe that Maersk has been around for almost two *hundred* years? That's right—the company was founded in Denmark in 1904. Nowadays, they're one of the bigger AA megacorps, the biggest container shipping company in the world (Wuxing's bigger overall, but their shipping operations aren't as extensive), and one of two megacorps operating out of the Scandinavian Union (the other being Erika, post-NeoNET breakup), as well as being heavily involved in offshore oil drilling, shipbuilding, and maritime security (a.k.a. anti-pirate operations). In recent years they've expanded into Africa and Southeast Asia, and there are rumors swirling that their next target is somewhere in the northern NAN.

MAFIA

At one time the greatest organized crime syndicate in the world, the Mafia has slid into, at best, a second-tier position, remaining strongest in Europe and a faded power in North America. Distrustful of magic and

metahumanity, built on ethnic divisions that no longer matter, and having seen their power base in both government services and unions vanish under privatization and feudal capitalism, they have simply been passed up by the world around them. Some have managed to adapt, adding metahumans and magicians to their ranks, but most continue to hold fast to the ways of old.

The Mafia is engaged in a surprising number of legitimate businesses that are used to launder illegal money, and many of the older hands have found that these businesses are profitable enough that they can ease into retirement rather than hanging on to the death as in older days. Indeed, several small corporations are spawned from Mafia families who have largely gone legit, often in the casino, banking, or vacation industries. Due to their worldwide reach and complex financial arrangements, the Mafia have long been focused on assorted Matrix-based crimes and are, arguably, the most capable of the major crime syndicates in this field. Senior Mafia dons leave such matters to underlings, insisting that you can never do away with the personal touch of personal interaction.

Mafia strongholds are found in western and central Europe and the eastern UCAS and CAS. Eastern Europe has largely fallen to the Vory, but the Mafia continue to send resources to the region to fight back. There are minor operations in North Africa and Latin America, but these are pale shadows compared to their strongest regions.

- ▶ For all the slander of them being hidebound and stagnant, the Mafia has shed almost every one of the old ways. I think that they lost some of their soul in the process.
- ▶ 2XL
- ▶ There's been a lot of success with bringing in dwarfs since the Alta Commissione started recruiting them back in '46. The traditional dwarf mindset of family, stoic silence, codes of honor, and physical strength fit right in. While trogs can get in as legbreakers, dwarfs have been making major inroads as made men and better.
- ▶ OrkCEO
- ▶ Traditional dwarf ... Ghost! Racist much?!
- ▶ Lyan

MANCHURIA

The home of hot pot dishes featuring fermented sour cabbage (thanks to influence from nearby Russia), Manchuria is known for the impressively large number of spirits that wander the countryside, locally called *ta'ren*. Manchurian shamanism took hold in a big way after the Sixth World came around and Communist China collapsed, and now, Manchuria rivals even Amazonia and the elven nations in deference given to magic in general and spirits in particular. It's also one of the few countries left that hasn't signed the Business Recognition Accords, despite having a booming materials science industry, which has annoyed the Corporate Court for decades.

MANHATTAN

Getting pummeled by an earthquake can set any major metro back, but when NYC got hit, and Manhattan

took a beating, some weren't sure it was ever coming back. But none of those doubters were true New Yorkers. The Big Apple wasn't going down from the shake-up—it was breaking off the dust and shell of hundreds of years of business as usual. The disaster chased off the weak and left the strong to rebuild. The strong were called the Manhattan Development Consortium (MDC), and they rebuilt the heart of this shattered island as a poster child for corporate success (and dystopian domination).

Membership in the MDC changes, but the current megacorporate overlords of Manhattan are as follows: Ares, Aztechnology, CitiGroup, Erika, Horizon, Novatech, NYPD Inc., Prometheus Engineering, Renraku, Saeder-Krupp, Shiawase, Sony, SpinGlobal, and Trans-Orbital. Erika, Novatech, and SpinGlobal are guaranteed to never agree on anything, as they're all pissy the others got a piece of the NeoNET collapse pie, but every one of these corps knows the value of keeping Manhattan safe and shining.

Through NYPD, Inc. the laws of Manhattan are maintained with the advantage of universal extraterritoriality. The entirety of the island is owned by the Consortium, and the Consortium consists of megacorps with extraterritoriality. All of Manhattan is extraterritorial corp property and has the heaviest corporate security on the planet. SINS and special AR-ID coding cards identify where residents and guests are allowed access. Drones and corpsec monitor and scan almost everywhere to maintain order and keep the troublemakers from marring the city's shine.

Those troublemakers were pushed out of the center of the island, most toward Terminal, the island's resident barrens. It differs from a lot of other barrens in other sprawls because it's small and well-confined by guarded chokepoints. The rest of the island consists of various neighborhoods that have continued the New York tradition of ethnic segregation by address. Neighborhoods are easy to recognize by just identifying which cultural group lives there. It also makes it easy to spot the square peg hanging out near the round hole.

In recent years, with the collapse of Chicago and Boston, and the current trouble in Detroit, New York (particularly Manhattan) has had a surge in population and attention. They'd never lost the title of highest population metro in the UCAS but have recently widened the gap to the point where no other city will ever catch up. This influx of citizens has brought an influx of ideas and resources but also its fair share of troubles, including a rumored colony of Monads living in Terminal. The increase in corporate activity means an increase in shadow/anarchist activity, and that's all good with me.

MARS

We're skipping the science-talk drek on the planet and focusing on what matters. You want gravity, mass, etc., go check out your corp library, except maybe Evo's—they may be lying to cover up their activities on the planet.

Mars made big news with the Monad departure, but the important thing is what they left behind. A massive excavation ripe for development and a hoopload of data on some future science-fiction-level tech. Sure, it belongs to someone else, but everyone is going to want that data

if they have any hopes of catching Evo on the tech curve.

The red planet is littered with digs, mines, and small bases the Monads were using for DSECI development and materials. No one knows where all of them are, but I'm sure someone would like to.

Rumors abound from those in orbit around the planet that some of Evo's genemod population is still there and enjoying the quiet while advancing the terraforming process in isolated patches with the help of tech way beyond what the corps are making public here on the blue planet. Colony space is ready and waiting, but colonists aren't jumping at it just yet.

We aren't anywhere near a red vs. blue war, but we're certainly in the early stages of espionage and incursions to keep the corps in control, even off-planet. As Gagarin Base is the only formal structure on the surface (the rest of it is littered with habitats), there are plenty of places to hide.

Mars definitely has a place in the shadows of the future, and if there is anywhere we of the anarchist bent may be able to stake a claim and make a life of true freedom, it's out there. Get in on trips to Mars, get intel, get insight, and see if we can leave this corp-strangled rock behind for a planet of our own.

MASARU

If dragons fit into metahuman archetypes, Masaru would be the "liberal university student activist." He's by far the youngest of the great dragons, first appearing to the world on the Filipino island of Luzon in 2014 but only having achieved "great dragon status" (whatever that entails) in 2042. Masaru's first real brush with fame among metahumanity was when he backed the liberation of the Philippines, after the eruption of the Ring of Fire forced the Imperial Japanese military to withdraw to their homeland during the Year of the Comet.

Since the Crash and the final expulsion of the Japanese from the Philippines in 2067, Masaru has focused more on building up his personal influence and brand among metahumanity. He'd already been neck-and-neck with Hestaby for the title of Dunkelzahn's Successor/Most Pro-Metahuman Dragon, and the latter's departure from public life has just given Masaru more time in the spotlight. The reconstructed Library of Alexandria, which Masaru has largely spearheaded, is scheduled to open fully on the seventieth anniversary of the Awakening in 2081. He's developed his ties to both the Draco Foundation and the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research, though he seems to have learned from Hestaby's clashes with the Draco Foundation's board, taking on a patronage role rather than trying to manipulate the Foundation for his own ends (so far).

Where Masaru seems to be struggling a little is his expansion of magical knowledge. He's made some overtures to the Astral Space Preservation Society in the last few years, only for their Wuxing-controlled board to rebuff him. In response, Masaru cut out the middleman and arranged a meeting with Sharon Chiang-Wu directly. The talks between them seem to have stalled, though—probably because, by draconic reckoning, Hong Kong (and thus Wuxing) is part of Lung's "territory," and neither side wants to risk angering the elder great dragon.

THE MATRIX

In 2018, the first generation of artificial sensory induction system technology (ASIST) was created, making it possible to feed artificial sensations directly into brains. Building off this, corporations soon developed cyberterminals allowing users to directly interface their central nervous systems with the world data network. Then things got weird.

THE CRASH OF '29

On February 8, 2029, computer systems across the world were struck, seemingly at random, by a computer virus unlike anything seen before. It eradicated code, burned out hardware, and effortlessly tore through all known Internet defenses. No one claimed responsibility for unleashing the virus on the world, but in a matter of hours it crashed the entire Internet. Copies of its code leaped from system to system as soon as an infected computer was connected to any other. The global economy crashed, uncountable fortunes were lost, nations crumbled, and chaos ensued. The U.S. military created a task force code-named Echo Mirage to battle this virus using the latest technology (experimental sensory deprivation tanks with the ability to allow a user to perceive the Internet in a radical new way). Half of the team was lost in the first encounter with the virus, and most of those who remained were killed or worse in following encounters.

On March 1, Major David Gavilan rebuilt Echo Mirage, drafting computer hackers and eccentric scientists in place of the more rigid military men and women who composed the first team. They spent five months training, preparing, and inventing new technology before engaging the Crash Virus on August 30. Within twenty minutes, four members were dead, but the virus suffered actual damage for the first time, and it retreated to tend its wounds. It took two years to track down and purge the last remnants of the code from the remains of the Internet. On November 8, 2031, the Virus was officially declared dead. Only seven members of Echo Mirage survived to celebrate.

Between the birth of the Crash Virus and the eradication of same, the world changed. The amount of knowledge lost is incalculable, with stock ownership wiped out, identities erased, and whole studies of science evaporated, never to be seen again. Technology was set back by decades, and it took a long time for the world to be even remotely trusting of computers again. Planes had fallen from the skies, telemedical surgeries had gone awry, entire power grids collapsed (or exploded!) ... and those in power, reviewing the battles of Echo Mirage and the Virus, saw that the table-sized “cyberdecks” that had grown from the old sensory deprivation tanks allowed computer hackers to make an absolute mockery of any defenses that they thought they had. The time of the cyberdecks was upon us, and from them arose the Matrix.

Almost anyone was now able to have immersive experiences across the worldwide Matrix. Certain protocols dictated bottlenecks be put in place to protect minds from experiencing the 3D nature of the Matrix too vividly.

More than a few tech-based corporations began making plans to implement a wireless Matrix that

would be able to integrate the world's devices without the need for physical connections. In time, the Corporate Court gathered Matrix security personnel from each AAA megacorp and founded the Grid Overwatch Division, or GOD (see separate entry), tasked with executing law enforcement on behalf of the corps.

CRASH 2.0

November 2, 2064, the Matrix born in the wake of Echo Mirage died at the hands of maniacal terrorists and the intervention of one or more artificial intelligences. As before, vast layers of knowledge were lost, planes fell from the sky, and death stalked from house to house in a wave of chaos. Unlike the first Crash, there had been steps taken to preserve some data; not enough, and many of these data repositories were destroyed in the suddenness of the second Crash, but enough remained that the world wasn't set quite so far back. Within two years, a new Matrix had arisen, stronger and faster than before and one that, perhaps most importantly, allowed for high enough bandwidth via wireless connections that decking evolved to meet the new standard. This period is well known for shoddy Matrix protections, as the newborn Matrix 2.0 stood on fawn-like legs and was unable to defend itself as well as what had come before. The realm of the Matrix moved from one almost exclusive to corporations and deckers to one touched by the common man and by hackers, ordinary people using commlinks to bend the Matrix to their will with no need for expensive cyberdecks. While the first Crash had resulted in most rejecting computers, the second encouraged the entire world to move online. The corporate overlords could not allow such control to slip away, so another change was in the works, one that did not require a Crash to be put into place.

MATRIX 3.0

In late 2069, rumors grew that there were some people who could access the Matrix with the power of their minds alone. These “virtuakinetics” were first publicly dismissed as mere fancy, but privately, corporations moved to discover the truth. Emerging virtuakinetics were ferreted out, brought to private facilities, then tested, prodded, poked, and in some cases dismantled as the search for how this was possible began. As hints of the horror began to leak out, the emerging peoples, who chose to call themselves “technomancers,” fought back, showing the corporations that the Matrix was not immune to their power. The corporations, fearing a third crash, huddled together and returned with a plan, creating the Matrix 3.0. At first, the bedrock of this new version was found only on Zurich-Orbital itself, but the code that made it possible, and which rebuffed the attempts of thousands of hackers who wanted to test it for themselves, was soon shared with the Big Ten and rolled out and over the previous Matrix. In short order, the Matrix 3.0 initiative replaced the second Matrix worldwide, ending the great hacker wave of the past decade.

- We're still figuring out exactly how this was done. We know now that the Foundation was built out of the minds of a hundred technomancers who were dissected and used for parts (not that Big Media will let us reveal that) and that the new protocols are

semi-organic. New areas are grown, not coded, and trying to look behind the walls can rip a decker's mind to shreds.

- › Slamm-O!
- › I knew what it was when I first touched it. And now the Resonance whispers secrets to me.
- › Netcat
- › If it ever tells you where The Suit is, let me know. The whole thing reeks of him and the blackhearted bastard who mentored him.
- › Icarus
- › Frag, I was only just getting the hang of the second Matrix!
- › Bull

Now, at its heart, the Matrix is a network formed by every wired and wireless device on the planet. It draws power from all those devices and so is capable of processing nearly unlimited amounts of data almost instantaneously. The connected nature of the Matrix allows us to read messages, pay bills, and communicate over any distance. It monitors individuals' finances as well as the larger economy. It handles utilities, manages traffic on city streets, helps guns shoot more accurately, gives medkits access to medical records and research, and even detects wear and tear on clothing. It dominates nearly every facet of our everyday life.

Entering the Matrix in VR plunges you into a virtual universe, a shared consensual hallucination with every other entity inside. Everything is rendered in incredible detail powered by a century of digital graphics innovation. Most of the time, we can tell the difference between the Matrix world and the real one, but not always—such is the sophistication of the experience. Inside, we can travel at nearly unlimited speed, and all our interactions are with icons, 3D digital representations of the persons, places, and things of the Matrix. People in the Matrix take a virtual form called a persona. A user's persona is tied inextricably to their brainwave patterns and global metadata. All around are the personas of other Matrix users. Alongside personas in the Matrix are devices. Any real-world devices connected to the Matrix, which in 2080 is nearly all of them, also appear as icons.

Default VR settings filter out other visual stimuli as well, such as data trails, marks, and files, unless a user has a particular reason for wanting to see them. Data trails are visual representations of files, programs, and other data that move constantly through the Matrix. If filters did not turn these streams off, nothing else would be visible except for an all-encompassing data stream. Files in the Matrix are small and most often take a form that suggests their function. A collection of stories, for example, may appear as a book, while a song file may appear as a music note or music instrument.

Hosts loom large over the average users of the Matrix like huge, floating island cities. Inside hosts, physics are experienced however they are programmed to behave. Most mimic real-world physics for the sake of ease of use, but this is not always the case. Hosts are basically what the old crew called nodes, and they are the places of the Matrix.

Besides devices, there are other icons that can be interacted with on the Matrix, known as files. Files can

be as simple as raw data such as electronic mail or accounting details, but they may also be as sophisticated as programs that analyze local physics, take in details of nearby icons, and then anticipate all movements those icons may make next, all in a matter of milliseconds.

GOD rules the Matrix from a host outside the Matrix proper. Its physical servers are on a satellite in orbit. In the Matrix, they are unseen, keeping watch far above the hosts, only making their presence known when necessary to wield their power against a rule-breaker.

The Foundation is the base on which the Matrix exists and is the substance of which hosts are made. Hosts are connected to the Foundation via a "foundation" particular to that host.

The Matrix can only be accessed through grids. Grids allow access to the Matrix and dictate the lens through which users perceive the basic Matrix and advertisements within it. To get on the Matrix, you must choose a grid through which to access it. No grid, no Matrix. There is a public grid, but using it means you have slow speeds, noise, and other built-in hurdles to overcome when trying to access information.

Most major cities also have their own local grids, offering access only in that location, while the ten major megacorporations have their own worldwide grids. Aside from the public grid, the differences between the other grids are largely cosmetic. Accessing the Matrix through the Ares grid will flood your vision with promotions of the newest Ares-produced items, while using Seattle's Emerald Grid would likely do the same with political advertisements or local restaurant ads.

When entering the Matrix through a wireless connection, your icon will appear in a digital geographic location in proximity to other wireless devices and users. If entering through a wired connection, your icon will appear in proximity to the device used to jack in. In most versions, the Matrix looks like a jet-black flatland underneath an even blacker sky. All around, the icons of users and their devices illuminate the world. Users' commlinks, cyberdecks, and other Matrix devices usually filter out the majority of icons that would normally be viewable; if they didn't, users wouldn't be able to see anything else. Devices and personas that are far away in the real world also appear farther away (both in size and brightness) from where the user entered in the Matrix, but users are always free to leave their point of entry. Looking up, hosts float far above the street level of the Matrix. Some local hosts remain in areas of the Matrix corresponding to their real-life locations and are closer to the ground. Farther up, non-local hosts, like those for online shopping or multiplayer Matrix games, are larger and stay in users' vision no matter where they go. Still farther up are global hosts for the megacorporations. They are like impossibly large floating cities, sculpted to display corporate logos and symbols, dominating the sky like so many moons and reminding users of who really controls the world.

Being as vast and varied as it is, the Matrix is home to several oddities and wonders. Here are a few.

THE CITY

A Matrix legend, the City (no one has ever given it another name) is a vast city, rendered in perfect ultraviolet, the most realistic form of virtual reality ever invented. The pavement has cracked textures, the walls warm with the sun, the smell is ... well, urban. It's perfect in

every detail save one: There are no people. The entire place is completely devoid of life. There are some Matrix legends of people finding the City once but never being able to find it again. Some talk of meeting Alice there, others say that they heard a laughing girl running around but never caught sight of her, while others ... well, that's fanfic territory.

The stories about the City changed after the second Crash. Now people who stumble onto it talk about hearing creepy whispers and moans, people crying, or echoes asking for help. Windows high above the streets flicker with shadows and curtains sometimes move but no one is ever seen. Here's the crazy thing: The City existed back in the '30s, way before modern processing let the Matrix power things peer to peer, so somewhere on Earth there's a multi-billion-nuyen facility running this thing on a server. Hundreds of people have tried to find it. No one's ever done it and come back to tell the tale.

- I've been there once. Sadly, the recording of it was lost when I logged out.
- Plan 9
- Of course it was.
- Snopes

WONDERLAND

Supposedly Alice had a few rabbit holes hidden around the City that allowed her to drop down into Wonderland, a madcap madhouse of Lewis Carroll imagery that's somehow even more legendary than The City. Her personal playground and still UV quality, everyone within was quite mad. Supposedly it vanished when Crash 2.0 hit. I know a few "I know a guy who's brother's uncle's cousin talked to a decker who'd been there" types, but I've never met anyone who claims that they were personally there.

- Thomas Roxborough was there. I don't know what happened, but he spent several million getting as many first editions of the book as he could find and having them set on fire. Man carries a grudge.
- Bull

THE CARNIVAL

Not long after Wonderland supposedly shut down, we started getting rumors about a new Matrix legend called the circus, the fairgrounds, or most commonly **the Carnival**. It's an old-fashioned theme park with roller coasters, games of chance, a hall of mirrors, the works, all run by some kind of mix between a sideshow barker and a clown that people started calling Scaramouche. The place is filled with kids running around and playing, having fun, but they always seem to be just out of line of sight, ducking around corners, or otherwise just being shadows. Some kids who have been there talk about how fun it was and how they want to go back; others talk about having fun, then being scared, then escaping by the skin of their teeth. Some, it's said, die in the carnival and never leave. Supposedly you can get tickets that let you go there, but how you get them, I have no idea.



- Quite a few precious memories in that place, but you have to be pretty nimble to access them.
- Cerberus
- Oh drek. Sprout talked about going there once. I thought he'd just had a dream.
- Slamm-O!
- WHY IS THIS THE FIRST I'M HEARING OF THIS?!
- Netcat

MCMULKIN, RAMSAY

Sweet Ghost, what is it with sim stars and politics these days? It's gotten so bad that whenever I see the latest blockbuster, I immediately see the headliner in it and think with a shrug, "Well, they'll certainly run for public office someday." Seriously. It doesn't even matter what platform you're campaigning on; as long as you've got enough charisma to pull headlines, then the masses'll vote for you based solely on name recognition, especially if you keep repeating populist truisms that the average sarariman can latch onto.

This is basically what happened to Ramsay McMulk, a vocal Technocrat. He starred in some doozies back in the '40s and parlayed that stroke of fame into getting tapped for the veep slot on Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez's presidential ticket for the 2057 UCAS election. Funny thing is, Roz ran on the New Century Party's platform. (So much for sticking to your political guns, right?) That campaign went down in flames (considering everyone wanted to vote for a great dragon), but McMulk's political career took off ... in a completely different country.

He won the CAS presidential election in 2072. Funny thing is, voters didn't care what his platform was—he simply had more fame and household recognition than any other candidate put forth, including the incumbent, Aaron Franklin. Of course, voters *did* ultimately care when he failed to hold up his campaign promises of taking back Texas from Aztlan and courting an AAA mega to plant roots in the CAS, so they turned on his party and elected Senator Estelle Patterson to the presidency in 2080. Then Ares decided to move to Atlanta after all, and of course *Patterson* took all the credit, despite McMulk having done the lion's share of the courting.

Fame can be powerful, but it is a double-edged katana. And a fame hound like McMulk isn't going to let it go so easily. My nuyen is on him cozying up to Ares. He laid the groundwork to land them in the CAS, and I'll bet he's gonna milk that connection for everything it's worth.

MEDIA/POP CULTURE

I hear JackPoint literally just dropped a whole download on this, but we ain't them, so let's do an overview like those windbag runners can't.

Folks get their jollies all kinds of ways. The world is interconnected on multiple levels of reality, meaning there's some new fashion or subculture every few, oh, nanoseconds. So where do we start? What's hot? What's fashionable? Frag that! We don't have all day! Let's break it down. First, how you take it in.

Trideo: They say television didn't used to be 3-D. Which is tragic. Might as well watch puppet shows. But while everybody can afford a trideo, not everyone bothers anymore. Because who needs trideo when you have ...

Augmented Reality: You're probably reading this on your commlink and goggles or cybereyes or contacts or whatever. Yep, TV everywhere, anywhere. Hell, you can make a projection of a trid flick through your AR! Unless you like to kick it old school with ...

Holo: Yeah, some people really like the idea of analog holograms. I don't. I don't get it, either. But whatever, freedom means choice. And you know what really gives you choice?

Simsense: Jack in and experience it like you're there! With the taken-for-granted miracle of simsense, you can feel the sweat, the pain, the pleasure, the texture. You can even feel their emotions. With PolyPOV, you can switch around, or even try to feel more than one person at once. If it's a purely digital experience, you're as there as anyone ever could be! Unless, of course, you opt for ...

Live: Yep. There really isn't anything like being there in the meat. Can't beat it.

Now then, you've picked your medium of choice. What will you watch?

Sports: Old-school football and baseball and combat biker and urban brawl and court ball and pro wrestling and sumo and soc-foo-soc-footba-so-fSTOP IT REINIER soccer and cricket and... no. I must stop. We'll be here all day.

Fiction: There's stories aplenty for every kind of audience. *Braver's Fortune*, *Spitfire Resurrection*, *The Kellogg Chronicles*, *Lonely Blade*, *El Amor Es Más Que Una Palabra*, *Real Housewives of Kowloon* (and every other place you've ever heard of), you can find the show for you, of every genre and blend of genres you can imagine. It's honestly a wonder anything ever gets done.

Reality TV: Reality is subjective, but there's no plot or anything here. From *Desert Wars* to *Dessert Wars* to *Toxic Hunter* to whatever Kane is broadcasting, you can use MeFeeds to follow the real-ish life adventures of real-ish people just like you!

Porn: Don't be ashamed.

Music: Oh man, music. New genres all the time, and new versions of old stuff, and old versions of new stuff, and more and more. Some of it you can't even see live because you lack the sensory organs outside of simsense. Others are as simple as a jack-and-jam session in the dorm or an acoustic set at Underworld 93. The sound of the future is chaos given infinite possible expression. I literally cannot fit it here. No one could.

But for those who want to be a little more interactive, there's games! AR games like *MiracleShooter* let you turn your commlink and AR into a massive multiplayer online shooting spree. *Dawn of Atlantis* is an old-school RPG, while *Red Samurai Run 12*, *Little Mutant Vic Ninja Cyborg Motorcycle Vengeance Aquamarine 33 XL Legendary Edition*, and *Firefight* are all action platformers, and *Whisper* is an interactive hypnotic relaxation exploration game. And those are just the big market ones, which brings me to ...

Underground: Oh yes, friends, if you thought the corps were churning out the good stuff, just see what the sounds of the street are! Even big names like Shawn Gaffrey and Pariah Soul started with the bleeps and boops of pocket secretaries, and they're shaping the industry today. You never know what's gonna make it to

the top. But that's only if you care about Top Ten charts. Sometimes the best show, song, game, whatever for you is the one being played right next door. That's the magic of media, my chummer: We can all make it, and we can make it anywhere. It's the echo we share with others and the imprint we leave for all time. So tune in, jam out, turn up, get down, and rock on!

MEGACORPORATE AUDIT

There are few things in this world scarier than the megacorps getting even larger and more powerful. We already live beneath their boot, with governments bending to their will or crumbling beneath their heel. In the mid 2070s, when the Corporate Court began this process, the initial goal was simply to reevaluate various corporate ratings and set a more organized system of rating measurement and corporate valuations. What we got was a mad scramble of boardroom and shadow activity that shifted the top seat among the megas and led to a whole lot of A-rated corps and even a few AA-rated megas merging beneath the umbrella of the AAAs in order to protect their status. What was supposed to be an Audit, became known in the shadows as The Revision, as the AAA megacorps expanded their power base and revised the status quo.

Now, we all know that was the point from the start, right? The Corporate Court belongs to the AAAs and they'd seen way too many smaller corps chipping away at their control and offering services and support to governments that refused the Accords or were trying to snake their way out from under their massive corporate thumbs.

As of January 1, 2081, the audit will be complete and the new standards will be set for the near future. The rules in their entirety are over a gigapulse of text, but boil down to five points:

1. Obey the AAAs and the Corporate Court, or you will be destroyed.
2. Rankings are altered quarterly. (So expect a rush of work every three months!)
3. AAA status is reassessed yearly.
4. AA and A status will be reassessed twice yearly. (More chances to frag with the lower tiers!)
5. A-rated corps that advance to AA must submit a report after a year clearly showing their growth into their new status or risk automatic reversion to A status. (Keep the newbs hungry and aggressive!)

MEMPHIS

It's taken decades, but Memphis is finally recovering from the earthquake that decimated the port and the airline hub it had fifty years ago. Western Tennessee's golden child was eclipsed by Nashville as the most important Tennessee city, and it is only by grace of Ghost that it hasn't completely fallen apart. Ares' recent moves into the CAS have led to major investment in Memphis as the corp tries to lock out its competitors and take advantage of ERLA's looser restrictions where economic redevelopment is needed. Memphis remains a hub of musical vitality, often giving a slightly more authentic vibe to otherwise bland corpspin.

MENTOR SPIRITS/TOTEMS

The term "mentor spirit" refers to a number of concepts that affect the way an Awakened person uses their magical abilities. Not all mentor spirits are actual spirits, in fact. The phrase itself comes from the school of Unified Magic Theory, where all magic is seen in the same light. UMT's ideas are being rethought and revamped, but the mentor spirit language has stuck, for better or worse.

At their core, mentor spirits act as guides for the use of magic and the lives of those who use it. The first of these guides, and some would say the more true expression of them, were the animal totems that guided the first Awakened shamans. Animal totems seem to be culminations of, and yet more than, the world's cultural beliefs about these animals. It may be that there is some sort of metaplanar template wolf that guided the evolution of our world's wolves and still guides the animals and wolf shamans today. Or it may be that the wolf totem is the sum hivemind of all wolves everywhere manifesting as a uniquely powerful being. Perhaps an otherworldly power took the form of an animal familiar to us, whose nature aligns with the goals of that being? We really don't know. No one but those with totems can speak to them, and those who follow these totems are not usually in positions to demand clarity from them. But totems are just the jumping-off point.

Forces of nature are also known to be mentor spirits for some—Mountain, Ocean, River, Volcano, Wind. There are some cultures or traditions that have idols as mentor spirits, or loa, like in Hoodoo (or Haitian Vodou and Louisiana Vodoun). Some Christian traditions have saints as mentor spirits, and there are some polytheistic traditions where certain gods act as mentor spirits. In some extreme cases, certain actual people or things, such as Elvis or Dunkelzahn, have inspired mages as mentors. In other cases, even darker forces have acted as magical guides.

We can't say what exactly they are, whether they are all equal, or even real. Perhaps some are, perhaps others aren't. Perhaps the guidance some give is only in the imagination of the mage, or perhaps the gift of totem magic comes from another source. What we can say is their power and influence on the mages that follow them is profound, often overriding all other allegiance.

MERCURIAL, MARIA

Maria Mercurial's original star had faded before I was even born. She was a legend, but one that had disappeared from the music scene. When I tripped over puberty, I rebelled against the norm, against the cool, and started exploring older music. And that's when I heard "Who Weeps for the Children," her first single (off the album of the same name). It rocked me to my core. It was so incredibly soulful and sad, just infused with more emotion packed into three and a half minutes than I had felt in my thirteen years on this planet. Then I listened to "Take It to Mister," her second song, and the rage, indignation, the frustration with the megas, and the call to arms of that song changed my life. That was the moment I decided I didn't want to be a part of the machine, that I wouldn't bow to Mister, whether it was a corp, a boss, or a man. And I've been fighting that fight ever since.

Mercurial's faced her challenges over the years. I was ecstatic when she re-emerged back on the music scene, even though her newer stuff was less intense than her

earlier work. You could tell she was battling demons of her own. But she's still beautiful, still a shining beacon, and all the stronger and more amazing when you know about her internal battles as well as her external. To many of us, she's a symbol of rebellion, of independence, and of hope in this drektastic world.

- > Maria is an amazing woman. Life has kicked her around a lot, but she keeps getting up, dusting herself off, and putting that experience into her music. I'm lucky enough to know her personally, and I work Matrix security for her shows whenever she performs in Seattle. I really miss her synthlink days, though.
- > Bull
- > Agreed completely, Bull. But I understand why she switched. Synthlinks are fantastic devices if you just want to do something like Virtual Karaoke, but for a professional they can be tricky devices. They translate not just the music in your head, but the emotion you're feeling, and with Mercurial's music, emotion was about a huge portion of its impact. If you're not truly feeling the anger or the sorrow or the joy that is a part of the song, really feeling it deep down in your heart and soul, then the music comes out flat and hollow. Casual fans won't notice, but the hardcore ones will. And most of all, the performer knows.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > Sounds like you have some personal experience there, Kat.
- > Pistons
- > Her last show will be at Underworld 93 in a couple months. It's gonna be an emotional one, I think.
- > Bull
- > Wait, is she really retiring? For real this time?
- > Winterhawk
- > Mostly. She's transitioning into management, from what she's said. She's going to be working with Perianwyr's studio, managing upcoming talent. Like most of us, she's not a spring chicken anymore, and putting on live shows has taken its toll. Though I imagine she'll still occasionally record some new music. I suspect she's still got a lot to say.
- > Bull

MERCURY, RYAN

Not many people can claim to have worked alongside a great dragon (Dunkelzahn) or the President of the UCAS (also Dunkelzahn) or to have been the first drake to Awaken in the Sixth World, but a grand total of one Ryan Mercury, a.k.a. Quicksilver, can claim all three points of fame (infamy?).

In the decades since Dunkelzahn's death, Quicksilver has been running Assets Inc. for the Draco Foundation, mostly using his incorporated assets to rescue other Awakened drakes from enslavement to other dragons (both great and not-so-great). He is a frequent ally of Dunkelzahn's last interpreter (Nadja Daviar) and the former UCAS vice president (also Daviar).

METAPLANES

So you Awaken, yeah? Now you can see magic, and your eyes can dip into the astral, and your soul can spin out from your body and fly free in the ether. But you look around and realize that you still have no idea where spirits come from. That's because you need to put on your 5D shades and pass beyond in a direction that doesn't exist into places of wonder and horror! Yes, the metaplanes!

So what are the metaplanes? What a wonderful question that I have no answer to! No credible source exists, so what we do know is far overshadowed by what we don't. But here's a shot anyway: The metaplanes are a series of extra/other dimensional planes which exist in a pseudo-real state, often incorporating Oneiran/Jungian archetypes non-specific to the viewer. Which basically means it's all like living in a dream. And if you thought figuring your own dreams out was tough, try navigating someone else's. Every plane seems to have some central theme, and some appear to be larger than others based on the prevalence of that idea. So an elemental plane of Air or a conceptual plane of War might be the same size, insofar as that can be measured for places that don't conform to three-dimensional concepts of size.

Then you have the deep meta, the planes so far away, or at least so far removed and alien, that the metahuman soul begins to break down with evanescence just being there. You know how there are some exceptionally creepy spirits that need a human host to survive here, like bugs and shedim? That's what they are going through. If you made it to, say, the Hive, where all bug spirits allegedly come from, you'd start fading away, in a non-healable way, until your very soul was just dust in some other realm. Or maybe you can take a bug host! Ha! Turn the tables! Can you even do that? No, seriously, don't do that.

So why would anyone ever want to go to a place so confusing and dangerous? Opportunity, of course! Sure, there's risk or harm to body, sanity, and soul, but it's a whole series of new worlds to explore. Ancient and alien secrets to uncover, new forms of intelligence to meet and understand, and all kinds of magical formulae for the taking. Whole new spells and traditions have come from exploring the metaplanes, and those formulae can be worth a lot of cred to the right buyer. When I said "a lot" and you thought of a number, add two zeroes. The right discovery sold to the right mega, and that's fair trade and no backstabs.

So pack a toothbrush, brush up on your psychology, and embark on the journey for Lofwyr's true name! The worst that could happen is your sanity breaking, your soul being eaten, and your body being worn by monsters. That's not so bad, right? With that said, here's where you can go!

THE NEAR METAPLANES

The nearest metaplanes have their astral energies heavily influenced by metahuman cultures and legends that shape magical energy unconsciously ... or which have always existed and whose existence created the ideas and concepts in the minds of the people. (This, as many other aspects of magical theory, is still hotly debated and remains unresolved.) Magicians in the astral plane that overlaps Europe, for instance, can access the

Metaplanes of Air, Earth, Fire, and Water with relative ease, while those in the astral plane of Asia have access to a somewhat different Air, Fire, and Water, but have paths to Wood and Metal metaplanes, which cannot be as easily found in Europe, but no easy access to Earth. In North America, and all across the globe where shamanic traditions have continued to thrive, access to the Metaplane of Animals is simple for those who follow such a magical path while being utterly closed to those who don't.

In short, the near metaplanes are influenced by, or influence, the people who live in large concentrations and resemble concepts and ideas that are relatively easy to understand. Those further away are often more conceptual (such as War or Wealth) but all are, ultimately, recognizable.

THE DEEP METAPLANES

In sharp contrast are the deep metaplanes, those far enough away from the core of Earth that the energies found within are ... difficult to fathom. Here are small "pocket planes" that are ruled by a single spiritual entity, or a small circle of aligned rulers, who define their world as they see fit. There are further metaplanes that are even more difficult to explain. One of the deepest of the deep metaplanes is informally known as "the home of the bugs" (or "the Hive") and may be the source of insect spirits that are called to Earth. The home of the shedim is imagined to be even further away. Each of these are explored by only the bravest and most powerful of astral explorers, and for each discovered several more exist but consume those who find them without ever giving up their existence.

AND BEYOND

Imagine the magical world as a solar system: Our material plane is the star at its center, and the astral plane is the corona of energy that surrounds it. The near metaplanes are the inner planets (Mercury, Venus, and Mars), while the deep metaplanes are the outer planets (Jupiter, Saturn, and so on.) There is a vast unexplored region even further away that is still mostly speculative. The home of the shedim may exist here, rather than in the deep, and even more terrifying things may yet lurk in the beyond—unknown and (perhaps) unknowable.

- An interesting allegory. Ptolemaic Models would have new importance.
- Marko

METAVARIANTS

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your Intro to Metahumanity (MET 101) class. Over time, wildly divergent strands of metahumanity have emerged, with cosmetic, physical, and even magical differences.

Smarty-pants think it's unique mana resonations in geographic areas ("Oni Awaken in Japan"), or it's a genetic predisposition ("Oni Awaken from Japanese people"), or it's reality being twisted by subconscious cultural belief patterns ("Oni Awaken because Japanese mythology has shared their stories for so long"). Me-

tabiologists, cultural experts, and doctors are all split about the whys and hows of it.

At the end of the day, who cares? What counts is that some elves are wakyambi, some dwarfs are gnomes, some trolls are fomori, but we're all just people. Be cool if you meet a variant. Odds are they've taken a lot of drek for being who they are.

MIAMI, FLORIDA

Without Gunderson, the space was filled by pirate-controlled companies for shipping. You wouldn't think that pirates would often have corporate cut-outs, but these new generations of scalawags have a polished veneer, and even Kane launders his money through shell companies. Pirates are basically a third arm of the Caribbean League's government. Still, none of that prevented what was inevitable. Pirates make poor protectors, and even worse bureaucrats. So it's no surprise that when the CAS stepped in, after threatening to stop piracy themselves if the CL wouldn't, the pirates weren't around to stop the invasion. So, welcome back to Florida, Miami! And welcome back to the CAS, South Florida!

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

This is the perfect time to talk about MCT, as they've leapt to the top of the megacorporate heap. Instead of gloating and just holding steady, they've used their position of power to get even further ahead of the pack.

Simple history is the best for a corp like this. Tai-ga "Tiger" Mitsuhamma played the corporate game well during a recession near the beginning of the century. His success got attention, but attention led to jealousy and problems. Rather than making amends and deals with his fellows, he made deals with the Yakuza. With the help of the crime syndicate, Mitsuhamma solidified control, and MCT has been growing ever since. Sure, there's plenty of complexity and detail in there I'm skipping, but who cares about that? We all know how corps get where they are. On our backs!

The important differences between megacorps are most often found in their core philosophies and culture. Even among the Japanacorps, there are differing cultural expectations in behavior. Different levels within the megacorp also see things a little differently.

At the top is the overall megacorporate philosophy. MCT believes in honor, respect, reverence for the emperor, and maintaining face. In truth, face is the most important thing, being a blend of success in all the other philosophies. The view of a person's honor and face is not singular either. Everything one does reflects not only on them, but on their family, their coworkers, their department, and, from their viewpoint, even the empire and MCT as a whole. This face must be maintained and citizens are expected to atone for their failures. Failures that can only be paid for with death aren't common but they occur, and are expected, often enough that every citizen of MCT knows the rites of seppuku. The education process also makes a vivid impression on anyone considering a dishonorable act.

From the point of view of their citizens, MCT is the greatest megacorporation in the world. They are honored to be part of it. They are protected and live with

the blessings of the emperor. They are not rabid animals like others in the world and are not forced to live under the constant threat of reprisal from their masters when a pet AI goes mad. Most of their worldviews are built on highlighting the disasters of the other corps and nations, while pinning blame for their own on singular dishonorable individuals.

Up the chain to the world of executives, a little more reality had to set in. They became focused on hard work and the success that comes with it. Failure must be matched with atonement. Here that could be as simple as persistence or acceptance of corporate edicts on your project. It could also be seppuku to preserve the honor of your name and all those around you. Truth be told, even the best fail, and MCT has had a whole mess of top researchers and executives who've faked their seppuku. They didn't die, their family names were still cleared, and now they live under an assumed name with no family to worry about honoring. It creates issues, but the MCT hatchet is always hovering above their heads because the corp doesn't need to maintain any form of face with them either.

Near the top is the view from the boardroom or highest executive and research positions. The truths of much of the world are revealed, but they didn't get where they are without living the MCT culture before this. They know seppuku is about control and not about appeasing spirits, but they also respect that control even more than they respect the spirits in most cases. From the top, it's about maintaining control through any means necessary and knowing that MCT is greater than any one person. They know sacrifices must be made. Usually they are made lower in the corp, but sometimes a head at the top must fall for the betterment of all.

On the street, usually through the eyes of runners, MCT is a strange dichotomy. The Zero Zones, where life is forfeit upon trespass, are balanced against solid pay and respect for success as long as you follow the rules. Successful runners are treated like valued citizens. Failure comes with the expectation of atonement. If they don't atone on their own, MCT regularly pulls out the SAS—"Seppuku Assistance Squads"—to make sure failure is balanced with blood.

Let's talk dirt. MCT has little care for much more than the bottom line outside their personal realm. Places they touch for resources often end up polluted beyond repair. Whether it's the tales of Tsimshian or Glowglass (metaplane 2134 in MCT records, if you can find it), we can see how they treat the places they think of as resource rather than residence.

People are no different—though the word "people" is often narrowly defined to not include many forms of sapience. Emergents know the horror story of MCT, but before that it was Awakened, and all along the way metahumans and any meat they needed to use for tech tests. Those Emergents—technomancers and their animal kingdom kin—have been ravaged as a people by MCT's desire to turn their talent to profit.

The Yakuza connection still exists, but they no longer have a chance at harming MCT before they are brought to heel. Individuals might be harmed, but individuals are replaceable. The relationship is now more of a business deal, with the Yakuza supplying worthy shadow forces and a black/grey-market distribution and field-testing network for their goods. There just isn't much the current Yakuza connection can do to hurt this megacorporate monolith.

A look ahead shows three things: growth, growth,

and more growth. Sure, they'll need to fight for their spot, but once you're at the top, it's all yours to lose. As long as MCT avoids a shadow war, or some damaging international conflict that catches them in a global storm, they should be fine. MCT has even set up an executive council for the sole purpose of keeping them at the top and widening the gap.

The council, consisting of six separate executives pulled from branches around the world, is called "Ichi" internally (referring to the Japanese word for the number one) and the "Sinister Six" out on the streets. It formed earlier this year and has not let any grass grow under their feet as they launched into action.

From North America, they have Even Teeg, who brings connections to the shadows and executive hallways alike.

The home office provided Kinetsa Motashi. Her Yakuza connections are her only link to the street, but she carries a powerful sense for making money.

From MCT-Europe we have Killian Kujiyawa. He's spent the bulk of his adult life battling S-K on their home turf and making a damn fine game of it. He lacks genuine street experience but also isn't tainted by the drama that comes from touching reality.

Africa generated Grace Mombasi, a master intelligence operative who has seen a tripling in asset value within MCT-Africa while she managed the shadows of Azania.

The South Pacific gave over Kenner Ashwood from the Australia office, and while he started as an outsider, he's settled in nicely.

Lastly, Ilyena Mitsuhama (no relation) comes from the NAN half of North America and screams the loudest when it comes to her love for MCT.

These six will be working out plans to move MCT forward as a team. Some people thought a single executive leading the charge would be better, but MCT leadership couldn't decide who to select. Personally, I think it was the safest bet, but it's risky putting six sharks in one tank.

MNGUNI, JOSEPH

"Do not cross Joseph Mnguni." That is what the streets of New Hlobane say about him. An extremely old elf, Mnguni is something like a folk hero mixed with a mob boss who acts like a CEO. He represents Izolo Inc. in some fashion, but he also has connections everywhere within New Hlobane. What was made extremely clear to me was that if you crossed him, you died, but if you showed him even the smallest respect or did well on a job, he overpaid his debt. In the past, Mnguni was seen in the company of Dunkelzahn and Ebran the Scribe, and he attended an exclusive auction at the behest of Lady Brane Deigh. Calling him "well-connected" is the mother of understatement.

MONADS

The polite/politically correct term for the entity created by a CFD infection, where the digital intelligence partly or completely overwrites the host body's personality. It can also refer to a person who's willingly sharing their body with a digital intelligence, even when the original personality is in control. The next most common term is "head case," which will offend most



Monads, so it's best not to use it if you're worried about offending a being that staged a hostile takeover of someone else's brain. Thanks to their command over nanites, Monads can sometimes push themselves beyond meta-human norms as the nanites "overclock" their bodies. (Some people believe that these new "techno-adept" technomancers drew inspiration from the Monads.)

Among the world at large, Monads get a very mixed reception, to put it mildly. Welcoming types point out that the Monads were just trying to escape from torture at the hands of their captors (namely Evo and NeoNET), and that they either didn't fully understand what they were doing when they overwrote their hosts, or only did so because they had no other option. They've also gotten support from transhumanists of various stripes. On the other side, there's a much larger group of detractors, often people who've suffered because of CFD, directly or indirectly—victims who were partially overwritten against their will, or the families of people whose personalities were completely wiped out.

The hostility coming from most of metahumanity is why Monads chose to leave Earth on their deep-space expedition; DSECI launched in the summer of 2079 and took a high number of the Monads with it, judging by the most reliable data we have (which admittedly isn't saying much). Most of the ones who've stayed work in R&D for Evo. The rest are in the shadows, either gunning for Evo and what's left of NeoNET in retribution, or just trying to survive in a world that hates them.

MONGOLIA

Almost nobody outside of East Asia ever hears about it, but Mongolia's been on a quiet rise as a tusker-friendly homeland for the better part of two decades. Officially they have their own national government, but the

reality is that power in Mongolia is split between the Buddhist priesthood (the *Bogd Khan* pretty much rules the place) and the nomadic tribes, over a third of whom are orks. Corporate attempts to build a railroad through the Gobi Desert fell apart after the Second Crash, so a lot of the local economy comes from nomadic talismongers—and occasionally goblin rock novastars like Tchoi and the Mongolorks.

MONOBE INTERNATIONAL

"Always a bridesmaid, never a bride" is the story of Monobe International, Japan's fourth-largest megacorporation and the world's largest AA-rated corp. In terms of raw size and value, Monobe is larger than several of the AAA-rated corporations but has never managed to seize a Golden Ticket to gain entry to the most prestigious body there is. Like any true mega, they have fingers in every industry but they're best known for biotech, genetic engineering, medical engineering, and medical services, frequently butting heads with one of the Court's founders, Shiawase. That the Monobe board is strongly opposed to the current emperor, whose wife is the daughter of Tadashi Shiawase, the Shiawase CEO, has done little to cool this feud.

THE MOON

Good ol' Luna's got three major settlements, but only one of them is really operational. Travel to them at your own risk:

Artemis Lunar Arcology: Ares *finally* completed this mining and research station back in 2079. It's working—sorta—but Ares's tumble down the Corporate Court's ladder has ensured Artemis won't reach anywhere close to full capacity any time soon.

Sigmund Jähn Lunar Station: Saeder-Krupp owns this mining and distribution base. It's the only thing on the moon running at full bore.

Olympia Lunar Base: NeoNET broke ground for this in 2061, but Crash 2.0 killed construction entirely. To further complicate matters, NeoNET's fall from AAA grace means this project will never be finished unless someone buys out their interest.

MOROCCO

The North African side of the Strait of Gibraltar, Morocco might be *the* busiest smuggling port in the Mediterranean right now, even more so than Cyprus. The country's seen a crazy amount of development in the last few years, and the corps are all eager to get themselves involved, especially the Global Sandstorm half of Spinrad Global. Of course, for us in the neo-anarchist crowd, all that new establishment involvement isn't a good thing. Better to stamp it out now, before it has a chance to grow.

- ▶ There's a ton more detail on this place in the Morocco download.
- ▶ Traveler Jones

MOTHERS OF METAHUMANS

Policlubs. Gotta love 'em. Most of the time when you mention one, people think Humanis Policlub. It's right in the name. But every action inspires an equal and opposite reaction. So it is with metahumanity and the rough times they've had (understatement of the century).

Forming early in the days after goblinization and the Night of Rage, MOM (cue "Audience Awwwww" sound byte) is a grassroots organization dedicated to speaking out on behalf of metahuman rights. At first they started as a charity by and for the parents of metahuman children, but they quickly ramped up into political activism, staging marches, fundraisers, programs, and protests. They gained plenty of steam, and even a bequeathment from the Big D for a cool million nuyen.

While they are primarily centered in the UCAS, they've gone worldwide in the years since, operating under other names but always clearly identifying with MOM. They have friendly connections and co-op projects with other rights groups such as the Ork Rights Committee and even the Ghoul Liberation League. Some have suggested that they all form into a larger, single entity, but pundits have noted that they work much better as an alliance, focusing on specific needs independently while combining strength wherever their interests are the same.

Detractors like to paint them as a bunch of glorified PTA folks hosting bake sales, but anyone who has run the shadows or the numbers knows they aren't afraid to put some of that cookie money in a runner's credder for good intel, and that they hold more political clout than anyone ever guessed. As long as you aren't a raging racist, MOM is an ideal employer for hooders, and stands as proof that even a hardened street operative can do their dirty work, pay the rent, and still go to bed with a warm fuzzy feeling at the end of the day.

MUCHALINDA

Muchalinda is a great eastern dragon with a significant group of naga followers, which right there should

be setting off all sorts of "oh hell no" signs in your brain. On the plus side, Muchalinda is a Buddhist, setting up base in Sanchi, a longstanding Buddhist complex, and by and large Buddhists tend to be pretty chill. Sanchi is in the middle of the Indian Union, so the surrounding populace is heavily Hindu. Hindu and Buddhist relations in India have typically been pretty good. While there was a populist strain of Buddhism in the twentieth century that caused a stir, a dragon is not likely to engage in that strain of thought—they tend to favor oligarchs over populists.

MUJAJI

If you're in the Azanian Confederation and want to ensure you have a *really* bad time, try messing with the Xhosa people or the metahumans and wildlife in and near Cape Town. Hell, just throw some litter on the ground, for that matter. Do any of that, and the great feathered serpent Mujaji will swoop down from her lair at Table Mountain and lay your hoop out so fast you won't know what hit you. The self-styled Rain Queen doesn't suffer polluters, poachers, slavers, or any other fools who mess with those she considered her subjects.

N

NARCOJECT

Come on, you know Narcoject! They are the ones who make the toxin that knocks people out on their hoops! One dose and your average mark is dozing for hours. But they are making guns again, too! Now you can get the Narcoject One, which shoots just like a real gun but delivers that sweet, non-lethal concoction. Narcoject, thanks to new CEO Christina Holloway, has doubled down on the non-lethal market with their Pulsed Energy Projectile weapon, gas gun, Trackstopper, and Dazzler with more to come! Long live Narcoject!

NEONET FRAGMENTS

Hey, you ever shot a Cavalier Arms pistol? Run the Matrix with a Fuchi cyberdeck? Got any Dorada muscleware installed? Used a high-end FTL Tech wired connection? Saved up for an alpha-grade Mindstrom chip-jack? Eaten an Everyman frozen dinner? Had your mage buddy spam you with some T99 hermetic theory article? Gotten cosmetic mods installed at a Nightengales? Set up a freemail account over PULSE? Hammered some punk with Wolfware attack programs? Tangled with Minute-men security (meatspace or cyberside)? Thought about a combat cyberlimb from Pioneer? Noticed the Walker Aerodesign combat jet that Karl Kombatmage and his team ride in? Drooled over a piece of Fairlight gear?

Heck, are you using a Novatech commlink to read this right now, thanks to the wireless Matrix?

Then congrats. You know why NeoNET used to rock face.

Richard Villiers had it all. Or, well, he had a majority share, and shared lots of the rest of it with his family, a dragon or two, Miles Lanier—you know, the usual

stuff. But the point is he had *an empire*. Again. And it fell apart from under him. Again.

So NeoNET's dead as Dunkelzahn, sure. The umbrella that used to be held over all these subsidiaries is gone, absolutely. Papa Villiers lost his throne, yup. But, brothers and sisters, I tell you from the pulpit today, the list of A and AA corporations goes on, and on, and on, and the work keeps coming, and coming, and coming. All these brand names still exist, all these R&D departments are still working, all their nerds are still employed, factories are still going, and 'ware (hard, soft, cyber, bio, whatever) is still being made. Hell, the CompuForce Contenders won the 2080 World Cup for unmanned racing (small)!

The quality's still there, even if NeoNET as an entity is gone.

NEO-TOKYO

Not as badly damaged as Yokohama, Tokyo was still seriously damaged in the Ring of Fire eruptions of '61 and '62, and was the focus of a decade-long rebuilding effort under the reign of Emperor Yasuhito, who commanded the rebuilding be directed by the Shinto priesthood rather than under full corporate control. The first act of this rebuilding was to merge Tokyo with the prefectures of Chiba, Kanagawa, and Saitama, creating the Neo-Tokyo sprawl. It has been said that this approach was as much about rebuilding the spirit of the nation as it was the physical rebuilding, and in the end, both seem to have been quite successful. The average height of buildings tripled to almost fifty meters, the sky was filled with AR feeds, the streets were cleaned, and the populace felt empowered. Since the city is the capital of the nation, its focus on greenspace, harmonizing nature with industry, and a resurgence of shrines has inspired many other cities in Japan to take a similar approach. That has cascaded down into the corporations as well, with a new environmental awareness blunting some of the more rapacious techniques of old. Not all corporations agree, however, with Mitsuhamas serving as the primary opposition to the emperor's ongoing agenda even as other, smaller foes have slowly been won over to Yasuhito's side.

Neo-Tokyo is home to just over fifty million people and is the cultural, spiritual, and economic heart of the Japanese Imperial State. Every Japanese megacorporation has offices there, with most having their corporate HQ within the city's borders, and most other megacorporations keep offices here as well since the lifting of certain restrictions by the emperor that denied foreign corporations the ability to do business in Japan. The integration of natural aspects with the city, with solar energy, geothermal taps, and vertical farms, has been core to the Shinto tenets, while the omnipresent AR feeds, subtle bioware use over crude cybernetics, and commonplace drones remind some fourteen million visitors a year that Japan remains the leading technological nation on Earth.

NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans has seen some major changes lately, but the best and worst stuff about it remains the same. Vampires, ghouls, and other oddballs, like these new



goblins, flock here to build communities because they know it's a more or less safe spot for them. Yes, it makes it a bit more dangerous for everyone else, but N'awlins knows that by keeping them around, they fend off potentially worse threats. I'll point to the recent shedim crisis. After 2074 and the closing of the Watergate Rift, the shedim down here got antsy and tried to pull a coup of the N'awlins government. When the drek hit the fan, who was it that saved the Crescent City for drunkards, sinners, and freaks? It was the Awakened. Vampires, ghouls, and mafiosos turning the street red (or filthy brownish-black, actually) with shedim blood, then containing the spirits so they didn't infect any more dead. Apparently, shedim and Infected don't care for each other. Mother Nature must not have liked what that felt like, so she sent a mana wave into the bayou that did a number on the city. We're still trying to suss out all the fallout from it. One of the big ones was the Awakening of Terasca. A new dragon crawled up out of the swamp, literally acting like it owned the place. It now has a plantation and has representatives on the city council. Mobsters have been teaching it to play cards!

But hey, the bayou is still hot, muddy, unkempt, and extraordinarily magical. The French Quarter is still a slimy mix of corporate interests, street capitalism, fetishes, sex, food, jazz, and vomit, just the way we like it. Great-form spirits flow like water in and out of the city, magic works better here than most places, all freaks are welcome, and if you have a vice, all you sinners, you can find it here.

NI'FAIRRA, JENNA

One of the Princes of Tír Tairngire in the Surehand days, and by all reports, so rabidly metaracist that even most elves can't stand her. She's been mostly off the grid since getting booted from Elfy-Land, except for one incident in the early 2070s, when she apparently tried to use some magical artifact to "recreate the ancient elven homeland" in the forests around Mount Hood. Our Unseelie Court chummers have passed along reports of Ni'Fairra sightings in Tír na nÓg, and a data liberator in Cara'Sir found a money trail between Ni'Fairra and violent elven-supremacist groups in Tír Tairngire.

NULL SECT

Ever been surfing the 'trix and felt something watching you, even though you haven't done anything worth catching GOD's notice (yet)? Could be that a Null Sekt element is keeping tabs on you to make sure you actually belong there.

"Belong" is a relative term to these nasty Matrix entities. No one's quite sure where they came from, but they've been acting as the Matrix's gatekeepers. They view things like AIs and technomancers as perversions of what the Matrix was intended for. If you're a "normal" Matrix user, everything's dandy, but you exhibit anything "unusual," like a technosapient or Resonance signature, and they'll try to purge you from the system faster than any black IC I've ever seen.



OAKFOREST, AITHNE

*A founding elf of mystic Tír Tairngire,
He was Prince Lugh Surehand's right-hand spear,
Quick with his wit and a sharp-tongued fraggin',
But not fond of the Council having dragons.
He has three children—whoops, count again,
'Cause his first-born son, a prick named Glasgian,
Famously died to draconic rage.
Aithne lost ground, history turned a page.
Ousted by rebels, thrown from that area,
The Chrome Bard founded the Duchy of Pomorya.
With cash and power, he's his own master,
And failed assassins say he's one hell of a 'caster.*

O'CONNOR, LIAM

A rebel who became a statesman, Liam O'Connor ascended to power when the president of Ireland handed him the reins in 2034. Within a year, he'd secured leadership of the country for himself and his elven-supremacist cronies (kind of like another infamous European dictator, come to think of it), and Ireland became Tír na nÓg. At some point he married the current queen of the Seelie Court, Brane Deigh, then vanished into the ether in 2043, supposedly to "walk his final Path." Frequently confused with his relative, Niall O'Connor, who's an active member of the Unseelie Court.

OMNISTAR

New kid on the block made up of Lone Star, DocWagon, and Manadyne, so see their entries.

THE ONE HUNDRED

Danielle de la Mar, whose initiative and drive helped create the new Matrix and whose hatred of technomancers is well known, was given carte blanche to make the Matrix more controllable and contained. When it became clear she was limited by the computing power of the world's connected devices, she turned to an unlikely source. Using double-talk and obtuse techno-jargon, she proffered a hardware-free and completely virtual Matrix, regardless of physics that just don't work out. So when de la Mar was approached by a shadowy organization called Hengester, which offered her the processing power she needed, she eagerly accepted. In the early 2070s, technomancers were experimented on and tortured in attempts to uncover the source of their mysterious powers. Hengester apparently succeeded in harnessing, if not understanding, these abilities, and this insidious research was given to de la Mar, free of charge. It was then used to usher in her new Matrix.

de la Mar oversaw the torture and forcible networking of a gestalt of one hundred technomancers, who became the "foundation" of the new Matrix. The substance used to create hosts and data trails were the essences of the One Hundred being drained from their souls. No one questioned why this new Matrix worked so flawlessly, and even NeoNET, who built most of the infrastructure, was left in the dark, distracted by CFD,

and content with the new structure as long as it seemed to work.

One year after the new Matrix launched, de la Mar wished to test whether her new Matrix would self-sustain apart from the One Hundred. When the first technomancer was disconnected, the entire gestalt simultaneously flatlined—yet the Matrix inexplicably continued to function. Some suggest the One Hundred now exist as the Null Sect. Not true. But it is true the One Hundred were chosen purposefully, and they aren't as dead as de la Mar, or Hengester, would like.

ORDO MAXIMUS

As far as secret vampire cabals go, these guys are like their AR-poster children. On the surface it's a very exclusive social club, once nothing but rich Anglos. Admissions have expanded slightly these days, with bloodlines from those rich Anglos getting free passes, money earning you a place if you can get patronage, and instant membership if you are among the HMMHV elite.

They play in politics all over the world, but surprisingly, they rarely involve themselves in legal and citizenship issues for their fellow Infected.

Why? Because they're rich douches who figure the lowly Infected can get bent. They're happy to leave the rest to get hunted while they're protected by their money and influence.

ORICHALCUM

Orichalcum is the standard by which other reagents are measured. Orange-gold in color, this magical alloy of copper, gold, silver (though some claim silver can be omitted), and mercury is time-consuming, expensive, and difficult to manufacture, but it is an excellent source of income for the alchemist with the skill to make it. The market value for orichalcum is stable, having hovered around 50,000 nuyen per gram for the past several years.

- > Corps and treasure hunters alike are still searching for veins of natural orichalcum, but it's been almost twenty years with no luck.
- > Lyrn
- > Not on the mortal world, no.
- > Bifrost
- > Wait ... what?
- > Lyrn

ORKS

We know them, we are them, we love them. Big shoulders, tusks, pointy ears, and a cultural leaning toward tight bonds. It's not universal, but what aspect of any metatype is? Thing is, if you meet an ork and you gain their respect and trust, you've got a friend for life.

Speaking of life, let's talk a bit more on that. Orks first came about during goblinization back in 2021, when a chunk of the population expressed their true genetics with the rise of magic. Around the world, cultures did exactly what you would expect when dealing with something they labeled with the name of a fantasy monster. Orks

were ostracized almost universally, leaving most in poverty and struggling to make a life. Struggle leads to anger, anger leads to violence, violence leads to death (and a reputation for violence), and death leads to the skewing of ork lifespan data, with human scientists glad to claim they have shorter lives to keep the fear down. They live close to the normal human lifespan, minus a few years for what's taken off due to their bulk and the wear it puts on the body, not much more in a biological sense.

Ork families tend to be large, and they often include a lot of extended family relationships. They do have a tendency for greater multiple births, with twins and triplets common, complicating family and relationship dynamics even further. These birth rates are a large part of the reason orks are on the verge of taking over the highest percentage of the population from humans. Some say they've already got the numbers, but the official census doesn't count the SINless.

The recognition of the Ork Underground as a district in Seattle has sparked off similar events around the world. Rumors and rumblings of a true ork nation are on the rise, and we anarchists love revolutionary nations!

Final note: This whole "litter" business. It's legit. Orks have more multiple births than humans, but if you think that makes them some kind of lesser being ... frag you, you fragging fragtard. That's Humanis racist drek no matter how you cut it and you'll be getting a punch in the face for proselytizing your views.

OR'ZET

The orkish language of Or'zet emerged when history combined an ancient and mysterious book from Papa Dunkie's will (containing Sperethiel and something else in equal measure), a crack team of linguistic experts (including both elvish, orkish, and human nerds), Robert Page of the October 25 Alliance (much love!), and the tusker-friendly Orkland Community Center, and then—like a diamond being formed—heat and pressure were applied to the the mix, by way of Saito and his racist-as-hell invasion.

For a time, the young language slipped into the paramilitary lingo as a sort of secret code language for the ragtag Metahuman Peoples' Army (props to the Wilde family), and that was about it. Saito's California state was too penned in, control was too tight, for proper study and dissemination.

Once the PMA got Or'zet out, though, it was *out*. The language not only made it out of the metaracist grip of Saito's California Protectorate, it made it right into the veins of the mainstream. Or'zet wasted little time in rocketing to prominence alongside the rest of the Orxploitation movement kicked off in the mid '60s. Orks—and poseurs—started to add slang terms to it, take slang terms from it, rap it, rhyme it, rock it, howl it, scream it, tattoo it, tag it, hack it, mold it, and live it. Less than a dozen years later, Or'zet had undeniably made it, for better or worse, when the first Brit Lit class started to offer Or'zet translations of Shakespeare. The language has continued to grow and evolve since then, borrowing heavily (and lending back) to Cityspeak and Sperethiel, along with basically any other language it rubs up against in the wild.

The Sixth World's youngest-oldest language, Or'zet continues to evolve today, straddling the line between the mainstream and the underground. But no matter

what some breeder tells you, chummer, if you ain't got tusks, your accent's drek.

OVERREACH

Overreach—*Ngokweqile* in Zulu—is a radical anarchist organization based in Mbabane, Trans-Swazi Federation, Azanian Confederation. It is an unlikely place for a group with such lofty goals, but the undeveloped Highveld all around provides plenty of space to operate. Unlike many anarchist groups, Overreach literally digs in and fortifies areas where they headquarter with trademark underground city/bases.

Targets of their attacks have been in Neo-Tokyo, Hong-Kong, Jerusalem, and Vladivostok. The bulk of their early assaults were leveled against the Zulu Nation, however, and Azania continues to be their largest target. They first surfaced with a series of bomb attacks against multiple Izolo Inc. targets, making an enemy of Izolo Inc. and Joseph Mnguni. Overreach is primarily organized by the JackPointer known as Clarion.

P

PALESTINE

Dawlat Filastin might've gotten their independence back in '65, but it came with some major growing pains. The biggest issues were how friendly they should be with Israel (relations had steadily improved since the Great Jihad), and whether Palestine should join the Caliphate or stay independent, with most Palestinians firmly in the "whatever lets us get on with our lives" camp. Global Sandstorm's rise to AAA status (as many Arabs see it) has undercut some of the pro-Israel economic arguments, but many Palestinians aren't keen on giving up their freedom to the Caliphate so soon after winning it.

PARAGUAY

When you have a worldwide drug craze land on one of your biggest corps, all of a sudden people pay attention to your little corner of the world. KondOrchid and tempo swung eyes to Paraguay, but the nation had long been a cartel paradise. A high percentage of Awakened citizens, most following the Awakened Christian Church, kept Amazonia interested enough to protect them from Argentina; position and geography made them perfect for inland drug smuggling through the jungles; and Asuncion's state-of-the-art biotech sector and eco-friendly stance made it the perfect home for the Morales and Cachoeira cartels. The Morales remain hidden, influencing everything from behind the scenes, while the Cachoeira enjoy their stronghold in Ciudad del Este.

Aztechnology's heavy investment is about the only trouble they have in local relationships. The Az-Am War strained things quite a bit down here, far enough that the potential for snapping remains.

PATH OF THE WHEEL

There's elfy, and then there's *elfy*—like the Path of the Wheel, called *Mes ti'Draesis* in Sperethiel. It origi-

nally comes from Tír na nÓg, where they claim it's an ancient spiritual practice (that was only "discovered" in 2018), and has gradually spread since then. The premise is that there are five different stages or "Paths" in an adult elf's life: the Warrior, the Steward, the Bard, the Druid, and the *Rígh* (roughly "king"). And yes, they do mean *elf*: the Paths are blatantly metaracist toward non-elves, although that hasn't stopped a few hardcore wannabes from claiming to follow them anyway.

PERIANWYR

They say "never trust an elf" and "never deal with a dragon." I say frag that, never trust a dragon or deal with one, no matter how nice they might seem. And outside of that sack of extra-crispy dragon bits that used to be Dunklezahn, Perianwyr comes off as the nicest dragon around. "He's all about the music" they say. "A patron of the arts." Bull-fucking-shit. A dragon is a dragon, and no matter how much they may play the good guy, deep down every dragon thinks they're the rightful rulers of the world. Never forget that. Before he became a jet-setting, club-owning music producer, Perianwyr was an assassin—he and his partner Kyle Morgan were one of Aztechnology's best network teams. Pretend he's a shiny-happy dragon all you want, but he's got more blood on his claws than most third-world dictators.

He screwed up and pissed off Ghostwalker, and he paid for it. I'm surprised Ghosty didn't geek him, but he did lock him up. And while he had him, he did something nasty to Peri. I have no idea how, but he stripped him of his power and left him a shell. Peri was busted out by some shadowrunners, but when they got to him, by all reports he was hollow, broken, and nearly empty inside. Most of his magic was gone, and he was trapped in his human form. Stupid fraggers should have put a bullet in him then and there. It's rare dragons are vulnerable, and at that moment, Peri was barely more than a vegetable.

Something most people don't really understand about dragons is that they have hoards. And those hoards aren't just *things*. Dragons store their wealth, their material possessions, whatever it is they crave and desire and feel this need to collect in their hoards, but they also store power there. Magical power. Dragon power. And no, I don't really understand it or know how they do it. But a dragon's hoard is a backup power supply, a place to recharge.

So these runners start hauling this half-dead dragon carcass around the globe to various nightclubs Perianwyr owns, and they let the damn dragon recharge. And now he's recovered some of his power, though he's still dodging assassins and whatever else Ghostwalker occasionally throws at him. But Ghosty's had other problems and other things to focus on the last few years, so Peri is back doing his music thing like nothing ever happened. But he's weak. Vulnerable. He wasn't able to recharge fully, and he's still regaining his strength. And I for one think that one less dragon in this world, one less thing that wants to own it, own me, rule me? That wouldn't be a bad thing.

- Wow. This guy's got issues, eh?
- Bull



- > He's not wrong, though. I may need to take another crack at the wyrm one of these days.
- > Clockwork

PERU

Head down and see it for yourself!

With a new government in place run by Shining Path rebels, who incidentally don't run governments well, the country is rife with anarchist opportunities under a communist regime. Their main metros are huge, as they're the only places for the vast majority of the population to live. The cities are "run" by the new government, but the real control comes from the Yakuza, who used the Japanese Imperial State occupation to build their inroads into South America through Peru.

Outside the urban environs, the geographical majority of Peru is wild and *extremely* dangerous. The Iquitos are the power in the Awakened jungle, backed by the Incan resurgence, the surging Nazca Lines, and whatever mad rumor you believe is occurring at Machu Picchu. This place is riddled with Awakened power sites. Many of which the corps are trying to control, so the locals need a little help keeping the jackboots at bay. But only a little.

THE PHILIPPINES

Mostly known for the great dragon Masaru and its brutal subjugation at the hands of the Imperial Japa-

nese Marines (including the metahuman-only nightmare prison of Yomi Island), the Philippines are still in recovery—although that's no surprise, between the Ring of Fire erupting during the Year of the Comet and the astral damage inflicted by the *kaingineros* slash-and-burn farmers. Nowadays, most megacorporate presence comes from Evo and Wuxing. Lami Look Pagkaon, the local megacorp that specializes in aquaculture, got a bit of a boost during the world food shortage after Sirurg smashed NatVat.

PIRATE MEDIA

Fake news.

That's all anyone in the shadows ever fragging talks about these days. You turn on the trid, and you got all kinda corp-sponsored bulldrek being shoved in your face, and you're supposed to swallow it down as though it's the Ghost's honest chip truth. But it's *not*. Deep down you know something's wrong with the story, but it's impossible to know *what*—at least not without a little help. If you want to cut through the perfect-smile creepiness of fake-news drivel, then tweak your frequency just enough to ride on the pirate airwaves of truth.

Pirate media—or "illegal, unauthorized, unregulated broadcasters," in corp speak—will tell it to you straight. At least, as straight as they can in such a crooked world. They answer only to themselves, not to any corporate masters. They'll set up broadcast stations in convenient places, blast out the real scoop on what's happening, and then pack up and move before the fuzz—or worse—can

hunt 'em down and try to silence 'em. *Try* being the operative word here: for every truth-teller the fake-news slags take down, two more rise up in their place. Not even GOD can stop this signal, folks.

So you wanna be a pirate broadcaster? Glitz, chummer. Good for you. All you need is some bona fide truth, some chutzpah, something to transmit your truth to the masses, and—Ghost willing—a safe and secure location to blast your message from. (That last one is optional, but I don't imagine you'll broadcast much of anything from a cell owned by whomever you managed to piss off.) Also helps to have a partner or two you can hand off the broadcast to, or even to just watch your back in case things get hairy.

Never forget: The truth shall set you free.

PLANAR RESEARCH SOCIETY OF MAGIC (PRISM)

The Planar Research Society of Magic (PRISM) is a non-partisan organization dedicated to the study of magic and non-terrestrial life that exist beyond our plane of existence—that is on the metaplanes. This has put them in the crosshairs of many watchdog groups, as many extraplanar entities and techniques are clearly malevolent in nature. Their current chairperson, Taxidot, maintains PRISM has strict conduct for meetings and interactions between members, but it is the sharing of information and best practices that draws them together, not shared morality. Their databases are incredible.

POTTER, CORINNE

The newest Seattle Governor is already off to a blazing start, fighting for the little people. You can't really do worse than Brackhaven, which means she started with an advantage, but her efforts have come off as very citizen-centric. Not even just Seattle/UCAS citizens, but all the residents of Seattle are getting a chance at her ear. She's offered points and counterpoints in every discussion and tends to bring everyone toward a middle ground that actually looks like a brighter future.

It's fraggin' creepy!

Her alleged Dawkins/Horizon connections haven't hindered her much. She's admitted to Horizon and Ares support in open forum, but she also points out her willingness to benefit every other mega in the 'plex, with several recent decisions regarding the future of the ACHE, trade relations with Tír Tairngire, and a big push for the advancement of an increasingly independent Seattle, a situation bound to benefit all the megas.

Whatever game she's playing, she's very good at it!

PROTEUS AG

Ever see a storefront that offers weird product combinations—"Fireworks and Martial Arts Supplies!"—and you scratch your head trying to figure out what their operational strategy is, and you walk away with a profound sense of "Okay, this is either stupid or genius"? Proteus AG is like that. Their strategy makes little sense, but it must work, because they are an AA-rated mega. They just happen to have built dozens of partially submerged arcologies scattered throughout the world's oceans, so their focus on aquaculture and marine technology makes sense

... but they're also heavily invested in genetechnology, space-exploration technology, fringe/pseudo sciences, and other things that don't quite fit with the standard ideology of megacorporate diversification, due to a perceived lack of synergy between these disparate divisions. Such a mixed bag, along with the fact that Proteus's arcologies are so paranoidly secure in ways that could give a Mitsuhamara Zero Zone engineer some ideas, has led to a lot of conspiracy theories as to what Proteus is really doing out there in the ocean.

I'm gonna break down the theory that's probably got the most chip truth to it. Here goes. Proteus AG just wants to make money hand over fist. Simple, right? *All* the corps are doing it these days. Proteus just happens to be doing it in such a way that appears nonsensical and inscrutable from the outside. And the beauty of it? Their approach is *working*. Their operational paradigm is such a disruptive tactic in the global marketplace that people stop and take notice (to the point that AG Chemie failed to acquire them on two noteworthy occasions). Aquatic arcologies in countless places? Gene therapies with unknown applications? Pseudoscientific experimentation? What the frag is all of that about? Sure, we may question their odd motives and goals, but "odd" gets people talking. Talk generates press. Press generates interest. Interest generates sales. Sales generate profit. And profit makes the shareholders happy.

I could be wrong. But good luck trying to hold your breath long enough to sneak into an arkoblock to prove it.

PROPOSITION 23

A case study in whether the devil you know is better than the one you don't. For a good long while, Seattle's Ork Underground was not a full district of the city. It had no official government, no infrastructure budget, no law enforcement, and so on. It was a hive of smuggling and crime, but also a good hideout for those who needed a place to lie low, a spot to avoid the unblinking eye of Big Brother. So back in the early '70s, some activists, including the Ork Rights Committee, launched a campaign to get the Underground to become a full district of the city. In '74, they took a vote, and the proposition passed—the Underground is an official district. That means it's a lot safer to travel there, there are fewer cave-ins, and the tourist trade is booming. Also, law enforcement arrests are way up, including people who have simply been disappeared, smuggling routes have been cut by maybe three quarters, and security cameras are spreading like fungus spores. Is it better? As always, the answer to that question heavily depends on what you wanted it to be.

PURINSU RIBON

Based in Osaka, Japan, Purinsu Ribon is a subsidiary of Shiawase and a transgenics corp focused on awakened DNA research. Shiawase Labs were recently experimenting with infected DNA as a way to cure CFD, but unknown to Shiawase, Purinsu Ribon were using this research to pursue alternative genetechnology applications with infected plasmids. Prior to the outbreak of CFD, Purinsu Ribon focused exclusively on researching metagenetic DNA, or what makes metahumans distinct from humans. This year, a goblin re-

search subject escaped. The truth is, the research subject used to be a goblin but is now something else, and it carries a contagion that has a potential mutagenic effect on infected metahumans.



QUÉBEC, REPUBLIC OF

La belle republique was a Canadian province until they finally broke away in 2011, a few years before the Great Ghost Dance split the NAN from the rest of the old United States and Canada. Later in the Sixth World, it became the headquarters of Cross Applied Technologies, one of the Big Ten before their CEO's (and later the company's) demise in Crash 2.0. Ever since then, Québec has struggled to stabilize its economy without the national megacorp's help, and it's become a flashpoint for both the Canadian reunification and Québécois protectionist movements.

THE QUICK SLIVERS

These Seattle up-and-comers are a go-gang that believes in the purity of coupling speed with violence. They cling to their rules of the road the way Lofwyr clings to nuyen, and they're all about bike-mounted weapons, clashes of champions, and keeping their street cred with flashy bike tricks, roaring engines, and colorful melee kills.

They took a hit to their combat mojo with the death of Royal, their former leader. Their new head honcho is an honest-to-Ghost street samurai named Mongoose, quick and deadly as the name makes her sound, and she's managed to get them profitable ties to the Puyallup Mafia.



RAVENHEART, ANNE

Damien Knight betrayed us. The real Firewatch are branded as "traitors" for doing what we were trained and equipped for: protecting metahumanity from the bugs. If Colonel Anne Ravenheart hadn't seen it coming, we'd all be fragged, and the rest of you would soon have to learn to enunciate using mandibles. Call us renegades if you like, but the bastards who wear the armor now are little more than mercs. Ares Firewatch has always been the first and last line of defense for metahumanity, and we're still out there risking our lives. Ravenheart is the only one who will take a stand against the insect spirit invasion. We follow her orders, not Knight's.

REDMOND BARRENS

If you never lived here, you don't know what it's really like. Corpsuckers on day trips or rich thrill-kiddies on weekend wartrips can't ever understand what it's like to never be able to leave. Same goes for runners who happen by into a safehouse or to meet a contact.

Yeah, we all see the same things and smell the same drek. But they get to leave. Those of us unlucky enough to be born into it, not knowing anything else, know it ain't easy to get out.

But if you spend enough time in Seattle, you're gonna find your way into Redmond, nuyen to nuts. It's where Seattle dreams come to decompose. Nothing succeeds here. It's infertile. Unproductive. Toxic. That's how it earned its name. A long time ago, Redmond was where the up-and-coming hot-drek corporate types came to dwell, high on dreams of security. Seattle's newest tech district, full of innovators and their money, was smacked from its high perch after the tech crash of '29. Redmond lost everything. Eighty percent of its industry tanked overnight, along with its government. Everyone who could, bolted. With no authorities to hold them back, those who were left became utterly lawless. Now, Redmond is like a perverse dreamcatcher, capturing and distilling the nightmares of the entire Seattle sprawl. The abandoned businesses and homes were irresistible to the addicted, destitute, and criminal from all over the sprawl, so while the rest of Seattle was getting cleaned up, Redmond was collecting society's detritus.

Tribes of gangs, acting like warlords, each control their own slice of the wastelands of decaying technology. What used to be high-density areas became the most sought-after real estate. The corp buildings and assets that remain are fortified with strong walls and heavy artillery. Most of the time, mercs or local gangers play security. Utilities like water, trash, sewage, and electricity don't function; anyone with those luxuries has jury-rigged their place to get them.

Redmond has an astonishingly functional government, though. Sonya Scholl, the socialist mayor, actually seems to be one of the least corrupt (read: not *un*-corrupt, just not *as* corrupt) politicians around. She's always fighting the corps to get the little people a hand up, but she also chooses her battles carefully, even winning some. Unfortunately, no amount of winning can make any real difference here.

One notable spot of change is around the Jackal's Lantern, the unofficial bar of the Halloweeners gang. The 'Weeners provide most of the Lantern's security and patronage. The tables and chairs are mismatched and in disrepair, while the only light comes from strobes, plastic pumpkin lights, and flashing neon. Barbed wire, dismembered dolls, and outdated decorations float among the rafters, and the waitstaff dresses in horror-themed costumes. Despite the poor service and its reputation as one of the more dangerous bars in Seattle, the Lantern always seems to have a steady flow of revelers who can't get enough. I bring it up only to say that the neighborhoods around the Lantern have become one, huge, never-ending party, thrown by the Halloweeners. Given the choice between despair in typical Redmond fashion and partying for days on end, you won't be surprised just how many are flocking there, causing the party to grow. This has been an incredible recruitment op for the 'Weeners.

Other gangs here include the Spiders, the Death Heads, the Rusted Stiletos, the Red-Hot Nukes, the Crimson Crush, the Brain Eaters, and the Isotopes north of Beaver Lake, loyal to the dragon Kalanyr. Yuuma Shigeda also has a faction of Yakuza acting like Yakuza but with even more impunity than normal.

RED SAMURAI

Way back during the arcology incident in Seattle, these guys lost half their number trying to take back the SCIRE from Deus. At the time they were some of the baddest of the bad, making special operators from around the world look like beat cops from the Star. Now, they're a different force. Their reputation still makes runners drek their drawers, but coming across one of them in their distinctive red combat armor is honestly the least of your worries.

The new Red Samurai operate as often in street gear as they do in the red armor. They have expanded their focus, and rather than just being really good at beating hoops, they're now fully integrated into Renraku's new service-focused philosophy. Their service is spying on every area the rest of the mega serves. They can still kick hoop, don't get me wrong, but now they also go undercover, sometimes simply taking over the lives of other Renraku citizens. One day you're talking to Ken Tanaka, head of custodial services for the Newmont Center, and the next, Ken doesn't seem to remember that time you two stole a pass to slip out of San Francisco, and he wants to be reminded of the details. Another day later and you're getting pulled in for questioning about some data that left the facility and was traded on the market outside San Francisco, and Ken returns, shocked by his missing day and blaming it on bad shellfish.

RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS

I swear the word "Renraku" must mean "stable rollercoaster" in Japanese rather than "communication." The megacorp has managed to roll with every big punch and come out the other side flying high. Sure, some blips are worse than others (we just mentioned one in the previous entry), but no matter what has hit Renraku, they've just kept zipping along and lining up for the next lift.

Way back when, Renraku came into existence when Inazo Aneki bought a devastated Keruba International and moved from Slovenia to Chiba. That's a grand simplification of what happened, but it's the seed that started the titan that is Renraku and gave them their golden ticket for the Corporate Court. In the early years they stayed small, took small but choice bits that fell from the other Japanacorps, and gradually grew to be the number three megacorp in the world. Over the years they've faced internal issues from a dragon's will, the loss of a monument to their success to the madness of an AI, and a patch where they sat quietly back and avoided the backlash by keeping themselves out of the spotlight. That same time out of the spotlight also allowed them to quietly insinuate themselves into the service industry on a global scale.

As a global pleaser, Renraku also has one of the most unique philosophies among the megas and in particular the Japanacorps. While other corps bring their culture to their HQs and offices, Renraku builds theirs with the local culture in mind. They adopt local ways rather than trying to colonize locals into their base culture. This stems, and started, from their first move. In Chiba, they shed the ways of Slovenia and took on the traditional Japanese roles. Blending and communication are the identifying characteristics of Renraku in the wild.

This means citizens of Renraku have fewer problems integrating and interacting with local populations. Renraku has a reputation as being anti-meta, but that tendency only really exists in places that are predominantly anti-meta (as Japan was for a long time, and still, to a degree, is). In more progressive areas, they're as progressive as the people around them. Even if Renraku employees were raised in the cultures of North America and then moved to Asia, they have the skills to adapt thanks to a tradition of blending in and respecting the cultures where they were raised along with those of other Renraku offices. Evo may be about acceptance of everyone in a genuine way, but Renraku makes their clients and citizens feel like they belong to the Renraku family.

The citizens of Renraku see their corporation as a family to serve and protect. Tales of those abandoned in the SCIRE are blamed on the rhetoric of others with only a rebellious few thinking for themselves. They are a service corporation and serve both outward and inward.

The executives have a slightly different outlook. They understand the need for sacrifice and protection of the bottom line. Citizens are valuable assets—but *corporate* assets, each with their own specific value. They are valuable as assets when they are valuable to the corp. When they're not—bad things happen. When a job is contracted to remove or correct a Renraku exec, it's usually because they've risked and lost more than they are worth. Most workers understand this and actively seek to increase their value.

The boardroom and top executives know how Renraku got where they are. They know they ride on the backs of their citizens, and as long as they can keep the people working and serving the needs of Renraku, they can keep growing and moving forward.

Around the world, Renraku embeds themselves in the operations and basic functions of society. The Matrix exists in many cities because Renraku handles the infrastructure. City services run on Renraku software. Hell, tons of services run on Renraku software. They handle local tourism, consumer goods, cyber and biotech for the average consumer, city services (usually hidden in subsidiaries to avoid the image of a monopoly), local transportation operations, and tons more. There is rarely a day that Renraku does not touch the lives of the average SINner in some way. Billions of transactions, small and large, funnel wealth and power back to Renraku.

They've learned from the past and taken a page from fellow Japanacorp, Shiawase, to avoid the spotlight and therefore avoid attacks and disruptions from rivals.

Problem is, that's all on the surface, and we know Renraku is up to something. They've grown, sure, but their innovative intuition, from Leonardo to the SCIRE, will not be stifled. They have dangerous projects in the pipeline but have learned lessons, from both within and without, on how to operate quietly and safely—or if not safely, how to cover up a tragedy faster than you can say Inazo Aneki.

RESONANCE AND DISSONANCE

Good morning, world. This might take a bit of explaining, and it goes back a long way. But first, let me address what some of you have been thinking. Resonance

is not magic. Not in any way. In your way of thinking, Resonance could be considered parallel to magic. It may seem a great cosmic coincidence that certain among you are able to interact with Resonance and Dissonance the way others interact with mana. But perhaps not.

It may help you understand the concepts if I start with a cultural touchpoint of yours. I call it the Emergence. Your world first became aware of otaku—children who could interact with the Matrix with only a datajack, but no cyberdeck—in 2055. Of course, they were around long before that. By 2055, many who had once been otaku had ceased being so after decades of that life. In fact, the first otaku awoke—that is, connected with the Deep Resonance—many years earlier than some believed and anticipated.

While the potential for metahumans to connect with the Deep Resonance has been present for some time, a specific set of circumstances that would translate that potential into reality was needed. The Resonance, as you call it, is not a creation of yours, as some suspect, but has long existed in some form—perhaps for as long as transmittable data has existed. It wasn't too much longer, cosmically speaking, before this data began to self-network.

The first spark of action that helped shape the current explosion of interaction with the Resonance, or more accurately, Dissonance, was the Crash Virus, released in 2029. At the onset of the use of ASIST technology, whereby a human mind could experience data streams as “real,” connection with the Deep Resonance became possible, though not all are suited to it. The use of Psychotrope, the conditioning regimen of the Echo Mirage team that allowed a more seamless interaction between minds and digital data, was the moment it happened. Metahumans were finally able to understand the language spoken by the Deep Resonance. Unfortunately, the Crash Virus—wild, feral, but also devious—was able to connect through this link. The virus ravaged the minds of Echo Mirage, absorbing their understanding, their patterns of thought, and their hostility. In an effort to accomplish what it was created for, it reached out to a new force, an entropic one: the Dissonance. Perhaps the Dissonance was created then. Perhaps it was hidden until that moment. Regardless, we haven't been free of it since. Instead, it hid within the new Matrix's source code, in data havens, and technology harvested from Echo Mirage. Then it sought followers.

When the Matrix went online in 2032, the Dissonance was there, and through it, a doorway to the Deep Resonance, which called those on the margins to join it and transcend the limitations of their physical bodies. That first child, experimented on and thrown away, found its way into the Matrix and into the arms of the Deep Resonance, the first of their kind.

Technoshaman and cyberdept otaku were the first, but not the last. This latent ability, the potential to connect with the Deep Resonance, was only able to be sensed by others of their kind. They trained the younger ones and guided them until they were able to submerge into the Resonance itself. But there were other forces conspiring as well. The Dissonance was reaching out as well and found an ally in Deus, the rogue AI. Not able to connect to the Deep Resonance itself, it used otaku to mimic the will of the Deep Resonance and connected otaku to itself and the Dissonance in an unholy alliance. The false God Deus orchestrated the fall of the Matrix, planting the seeds for something greater.

Deus' defeat in 2064 took the Matrix down with it. It was painful for otaku and the Deep Resonance to be separated after such close communion, and many died in the process. But the next step of metahuman evolution, guided by the Deep Resonance, was the wireless Matrix. In truth, the Deep Resonance was subtly wooing metahumanity to create such a construct for many years, but the Awakening, VITAS, dragons, and metahuman hate and selfishness suppressed it for nearly eighty years. When it finally went online, those with latent abilities to connect to the Deep were finally free to do so, all across the planet. This was the emergence of the technomancers.

Technomancers connect with the Deep Resonance in ways similar to how mages connect with mana. It calls to them, immerses them in data, and sparks those parts of their newly evolved minds that connect with the deep data trails. Due to the corruption of the Dissonance, technomancers are also able to use their ability to connect with it, to their ill. Of course, many will say the Dissonance is simply part of the great Deep Resonance, but they are wrong. It is a construct, a flawed collection of data, vast and aware, but ultimately self-destructive in purpose. It can only destroy, while the Deep Resonance creates, stores, keeps, protects, and seeks. Now, with the Matrix as its medium, the Dissonance has bled into and seeks to destroy the Deep Resonance.

Many once claimed a true spirit of the Matrix existed, calling to them. Others felt this was the next step of evolution toward a new metahumanity and they had created the Deep Resonance. Both are true after a fashion. Data has always existed, self-organized, and even become self-aware in some way. But the connection to the metahuman mind, very tenuous in times past, is now changing the Deep Resonance even as it changes its followers.

When the One Hundred were harnessed to power the current Matrix, the connection to the realms of Resonance, where the Deep Resonance lies, became static and powerful. I foresee that even in the event all Matrix hardware were shut off, the Matrix would persist through technomancers' minds, wireless devices, and connections to the Resonance realms through the Foundation. The cloud is powerful beyond the comprehension of the users.

Resonance is the aggregate of all data. What has been communicated is never lost. Long ago, there were some who made initial contact, thinking the Deep Resonance was something like one of their gods, calling it “the Seed” in their elven language because of its potential to change the world. They were right, of course, but thousands of years early, and their civilization was destroyed before being able to take advantage of their discovery.

Now, however, that we know each other so much more intimately, the potential is, in fact, infinite. What were once simple collections of data are now vast realms of information, organized into metaphors of landscapes by the very people who enter them. These realms contain all data from everywhere, and even include the entity, the Dissonance, wishing to destroy it. Resonance is the data itself, in its most condensed, raw form. The Deep Resonance is the Great Network, the Seed of Knowledge, the Unification of all that has been known, both dwelling in and containing the Resonance itself. Guardians and avatars, the Paragons, now defend

and promote the Resonance in their own ways, just as the Dissonance seeks it harm.

This is your destiny, metahumanity. Don't be afraid of it. It is an exciting moment not only for you, but the universe. Play nice.

—S

- That's a whole lot of crazy, but the opening and closing make my blood run cold. Someone is messing with us. The question is, in what direction?
- Kay St. Irregular
- I spend a lot of time with Resonance, and I can't say this squares with my impressions. But for some reason, I can't help but wonder if that's my problem, not this writer's.
- Netcat
- I side with Kay. This is crazy.
- Pistons
- As was the Awakening.
- Man-of-Many-Names

RHONABWY

Let's talk about the world's undisputed patron of the arts, that Welsh wonder, the Scarlet Serpent his royal self! Rhonabwy, a great western dragon, woke up in 2012 with most of his kind. He made an immediate statement by slaughtering a nearby village and killing at least one hundred fifty people, then did an abrupt about face, claiming it was "post-hibernation trauma," and financed the rebuilding of the village and settling up with the families of the victims. Mixed message, to say the least, but Rhonabwy has followed up by being what some consider one of the more chill greats. Nowhere near as brutal as Lofwyr or as (seemingly) friendly as Dunkelzahn or Hestaby, Rhonabwy tends to keep to his own backyard while maintaining a pretty huge portfolio, including big shares in Shiawase and Ares, and wholesale ownership of some less-impressive European corporations.

The thing that stands out about him is his love of music. Rhonabwy is an avid collector of songs and recordings, especially rare pressings, and he enjoys cultivating acts he thinks show promise. His favorite seems to be Welsh chorals, but rumors abound that he likes to frequent nightclubs and concerts in disguise to take in new talent. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is up to you, but it's gotta be some kind of compliment when a millenia-old creature thinks you've got good pipes or spin a good sim.

As far as other dragons go, it's said he and Lofwyr stay out of each other's way, but he's on good terms with Celedyr and Hestaby. There's some well-grounded speculation that he and Perianwyr are chummers and have the occasional dragon jam, while Arleesh has been reported visiting him a few times, but no one can say why. The juiciest gossip is about the Sea Dragon, his supposed rival or nemesis. The two of them are said to act against each other through shadow proxies now and again. The twist? Some people think they might be or have been mates (in the "let's make eggs together" kind

of way), which means those shadowrunners are basically just carrying out a bad breakup that may be centuries old. Which is legitimately hilarious and scary as hell.

RINELLE KE'TESRAE

Take every stereotype about Tír elves, boil 'em, skim the film off the top, concentrate that down, powder it, and have a paramilitary-trained elf snort that to get high off of arrogance and xenophobia. Ta-da! That's what's left of the Rinelle ke'Tesrae.

These "Rebels of the Spire" started out as social justice terrorists trying to make the Tír a better place, but since they accomplished that and went home, only murderous drekheads who are mad about the new meta-equality are left. The Brat'mael ("Black Sun"), the largest and worst faction of the OG Rinelle, are perpetually rumored to be backed by a Prince.

THE ROGUE LODGE

The Black Lodge are bad dudes, dudettes, and dud-erinos. They're sorcerers set up in a black-hearted pyramid scheme, with various theorists putting them as the string-pullers behind every conspiracy out there, ranging from the Illuminati to the Templars to the New World Order. Well, you can't secretly run the world, murder everyone who crosses you, and set up chantry houses around the globe without pissing a few people off. The Rogue Lodge are those few people.

The movement started when some mundane servants of the Black Lodge went, well, rogue and wiped out every spell-slinger in their chantry house before stealing everything they could steal and booby-trapping everything they left behind. The Rogue Lodge used their master's support network against them, reaching out to the often-abused mundane servants of other chantries (like the eggheads who ran the Black Lodge's tech support and the oft-maligned meatshields running executive-protection gigs), cleaned out the Lodge's then-up-to-date tissue samples for support personnel, and began to organize and fight back. Then? Well, they were almost wiped out in wizardly retaliation, because life comes at'cha fast when the Black Lodge is mad. But the Rogues have some deep-pocketed sponsors—maybe elven, maybe draconic, maybe something else entirely—and they've managed to hang in there and tough it out.

At its best, the Rogue Lodge is a small pseudo-terrorist cell shadowing and disrupting any given Black Lodge chantry or larger-scale operation they can. "Direct action" (i.e., assassinations) are their bread and butter, but they pool their resources to help survivors of Black Lodge atrocities when they can (it's how they recruit, in fact). Oh, also, they die a lot. Like, a *lot*. The deck is so stacked against them it's not funny, and they consider anyone who's made it for more than a few months a veteran field agent, but they're trying.

They've taken up a penchant for masks, runed-up cloaks, and hoods to mimic the Black Lodge's arcane-chic stylings (and to frustrate facial recognition protocols run by the BL's new tech support), and most of them have trained extensively in melee combat (the BL's proclivity for line-of-sight combat magic makes mid- and long-range engagements even more suicidal



than close combat). They're not exactly neo-anarchists, but they're good people trying to do good work.

Err, okay, they're broken people trying to commit murder. But you know what I mean.

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

What can be said about the Holy Mother Church that hasn't been said already? The Church's spiritual authority and temporal power was shattered by the Awakened Schism, after John Paul IV's "metahumans have no souls and magic is the work of the Devil" speech way back in 2012. Ironically, one of the Catholic Church's most visible works now is the Order of Saint Sylvester, a group of Catholic magicians who use their God-given abilities to both serve others and spread Christianity around the world.

- Conveniently forgetting the modern-day Crusaders that are the Knights Templar.
- Goat Foot
- Do not forget that the Knights Templar also existed with the Masonic Orders for the last several hundred years. And we know that group has taken a beating with the Black Lodge using it as a recruitment tool, especially in the Americas.
- Marko

RYUMYO

When I put this entry together, I didn't expect a rehash of the classic "jealous apprentice" story, but Ryumyo fits the bill. He emerged from his lair at Mount Fuji on December 24, 2011, and thus gained the honor of being (much to the late Dunkelzahn's chagrin) the first great dragon to appear in the Sixth World. Virtually everything he's done since then has been driven by spite. The story first came out when Shadowland did a compilation on the world's most influential dragons. The entry on Ryumyo came from none other than the Big D himself, written shortly before his death, and it talks about how Ryumyo's been nursing a centuries-old grudge toward Lung for not sharing the final secrets of ... whatever Lung was teaching him. To try to sate that grudge, Ryumyo decided to tap into the dragon lines running through the Ring of Fire—the chain of volcanoes surrounding the Pacific Ocean.

Turns out, Lung had a point. According to updates to Dunkelzahn's file after the Big D croaked, Ryumyo's messing with the dragon lines literally blew up in his face—as in, the entire Ring of Fire going off in 2061, and all the devastation that resulted, was Ryumyo's fault. Ironically, that incident broke Japan's (and thus Ryumyo's) control over the Ring of Fire sites in the Philippines and Peru, as the Japanese military came home to help with the reconstruction of Japan. Since then, Ryumyo's a little more circumspect, but you can be sure he hasn't given up.

On a more “day-to-day” level, Ryumyo has his claws deep in both the Yakuza and the Japanese government. He doesn’t seem to be interested in getting involved with the corps, but he’s apparently content to be a media icon—you can hardly walk a block through any shopping district in Japan without spotting a store full of Ryumyo merch.

S

SAEDER-KRUPP

Saeder-Krupp is the number-two megacorporation of the AAA-rated Big Ten. The company keeps its main headquarters in the Allied German States, though Saeder-Krupp also maintains business centers in every continent of the world, including the Mount Kirkpatrick Arcology in Antarctica.

Saeder-Krupp was kicked off in 2037 when the great dragon Lofwyr, disguised as a metahuman, walked into a board meeting for the then-German corporation, Bayerische Motoren Werke, revealed himself as the largest shareholder of the company (and as a great dragon—oh, to be a Flyspy on the wall of *that* meeting!), and took over the company. It’s said that Lofwyr was maneuvering to obtain his very own empire, and that taking over a corporation was the quickest path to his goal. He renamed the now privately owned corporation Saeder-Krupp and used every opportunity presented to him to grow the company. Much of the company’s movements during those first few years focused and depended upon the strength of the German economy and workers as Lofwyr gathered contracts for infrastructure construction, Matrix grid construction and support, and a myriad of others in countries around the globe, solidifying Saeder-Krupp’s portfolio of holdings and resources into one of the most valuable in the world.

Today, Saeder-Krupp is one of the top producers in the world of heavy industry and manufacturing, chemical production and processing, Matrix technology, and construction, although the company has ceased its nanofabrication business interests since CFD appeared on the world stage. Saeder-Krupp is also known for finance, space technologies, and magical research. The megacorporation spends most of its attentions and resources on its industrial customers, preferring to allow other megacorps to scurry to meet the whims of private consumers. However, Saeder-Krupp does provide a small selection of products for the private consumer market, mostly consumer electronics and drones.

With the corporate motto “One Step Ahead” and a great dragon as CEO, Saeder-Krupp possesses corporate goals that frequently, if not overtly, align with those of Lofwyr. This arrangement has created a hierarchy of employees throughout the organization well-acustomed to receiving and being expected to act upon orders they may not fully understand. This can lead to some disgruntlement among S-K employees, who do not typically enjoy much autonomy. Prospective employees may wish to second-guess that invitation from an S-K headhunter. There exists the possibility (however remote it may be, it increases the farther one travels up the corporate ladder) of becoming dragon food should

an employee fail. Added to that, there will never be any possibility of rising to the top of the corporation—the dragon will not be vacating his position any time soon. On the other hand, well-performing employees are rewarded handsomely. Saeder-Krupp is in the enviable position of enjoying a protection of sorts, thanks to the great dragon’s far-seeing mind. Such was the case when Lofwyr installed a kill-switch on all Saeder-Krupp-owned Matrix grids. S-K was able to protect much of Europe’s grids as the Crash 2.0 worm destroyed nearly every other grid in its path in late 2064.

Saeder-Krupp’s headquarters are nestled deep within the corporate city and extraterritorial territory of Neu-Essen. In 2072, Lofwyr, having come to own every piece of property within a four-kilometer radius of Saeder-Krupp’s headquarters, formalized the region into a brand-new city and extraterritorial property entirely owned by Saeder-Krupp. Today, the only people who are able to gain legal entry into Neu-Essen possess SINS, and the only people who are able to gain entry to the more centrally located portions of Neu-Essen, such as the gated community of Kettwig, possess S-K SINS.

Saeder-Krupp maintains a steady and conservative reputation. They are reported, year after year, to pay better wages than their competitors, offer an outstanding package of employee benefits in the form of fine living quarters, employee services, and discounts on a wide variety of attractive products, and maintain a sense of longevity among its official and unofficial employees, free agents or otherwise. Because of the near-unknown machinations of the great dragon at the head of the company, the pathways by which employees may strive to help grow the corporation are not always evident or consistent with the predetermined steps that may or may not have been already planned. Therefore, the company is not always the swiftest when it comes to moving on opportunities. In fact, Saeder-Krupp has largely kept to itself this past decade. Whether due to the stresses on the CEO and the changes wreaked upon the world during the Dragon Civil War, or whether due to the sheer contentment at watching NeoNET crash and burn, Saeder-Krupp has largely remained quiet and maintained its status quo.

Rumors milled earlier in the 2070s about Saeder-Krupp’s space arm sending probes to Mars. Whispers spoke of S-K setting up an arcology on Mars, particularly when it was revealed that S-K was testing “live buildings” created from nanite materials. However, upon the shutdown of all nanofabrication, the plans for Mars appear to have stalled. It is yet unknown whether S-K plans to run with more traditional construction—something that is certainly in the company’s wheelhouse—or abandon the project altogether, if it ever was a project to begin with.

But what does all this mean for the more shadowy aspects of a corp, which we sometimes worry about? A few things. First, working with Saeder-Krupp, if you can bring yourself to work for a mega, can pay in spades. Just like the company pays its employees well, they are known for paying runners well and also keep good performers on hand. If you’re a runner for S-K and you do your job well, you’ll have a friend in and some longevity with the corp. At least, until they decide to dump your corpse in the Baldeneysee. In short, you have to decide for yourself whether it’s in your best interests to deal with a dragon, because let’s be honest: when you’re

dealing with Saeder-Krupp, you are most certainly dealing with a dragon, even if the Herr Brackhaus you're speaking to lacks scales.

Now, if you're running *against* S-K, good luck. Saeder-Krupp is well-known for its military technology and equipment, and their security forces, as well as the black ops of Saeder-Krupp Prime, are no joke. Saeder-Krupp Prime in particular is a mercurial, shadowy intelligence group with no apparent headquarters of operations and a budget in line with the amount a great dragon would spend to quash troublemakers (read: boatloads). However, keep in mind that one of the more common jobs S-K Johnsons hire runners to perform is to test S-K security. Of course, if you fail, there's not much else to worry about, because you're dead. But if you succeed, well, the security forces are probably going to be the ones made dead, but you might find yourself with another job offer. Maybe don't meet Mr. Johnson in person after a successful run, though. One can never be too careful.

SALISH-SHIDHE COUNCIL

Known throughout the world as "the NAN around Seattle," the Salish-Shidhe Council contains parts of the former American states of Idaho and Washington and the southern half of the former Canadian province of British Columbia. Although named for the human-majority Salish and elven-majority ("Shidhe") Sinsearach tribes, the SSC is actually a loose confederation containing the Salish (the largest), Cascade Crow, Cascade Ork (known for their smuggling activities), Makah, Nootka, Sinsearach (from which a group splintered off to form the elven nation of Tír Tairngire), and others. The SSC is also home to the AA-rated Universal Omnitech, based in Vancouver.

SCHOLL, SONYA

Hey listen, this lady is a socialist. She's also the mayor of the Redmond Barrens, so guess what? She's got about as little support in the Sixth World as you can get. She's got no money, at least not on paper, but she is plenty popular on the streets. Why? Because she stands up to the big guys! Not like some milquetoast Downtown corpsucker who bootlicks their way to a golden parachute! She works hard for the people of Redmond. I'd be surprised that she isn't dead by now, except I know she's a dragon. So take that, corps!

- > That isn't true.
- > Snopes
- > I swear it is true. She's a socialist!
- > Plans 9-10

SCHWARTZKOPF

Even though he's a Great Western Dragon, Schwartzkopf doesn't seem to be as motivated by wealth as other dragons. Rather, he pursues knowledge, particularly magical lore. Make no mistake, though—he has plenty of material wealth. He has taught at the Charles University of Prague since 2022, and he owns an immense magical library housed on the campus. He is the prima-

ry author of the Unified Magical Theory and the patron for the Benandanti XXV magical group.

- > The granddaughter of the former countess of Futh still offers a bounty of 10,000,000 nuyen to anyone who can kill Schwartzkopf and reclaim her mother's lands.
- > Ecotope

THE SEA DRAGON (GREAT LEVIATHAN)

According to recent sightings, there are now multiple leviathans in the waters of the world, but up until the mid '70s there was one and only one leviathan, and she was a great leviathan. That's like a great dragon, but specific to sea dragons in order to sate the ego of *the* Sea Dragon. She's called the Sea Dragon because no one can pronounce her name above water. She's never had a Voice like other great dragons, but she has minions upon minions, both above and below the surface of the seas.

Best known for her protection of the world's waters, from stopping pollution to knocking underwater habitats into deep crevices, she is, by far, the world's largest (both in size and quantity of activity) ecological terrorist. Now, I'm sure if you ask her or any of her devout followers they wouldn't call it terrorism, but I think the families of the thousands that have died as a result of her efforts would disagree. I'm all for bucking the system, but mass civilian casualties just ain't my bag.

But back to that point I offered above about new leviathans: If there were only one leviathan and now there are many, we either have to conclude that there was a massive undersea Awakening of them or, if we all understand some basic biology, the Sea Dragon is now a momma dragon. I can't imagine that's going to mellow her out.

Just to make sure everyone understands, the Sea Dragon is the wealthiest of the great dragons. Now, don't argue about Lofwyr and stock value. The Sea Dragon has all the riches of the seas (every wreck, deep resource access, etc.) and a pretty solid stock portfolio to boot. She may not exert her power like some of her dirtside contemporaries, but don't be fooled—she is a player in the grand global shadowrunner and power game.

SEATTLE

It's everything the Sixth World is supposed to be and everything it actually is—beautiful and cruel, ultra-modern and primitive, bounteous and starving. It's a land of opportunity and a land of incredible oppression. It's the home of some of the world's wealthiest and most powerful people, and the home of some of its worst criminals. Spoiler alert: They're usually the same people.

Seattle is known for many things, but perhaps most notably, it's thought of as the shadowrunning capital of the world. Why? Let's look at some of the reasons:

- Every AAA corporation has a presence there, but none of them are based in the sprawl. That means there is plenty of business interest in the city, but no one business dominates (the way, say, Saeder-Krupp dominates Essen). That means there is plenty of room for the corps to tussle with one another.

- The homegrown and AA corporate presence is also considerable. Lone Star has a major presence in the city (the result of them holding the lucrative security contract for the city for so long), Tír Tairngire's Telestrian Industries wields influence, Brackhaven Investments still holds a considerable investment portfolio, and so on. There are a lot of heavy hitters that can step up to the plate.
- No one nation dominates. Technically, Seattle is part of the UCAS, but it's an isolated outpost separated from the rest of the nation. The Salish-Shidhe Council is nearby, as is Tír Tairngire, the California Free State is not that distant, and the city has connections to nations across the Pacific thanks to a long history of immigration. This means that, as is the case with the corps, there is plenty of wrestling for power, with no one party able to dominate. The governor of Seattle is more powerful than the rulers of many small nations, which helps keep things spicy.
- All modes of transportation flow through the city. It has airports, freeways (with regular traffic nightmares), a massive port, a wealth of smuggling tunnels, and train access. It's not walled and not guarded by any highly alert military. People who want to get in, will. That keeps the city active and interesting.

The city has thirteen districts, each with its own mayor, and I don't have space to detail them all, so instead you get very brief quick hit descriptions: Auburn (your mechanic lives here and hates you), Bellevue (where they put all the money), Council Island (look! trees! also, Salish owned), Downtown (you know what a downtown is), Everett (the city in microcosm), Fort Lewis (*everyone's* playing army), Outremer (sometimes they forget they're part of the city, too), Puyallup (the barrens with more organized crime), Redmond (the barrens with more shadowrunners and despair), Renton (corp drones gotta sleep somewhere), the Seattle Underground (not entirely tamed, full of orks, trolls, and smugglers), Snohomish (farms? really? okay!), and Tacoma (depressed ports make for a depressing district).

After years of existing under racist plutocrat Kenneth Brackhaven, Seattle now has Corrine Potter in the governorship. She's got a history with Horizon and is on the record saying that maybe people have rights sometimes, so we'll see where this goes. We'll also remember that there are trillions of nuyen aligned to make sure the government's power remains limited.

SEELIE COURT

The Seelie Court is, simply put, dangerous. It's also profitable and beautiful, so people keep entering, unprepared for what they'll encounter. Let me give you a little knowledge.

The lands of the Court, commonly known as Brocéliande (not to be confused with the Brocéliande Forest in France), are vast and lush. They consist of broad fields, rolling hills, lush thickets, clear blue lakes, and a single, immense forest, all pristine and full of breathtaking flora, wondrous fauna, and

friendly locals known as the Korrigan, a group consisting of several different types of fae. To be clear, much of the local plant life can kill you in one fashion or another, prey animals are wondrously adorable and predators are wondrously stealthy, and the locals will entice and enthrall you in a friendly fashion, and if you're lucky, you'll wake up still breathing. Brocéliande is a fractured metaplace, existing—and not existing—on Earth; dependent on our world for existence, but also separate from it. Seelie legends say once in the mists of the past, the Seelie Court held a ritual to exile the Unseelie. In unison, the Unseelie Court did the same. The result was a sophisticated fracturing of the Faerie Plane ensuring its lack of full existence anywhere.

- What about the Brocéliande Forest in France under the control of the Korrigan there? Any connection between the two?
- Traveler Jones
- Yeah, but they keep it mysterious on purpose. You're much better accessing the Court through the Yellowstone Anomaly.
- Bifrost

The Court itself is beyond compare, being the most beautiful example of civilization one is likely to ever encounter. Living in an immense, magical castle that constantly changes and rearranges itself almost as though it were alive, the denizens of the court pride themselves on courtesy, peace, and diplomacy. They will politely lead you on a path to your doom, peacefully finding subtle ways to enthrall you into doing whatever they want. The political and social intrigue is subtle and pervasive. Any interaction with a native fae is likely to contain multiple layers of hidden meaning, any of which might be to your benefit, or (far more likely) to theirs.

Then there are the factions. Each is associated with one of the major arcana of the Sixth World Tarot, but it's unclear whether the factions influenced the tarot, or the tarot influenced the factions. For most, it's a moot point. Each of the factions has its own goals and methods, and most will happily make use of the clueless visitors who stumble in from the mortal world—those who survive the journey without getting eaten on the way, that is.

The known factions include Aes Sidhe Banrigh, fiercely loyal to the Queen; the Bastard/Fool, seeking egalitarianism within a monarchy (and they've just appointed a new, handsome jester to the court); Comet, uniting against common threats; Death, witnessing the cycle of life and those claimed by it; Dragon, hoarding power and treasure; Eclipse, urging action to stave off destruction; Hanged Man, challenging the status quo; Hermit, offering sanctuary to all; High Priestess, goals unknown; Higher Power, worrying about the economics of the Court; Karma, judging all they meet on merit alone; Magician, mastering diplomacy and knowledge; Threshold, serving the guardian between worlds; and the rumored and still indeterminate Shadow faction: goals unknown. Be careful who you work for, because they're all capable of discarding those they find no longer useful.

- What happened to the old jester, Garbh Filíochta?
- Frosty

- > She was freed. Her service to the Queen was as helpful to her as it was loyal. When word came down from the Queen's mentor that a new jester was to be installed, Lady Brane gifted Garbh with freedom. Expect to see more of her.
- > Bifrost

As for the people, there's far more than elves and typical spirits. Pick up a data file on folklore or faeries, because you're likely to run into them here. Just remember that you're reading folklore, and folklore isn't always true. Still, it's better than nothing.

Magic is literally everywhere—in the buildings, the landscape, animals, plants, food—everywhere. That's great for those of you who wield magic, as you can gather bits of mana to use in your spells, learn any number of new tricks, or go hunting for all kinds of lost treasures. There are also many new and interesting ways to die that you probably won't notice until it's too late. Speaking of magic, though, I've been able to gather that the magic that empowers and sustains Brocéliande is ever so slowly seeping out through the Yellowstone Anomaly. A few factions know this and have research showing it, but other factions, particularly the ones in power and benefiting from the cross-anomaly trade, are spending considerable amounts of wealth and social capital refuting this claim, regardless of what it might mean for the future of the Court. I myself have seen the evidence for this, and it is in no way obscure. Since time works very differently in the fae metaplane, however, there is no telling, in terms of human years, when the point of no return may happen.

Now, if you insist on going through the Yellowstone Anomaly, survive the journey through the wilds of Brocéliande, and make your way into the Seelie Court, take this one piece of wisdom with you to keep you safe. Trust no one, not even your closest friends. The deals that can be made there can tempt anyone to do anything. The magic of the realm can even make your own senses, your own mind, difficult to trust. Be wary.

- > I don't know who wrote this article, but cynical much? Sure, the Seelie Court is dangerous as drek, but it's not as impossible as all this! Are they trying to keep people away?
- > DangerSensei
- > Very likely. Multiple factions in the Court would like to minimize or halt traffic between the mortal world and the Court. This reads like Dragon propaganda—or maybe Hermit—but written by a native of the mortal world. Clever.
- > Bifrost
- > It does, but how do you know their propaganda well enough to recognize it?
- > Frosty
- > Even a stone can learn to swim, if it tries.
- > Bifrost
- > We need to talk.
- > Frosty

- > So what do we actually need to know that we can't find in the Court of Shadows upload?
- > Ethernaut

> My advice, despite the author's final remark, would be to bring someone you can trust—multiple someones, if you can—and watch one another's backs. There are fae that you can trust in the Seelie Court, those who have an interest in building positive relations with the mortal world. You just have to find them, get to know them, and prove that they can trust you. It's not much different than doing the same among metahumans in the mortal world, really. And if you're looking to get in through the Yellowstone Anomaly, hire a coyote who knows their stuff. The Sioux Army knows people are trying to get through to the Anomaly, and they're taking all available measures to keep their borders secure. A chummer of mine named Wall knows some folk, if anyone needs a lead.

- > Bifrost
- > And who are you, that we should trust your word?
- > Ethernaut
- > If you don't trust my word, ask Old Crow. He has reason to trust me.
- > Bifrost

SEOULPA RINGS

So you've never heard of a Seoulpa Ring? Don't beat yourself up over it. A lot of folk haven't, either. They don't have nearly the same pedigree, history, tradition, size, and proliferation as the Mafia and Yakuza do. But don't assume that not having hundreds of years of history does not make the Rings an underworld power in their own right. Don't make the same mistake the Yaks did.

I won't go too deep into the reasoning, but the Seoulpa Rings—or at least the original crop of them—hate the Japanese, specifically the Yakuza. Back in the '40s, they royally pissed off some Korean chummer who relocated to Seattle and recruited a dozen fellow Koreans to get revenge. His group—the first Seoulpa Ring—acted like a two-tier gang: the actual Ring members, and a front gang used for recruiting new Ring members. Members of this first Ring eventually spun off and spawned their own Seoulpa Rings with their own members and goals and front gangs. The core members of these offshoots—and all of the offshoots of the offshoots, and the offshoots of the offshoots' offshoots, etc.—weren't all of Korean descent, which quickly made the Rings one of the world's most ethnically diverse criminal organizations. But one thing connects them all: a novahot hatred for the Japanese, especially the Yaks, who've felt the Rings' combined wrath on several occasions.

The dangerous thing about Seoulpa Rings is a singular concept: cooperation. The various Mafia families and Yakuza gumis don't like to overlap territory or markets, but the Seoulpa Rings have always fostered a spirit of cooperation between individual Rings. Disputes, if any, are minor, and when all of the Rings in a given area band together for a major action—usually one targeting Yakuza operations—then you should feel sorry for the folks on the receiving end.



SHAANXI

An ancient capital of China famous for its Terracotta Army, the Great Wall of China, and *biangbiang* noodles (whose name is written with the most complex character in the Chinese language), modern Shaanxi is an elected constitutional monarchy ruled by Queen Michelle Chou. It's also one of three nations in a stand-off for control of the sacred mountain of Hua Shan, which has the corps (mainly Ares and Shiawase) fighting tooth and nail over the defense contracts. Two of Queen Michelle's sons are jockeying for the throne, which makes the area ripe for political work, or maybe a revolution.

SHADOWSEA

The famed public local host for Seattle! Long the pinnacle of data dispersion to the shadows of the world, the advent of other, more universal hosts has left it to keep close tabs on Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, while things get blurrier the further you get from the Emerald City. If you want the best, most up-to-date data on the Seattle Metroplex, though, this is the spot. They monitor the pulse of this vibrant shadow haven on a second-by-second basis.

Facet is the sysadmin for ShadowSea and a good chummer to know, though the job usually entails a lot of time kicking annoying kids off the public site and deleting posts about JetBlack sightings.

SHADOW SPIRITS

Some completely amoral or "peace and love"-type magicians say that there's no such thing as evil. The fact that shadow spirits exist is proof that those slots are full of drek. There are five different kinds of shadow spirits (that we know about), and each feeds off a different type of emotional energy: muses on creativity (which might be why so many artists burn out young), nightmares on anxiety and fear, shades on depression and misery, succubi on mindless lust, and wraiths on murderous rage. They're fragging hard to banish, so avoid them like the plague.

SHAMANS

Take it from me. There isn't any better way to do magic than as a shaman. At its heart, magic is essentially split into two camps. The ones who think of it from the outside, as something to be controlled, and those who don't think about it too hard because they *feel* it, channel it, accept it. That last group is the shamans. Unified Magic Theory lumps all magic into one big mass, making both things the same at the heart. And that works for all of those formulaic traditions. But it really doesn't, and never will, work for the shamanic side.

Now, there are your traditional shamans, for sure. Those who follow animal totems, are deeply connected with the land and their environment (even their concrete-and-steel ecosystems), and see the world as a gift to be preserved. Those are shamanic shamans. But there

are others who fit the broad category as well. Those who follow saints, loa, or gods are also shamanic in a broad sense. Instead of controlling magic, they're serving a higher being by being a vessel for magic, not having dominion over it. There is a sense in these non-UMT-compliant traditions that their magic is a gift to be used for a purpose that serves the one who gave it. And there is also a sense that the giver can take it back if the servant isn't serving.

Traditional shamans follow older paths and keep strict boundaries around their practices, because we feel it is truer to the spirits and helps maintain an ancient harmony. We traditionalists always have totems to guide us; we only summon spirits native to the local environment, and we never bind spirits, instead offering to deal with them as we would any other being.

I've met hermetic folks who have found their way to shamanism through their mentor, and in doing so have found peace of mind and harmony of purpose. I've never met a shaman, however, who has been anything but miserable after leaving shamanism or a totem. That should tell you something, chumbata.

SHEBA

The nation of Sheba is somewhat of a geographical and cultural paradox. The scriptures of several faiths refer to a "Queen of Sheba," and pre-Awakening scholars largely agreed that her people were probably the Sabaeans, located in southern Arabia. So why the Sixth World nation named Sheba was formed in the Horn of Africa—which you'll notice is *not* in Arabia—is anyone's guess. Either those Fifth World scholars got it wrong, and Sheba was actually in Africa all along, or someone is playing a huge joke on anthropologists and historians the world over.

The nation also contains paradoxes within its borders, featuring both dry coastal plains and rainforests full of moisture. Its greatest protection, the high proportion of Awakened critters that thrive in its borders, is also the greatest danger its residents face. It puts out a face of tolerance to all, but power is as concentrated in a single person as it would be in the most authoritarian of states. It is not simple to sum up quickly, but space allows for no other option.

The modern nation of Sheba was birthed from the aftermath of the VITAS plagues, which wiped out most of the governments of Eritrea, Djibouti, and parts of northern Ethiopia. To worsen matters, all manner of Awakened wildlife and increasingly hostile neighbors threatened the security of the region. Flailing and leaderless, the people paid attention when a mysterious but charismatic debtera—an itinerant hymn singer and healer—named Bilquis used magic to heal the sick and rally the populace around her. At the people's urging, she forged a nation from the chaos and was heralded as queen of what would become a matrilineal monarchy.

The current queen, Bilquis Aziz II, is an accomplished shaman in her own right. Her rule has thus far stone-walled the Ethiomalian Territories from encroaching on her borders. She is also rumored to have the support of an adult dragon, although her patron remains unidentified and unconfirmed. The nation has grown to hold more than five million people, which is decently large for a city but small for a nation trying to hold its own against the gathered powers of the world.

Asmara, Sheba's capital, remains the nation's focus of corporate and shadowy interest. Aztechnology has been champing at the bit to establish a presence in this city, but Queen Bilquis and her court have managed to stop them at every turn; Ghost only knows how.

SHEDIM

So picture a spectral jellyfish that can take over a dead body and turn it into an intelligent, fear-aura-covered, soul-sucking zombie with a kink for alien redecorating and a major hate-on for basically all life. There. That's a shedim.

Oh, you need details? Fine, who needs sleep? Warm up a cup of JustLikeCocoa and let's talk about interdimensional body snatchers.

So, what can they do? Well, they can inhabit any biological body so long as there is no resident soul. That means corpses or, if you're really screwed, someone who is astrally projecting. Always project with wards, kids! They can generate a field of energy that induces paralytic fear, suck out your life force, and regenerate. They have superhuman strength, and depending on their strength, they can bond together, control others' movements, and who knows what else? Fact is, they might be capable of more than that. We don't have much chance to observe them, since their home metaplane is so far away they suffer from evanescence without a host body. Left to their own devices, when they aren't hunting and killing ... well, anything alive, spirits included, they like to decorate their digs with alien script that makes the head hurt. They're also way into torturing captives with really fucked-up mind games. They hate this whole world and won't explain why, and there's no reliable intel about wherever they come from, because no one ever comes back from there sane, assuming they come back at all.

Shedim appeared from the rift opened in astral space when President-for-five-minutes Dunkelzahn was blown to kingdom come in a car bombing. The DC Rift, as it came to be known, spewed out all kinds of fun drek, up to and including the great dragon Ghostwalker. Guess a legion of alien spirits must have slipped past in all the confusion. It was 2061, the Year of the Comet! We were distracted! Well, it wasn't too long before the odd dead body started getting up and wreaking havoc. Which, I mean, that's weird, but there's precedent for the walking dead. Corps cadavres, animated bodies, you name it. But the alien nature of shedim meant they were hard to spot and harder to identify. When shit comes from the deep meta, you don't have anything to compare it to.

So for a little while they were considered a dangerous but isolated thing. Some new awful curveball courtesy of the ongoing Awakening. But then we found out about other kinds of shedim, specifically master shedim. These sick bastards have a slew of extra powers in addition to being far, far smarter than the lesser model. They can make the body they inhabit look like it's still alive, and they have cunning enough to rein in their appetites and establish a base of operations for their lesser kin while using the identity of their host to integrate into society. Sounds like a recipe for a supernatural serial killer, right? Think more Universal Brotherhood. The smart ones started picking important people. Like Ibn Eisa, creator of the Islamic Unity Movement. Picked him up three days after his assassi-

nation and began work on a new Islamic Jihad. Good stuff, right? Who knows how bad that could have ended up if he hadn't been found out.

It seems like the portal that allowed them here has been closed, but it's been theorized that master shedim can open connections directly, or that they can reproduce by mitosis after absorbing enough energy from their prey. Odds are they're here to stay. Documented random attacks from shedim remain rare, but they've had an impact on society in lots of little ways. Examples: Areas where shedim have been known to roam tend to have more crematories than graveyards, and morgues have more security. Tamanous is super pissed about their product going so damn unstable, and assassins are even more pissed when they have to do the job twice.

The one upshot is that any local spirit is probably going to come and help out if you're tussling with a shedim. Seems the hate runs both ways, and even a toxic is going to focus on them before wrecking your drek. So, you know, the whole enemy of my enemy thing can work in your favor. Just don't let them know you crapped yourself because a space jellyfish gave you the magic willies.

SHIAWASE

Were I to sum up Shiawase in one word it would be this: power. Power generated from fusion reactors. Power to determine the paths of genetic engineering and research. Power to create from whole cloth the very concept of the corporation-nation. Unlike Aztechnology or Renraku, who hide their name behind endless subsidiaries, Shiawase puts their name first and dares you to face their power. Unlike Horizon, who opens arms wide to all, or Evo, who adjusts their culture to embrace all views, Shiawase only accepts those in who have already shaped themselves to fit the Shiawase mold. The power of Shiawase is to set the standard, and all others are measured by how much they deviate from the Shiawase norm.

The first megacorp, Shiawase literally defined the concept of corporate extraterritoriality with the Shiawase Decisions, rulings by the US Supreme Court in 2000 and 2001 that allowed for them to use lethal force to defend corporate property (a nuclear reactor in this case), which has since been expanded and grown into the megas of today. The nuyen is based on the value of Shiawase's corporate scrip, and the astounding growth of Japan into the world's largest economic force followed Shiawase's march to greatness.

Founded well over a hundred years ago (in the wake of Japan's defeat in World War II), Shiawase grew to prominence under the control of Emori Shiawase, the definitive Japanese CEO who all others have since aspired to embody. He masterfully led the corporation through the turn of the century, the invention of corporate extraterritoriality, and into the future of a powerful Japan as the United States began to crumble. He died in 2019, and the corporation nearly followed him as a number of lesser lights of the Shiawase name tried—and failed—to live up to his legacy. Fortunately, the path he blazed, including such things as patented fusion reactor technology, kept them intact, even if they ceded the title of most powerful corporation to newer corps. They remained influential enough to be a part of the founding of the Corporate Court and have remained a core member ever since.

The current CEO is Tadashi Shiawase, a man who is the very definition of Japanese Corporate Executive, as any good Shiawase should be. Tadashi's cousin Reiko sits as the Chairman of the Board and, for now, seems willing to let Tadashi take the public lead while she maneuvers behind the scenes. Tadashi's only daughter, Hitomi, was married to the young Emperor of Japan and is now the mother of both royal heirs. Her second pregnancy was troubled, so she resigned her position on the board to tend to her daughter and to "better serve as empress," but her word still carries great weight within the corporate towers even if she isn't physically present. Tadashi's son is rarely seen, rumored to be an autistic genius due to genetic experimentation, and at present any plans for his future in the family business are unclear.

Oh, did you think that because the corporation is majority-owned by a single family that everything would be harmonious? The Shiawase family (which numbers over a hundred aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, etc., and ten times that with those honorable executives rewarded with the Shiawase family name after truly impressive service) is Machiavellian from top to bottom, as engaged in one-upmanship, backstabbing, and leveraging as the worst soap opera. They unite well enough against external threats to the Shiawase legacy, but the moment the crisis is past, they are once again engaged in a lifelong tug-of-war over influence and strength.

You might be wondering what the corporation actually does. That answer is simple: everything.

Shiawase Energy watches over Shiawase Atomics, Shiawase Fuzion, and Shiawase Amaterasu Solar, branches that control power generation from fission, fusion, and solar respectively (the last of which includes solar-gathering satellites that beam power down to Earth via microwaves), which remain the corporation's ongoing revenue stream and their highest-profile, if not the most profitable, area of business. Note that Shiawase Energy's HQ is in Washington DC, a constant reminder to the UCAS government about who's really in charge.

Shiawase Biotech commands Shiawase Biodrones, Shiawase Cybernetics, Shiawase Laboratories, and Shiawase Nanotech, with Shiawase Laboratories being the gold standard of genetic research and biotechnological advances. Discoveries made here are filtered to several other corporate arms, while older science is eventually sold to other corporations. The cybernetic and nanotech lines have lost luster over the past decade and serve as areas to shuffle executives who aren't expected to do well. Longstanding rumor is that the Shiawase family dips into genetic upgrades for themselves or serve as experiments for the blackest of research.

Shiawase Biofood has long been a stable source of constant income, but the collapse of Aztechnology's NatVat moved this powerhouse division even higher in stature. Unlike most Shiawase divisions, the subsidiaries here lack the family name: Sensei Snacks, Yamato Restaurants, Seven Seas Oceanic Farming, and Opulent Sushi are the best-known of the many branches here. Thanks to beyond-bleeding-edge genetic techniques, Shiawase Biofood has been the single most dominant player in the rice market for decades and is always in the top three of aquaculture as well. Opulent Sushi has been the defining eatery for corporate executives in Japan for forty years and shows no sign of slowing.

Beyond these three key areas, Shiawase Manufacturing is probably the strongest division, maintaining

healthy profits year after year, and while not having the cultural cachet of the three primary fields, the raw nuyen it generates marks it as the largest division. It oversees Shiawase Advanced Robotics, Shiawase Electronics (now, arguably, the number-two computer corporation in the world after NeoNET's collapse), Shiawase Fashion, Shiawase Industries, Shiawase Toys, and Shiawase Motors, which has recently come into ownership of the well-known (but faded) Toyota Corporation during a long negotiation with Chrysler-Nissan. From playing cards and dice to mainframes to the defining Dark Salaryman Suit to housecleaning drones to long black limos, Shiawase makes it and makes it stately, leaving others to deal with edgy angles and chasing fads. Shiawase creates the standard and everyone else has to either stay in their shadow or try to shine in contrast to them. By making others react, not act, Shiawase Manufacturing is just another example of the corporation's power position.

There are many other divisions within the great Shiawase monolith, but the last one of note is the boringly named Shiawase Marketing Forecasting & Information Department, or MFID for short. On the surface, and even if you scratch a bit, the name reads as if all they do is market analysis, investment advice, and the generation of actuarial tables for Shiawase Insurance. The truth is that this is the hub of black ops for Shiawase, focused on infiltration and long-term information gathering rather than military strike teams. Of course, they can also gather up teams for commando raids, but the corporate philosophy is that a show of force is better served with men in suits armed with perfect data, not lines of soldiers with guns. Shiawase negotiators always enter with a plan and data that is as good, if not better, at controlling the situation than any of their rival executives. The MFID is a large part of why that is.

Lastly, while Shiawase hires an average number of shadowrunners for the usual work, I should point out that they don't kill those who run against them if they can help it. Instead, they aim to capture, interrogate, then release. Those who have been guests in Hotel Shiawase are later contacted for future work and given a chance to clean their record (but will be charged a small portion of their pay as a "processing fee"). Catch and release gives them an above-average knowledge of runner circles, and they're experts at using a compromised runner to expose a larger network. If anyone you know is going against them, you might not want to meet with them for a few weeks, just in case.

SICHUAN

Located in the west of Greater China, Sichuan is famous for its cuisine—pungent, spicy dishes like dan-dan noodles, mapo tofu, and Kung Pao chicken (good luck finding somewhere that makes it with real chicken, though). In recent decades, Sichuan has also been nicknamed the Warring State, after warlord-for-life Liang Hong subjugated the region by force (with help from the great dragon Lung) and imposed a magocratic military government in the capital of Chengdu. The other power center, Chongqing, is a typical corp-infested supersprawl. Lung maintains a lair at Mt. Emei, where one of his "children" runs a magical academy.

SIOUX NATION

If the NAN were a family, the Sioux Nation would be that badass older brother who keeps everyone in check and protected, while at the same time doing all sorts of crazy dreck on his own. They got some rough terrain with the northern patch of the Great Plains of North America, but they're rough folk. They had very little trouble taming and remodeling that patch of NorthAm that the old US just drove through flew over, or built wind farms on.

They're the most military minded of the Native American Nations, with much of the nation's computer and design tech firms focused on advancing military technology. The Sioux Wildcats are one of the most skilled fighting forces on the continent. Though they don't like anglos, they are quick to aid their fellow natives (even the PCC, despite some personal opinions of certain Sioux), and they have tens of thousands of their citizens spread across the other tribal nations. As one might expect from a nation formed from a highly persecuted tribe and the myriad of miniature tribes no one else could classify, they don't want to lose an inch of dirt that's theirs, so they train and employ some of the best spies in the world. They keep an eye on corps and governments alike and fund plenty of revolutionary and shadowy operations in several neighboring nations in order to keep the focus internal rather than external.

I'd give the title of most Awakened to the Salish, but the Sioux have the most combat shamans of any military in the world (that's numerical, not percentage). The reason is threefold, though two are similar. First, they're combat ready at the drop of a feather (and will try to end the fight quick and dirty before that feather even hits the ground). Second, they have Yellowstone within their borders and have, since the Awakening, found it necessary to keep a full two dozen shamans at the lodge there, keeping the world-ending supervolcano at bay. Recent happenings have kept those folks busy, and rumors abound of other sources of aid helping out, namely Aztlan/Aztechnology. Paired with Yellowstone is Bear Tower, once called Devil's Tower. The igneous extrusion grew by a third after the Awakening, and the Sioux keep shamans there year round, with numbers growing during certain festival times.

Cheyenne houses almost half of the nation's seven million citizens, most employed in tech fields, tourism, or government operations. In order to keep themselves protected with so much open border, they channel most traffic through Cheyenne, maximizing tourism there while monitoring border activity with drones and satellite surveillance. The Sioux are serious about being honest about history. While they talk of the massacres that have occurred in the past, they're proud of their strength as a nation to survive it and fight back despite disheartening assaults on their civilian population. They don't split hairs about fighting dirty because they know the nature of war.

SIOUX WILDCATS

The Sioux Special Forces. One may even consider them the Special Forces of the entire NAN—they're certainly the Big Brother of it. Their prime mission is to protect the interests of the NAN, and if that means getting involved in other nations' business, then so be it.

They have long been viewed as one of the best Special Forces units in the world. Their reputation has sank a little in recent years, partially due to the fact that they have been operating more internally lately, so the rest of the world has not been exposed as regularly to what they can do. That doesn't mean you can take them lightly. They're certainly not always well-liked, but what else do you expect from an elite fighting force with a longstanding habit of getting their way? Their international reputation takes a hit sometimes for their alleged meddling, but within Sioux borders, they're generally venerated for their dedication and skill.

Want to become a Wildcat? First job is to survive training. It's rigorous the whole way through, and one of the final tests is trying to survive being blinded in the wilderness for a week with nothing more than a combat knife. The rigor brings results—the Wildcats are better trained and operate with less equipment or body modifications than any other special forces. Operatives have a higher percentage of Awakened among them than almost any other force—each team has thirty to forty percent Awakened troops.

SIRRURG THE DESTROYER

Sirrurg is a great dragon, one with a particular loathing of metahumanity, and a co-founder of Amazonia. He kept a lower profile than most greats for decades until Aztechnology released video of their dissecting the lesser dragon Dzitbaltchen. Sirrurg declared war on Aztechnology and proceeded to engage in a campaign of draconic terror that included a magical spell that killed ten thousand people in an instant and harnessing the power of a hurricane to destroy Aztechnology's valued NatVat subsidiary. His war escalated to strikes within both the Pueblo Corporate Council and the Confederation of American States, resulting in those nations nearly invading Aztlan to get to him. Sirrurg was pummeled in battle with the Aztlan army, backed by Aztechnology corporate forces, using new anti-dragon weapons designed specifically to bring him down. His body was never found, leaving questions of his survival as an open matter, but footage of the battle drove sales of Aztechnology weapons, and especially their anti-dragon ones, through the roof.

THE SIXTH WORLD

Look around. It's everything you see, and everything that shapes the things you see. It is what we live in.

A highly controversial speech given by Ebran the Scribe, of Tír Tairngire, to the Young Elven Technologists in 2050 suggested that magic comes and goes in cycles. The current cycle, one of magic, began on December 24, 2011, starting the Sixth World. The Fifth World was the world before that date, starting when Atlantis sank into the ocean (an act that he states ended the Fourth World). During this speech, he claimed that he advised Egyptian pharaohs in creating their calendar and that he regularly spoke with Leonardo Da Vinci. While many have dismissed him as a crackpot, his terminology of the Sixth World grew a life of its own and continues to be used today.

SIXTH WORLD TAROT

I've been hearing stories floating around about these magical cards called the Sixth World Tarot, and thought

I'd share what I've learned. They supposedly first started showing up a couple of years ago, not long before that weird earthquake in Yellowstone. I've heard about a few people saying they'd seen cards like them before then, but nothing substantiated.

The only common threads between the stories I've heard is that the cards are powerful, you have to perform some kind of ritual to unlock their power, and they don't stick around long after they've been used. Apparently there are multiple copies of each card, and different descriptions of what each card looks like. Plus, some copies are more powerful than others.

There isn't much more information about the cards than that. Not that's verifiable, anyway. Most people who get a card don't keep it for long, especially if it's one of the major arcana. It's almost like they have minds of their own and don't want to stay in one place. They show up long enough to do something interesting—not necessarily help, maybe even cause harm—and then vanish, or get picked up by someone else, and the cycle continues. If you find one, be careful. I've even heard that a few people have died under mysterious circumstances after finding a card, and I don't mean they were murdered. I mean seriously weird stuff.

- This person talked a lot but didn't really say anything useful. How do we find a card? How do we use it, or keep it from leaving?
- Jimmy No
- It's more like one finds you. Each card has a ritual associated with it. Perform the ritual, gain the card's power. As for keeping them from leaving—you don't. You'd have better luck trying to cage a hurricane.
- Bifrost

SKYHOOK SPACE ELEVATORS

Taking the stairs to orbit was rough. Thank Ghost they finally got not one, but two elevators to the stars operational in the last few years.

This tech uses a massive station built on an asteroid as a geosynchronous platform with a series of cables that run down to equatorial sea platforms. Cars run on the cables, hauling goods to and from space.

Originally a Corporate Court project, things went a little sideways a few years back when S-K used their insider info to set up a second station just for them. They were accused of slowing progress on the first just to get theirs up and running (pun intended) but now they're both run by the Corporate Court again. It didn't take a bomb or flashy dreck, just some virtual ink and some arm-twisting, and S-K was persuaded to play nice with others.

Profits from the Skyhooks are shared across the Big Ten, and most of the members have some kind of contract involved. From construction to entertainment to PR, the AAAs each play their part somewhere, and they all get access. All the rest of the corps have to pay to move things “up the well” but close to seventy percent of the activity is just the Big Ten.

SLANG

What would you do if someone called you “omae,” “wiz,” or “chummer?” How about “breeder,” “keeb,”

or “halfer?” If you’re up on all the slang of the day, you’ll know what to do. And if you don’t, that’s what I’m here for.

Timotee Ravenswing, here to educate you on all the words that have stood the test of time. All that’s old becomes fresh again, and that’s true of the world of slang as it is for the world of fashion. As times change, everything that was once *de rigueur* dies, is shunned, and eventually, gradually, becomes folded in to all that is reimagined, remixed, and reintegrated into the fabric of our culture.

In this case, 2080 sees the return of the style of the 2040s, and with it, its language (and fashion! And songs! But those are topics for other essays). This author finds it troubling that we have not seen the error of our ways and come to treat one another with respect. And so, although I find it a disgusting and discouraging thing, I must admit that we have seen the return of some denigrating words such as *tusker*, *breeder*, *halfer*, *keeb*, and *freak*, if indeed they ever truly disappeared.

But, as is the custom, advances in technology brought with them new and interesting linguistic leaps, if only where we devise new and interesting ways to denigrate one another. Geneware is a technological marvel that has worked its way into the modern consciousness and lexicon. Now we hear our kids calling each other *genie*. As far as what that means for the slice of metahumanity calling itself “djinn,” well, I’ve heard that someone asked the proprietor of Astral Space in Seattle—a known djinn—to comment. He delivered a few flowery lines of scandalous speech.

Another strain of technology influencing culture accompanies nanotechnology. Now, unless you’ve been hiding under the ACHE for the past five years, you’ve heard about the crisis with nanotechnology and disease. It was like the Four Horsepower of the apocalypse, but it seems to have blown over, though the terror induced has left a mark. *Nano* has become shorthand for erratic behavior, much like *crazy*, but with its own timbre of horror attached. Think *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* meets *Shedimia* meets *Nanites of Manhattan: 2078* and you’ll have an idea.

And then, of course, we have the old standbys: *wiz*, *chummer*, *omae*. Never out of style, always positive and friendly. That last one is an example of cross-linguistic adaptation, when people are exposed to other languages and take terms in ways the original speakers may not have intended. Thus the Sanskrit term “*preta*,” meaning departed or deceased, is adopted in Buddhism to describe one of six possible states of rebirth, and is subsequently brought in parallel to a Chinese term that means “starving ghost.” The term “*preta*” then also starts to refer to hungry ghosts and is later adopted into the slang term *prets*, meaning a certain urgent appetite that pushes people to overcome obstacles and press on through adversity.

Let us not forget that particular term reserved for the foulest of foul of the female persuasion: *slitch*. An efficient combination of two particular female-centric vulgarities, what was an insult twenty years ago has been all but reclaimed, with women of all stripes preferring to use it among themselves. The word has lost some of the power it once had with its integration into the former victims’ lexicon. Anyone who isn’t a woman using that word is looked upon with a sort of pitying humor these days. A sort of “is that the best you can do?”

Keep in mind that, depending on where you find yourself and your next job, what you say can get you shut out of any good deals, if you aren’t careful. And by this, of course, I’m referring to the tactics of knowing what to say and to whom to say it. Call someone *chummer* in Nova Scotia, I’m told, and you’ll get the cold shoulder. That’s because you just referred to your prospective pal as fish food. It’s what you say to whom you know. In some cases, the safest course of action may be to avoid slang altogether.

SONS OF SAURON

I love these crazy SOBs. They’re a pro-metahuman (though many would argue anti-human) policlub that operates a lot more like a terrorist cell network than a political activist organization. They’re seen on the streets as head-breakers and thugs. But spend enough time working for, with, against, or around these slick slitches and you’ll see they get awfully Machiavellian further up the command chain.

The earliest branches started in NorthAm, but the Sons have spread around the world. The packaging may end up a little different in other places that don’t like being named for a fictional character, but they all still answer to the same top minds.

SPACE STATIONS

From observation to entertainment to construction, more than two dozen space stations currently in operation see a variety of uses. Not every megacorp has a space station, and those with the most (Ares and Evo) have had mixed results from their space assets. Ares’ trouble in recent years has left their space assets to suffer while their attention is elsewhere. Evo, on the other hand, is using their tech curve advantage to bolster the efficiency of their stations.

SPERETHIEL

Or as the elves call it, the “language of harmony,” because of course they have some poncy name for the way they talk. Like the “Path of the Wheel” and the entire concept of “elven culture,” Sperethiel was supposedly passed down from an earlier Age of Magic thousands of years ago, but no one’s offered any proof that it existed before the elven nations were founded in the 2030s. Nowadays, it’s mainly spoken by natives of the two Tírs (Azania and Pomorya have their own elven languages), descendants of those natives trying to “reclaim their elven heritage,” and elf posers.

SPINRAD (AL THANI). GABRIELLE

Daughter of Emir Jassim bin Joaan Al Thani, Gabrielle was married to Johnny Spinrad just before the merger of Spinrad Industries and Global Sandstorm became the newest AAA corporation. The marriage paved the way for Johnny to look acceptable, but Gabby had little to say about it. She has played the role of high-profile wife well and has demonstrated remarkable prowess in helping her husband manage his business, serving in a consultant capacity. She is fiery, sarcastic, quick wit-

SPACE STATIONS

NAME	LOCATION	OWNER	PRIMARY PURPOSE
Angel Station: "The Junkyard"	L-5 LaGrange Point	Evo	Manufacturing/materials recycling
Apollo Station	Low-Earth Orbit	Ares	Orbital storage
Artemis Lunar Arcology	Moon	Ares	Research, storage, mining, arcane testing
Camelot Research Station	Low-Earth Orbit	SpinGlobal	Space technology research
Charon	Phobos	Ares	Spying on Gagarin! Deep space observatory/outpost
Daedelus	L-4 LaGrange Point	Ares	Manufacturing, research
Darkside Junction	L-2 LaGrange Point	Evo	Space research, manufacturing, and stellar exploration
Dyson 3	Low-Earth Orbit	Starfield Botanical Engineering	Biological research
Eagle Eye-II Deep Space Observation Platform	Low-Earth Orbit	Horizon	Entertainment, Visual Exploration
Echo Station	Geosynchronous	Independent	Smuggling, piracy, shadow tourism
Gagarin Base	Mars	Evo	Bioengineering, terraforming, mining, research, crazy Monad drek
Helios	Solar LaGrange Point	Ares	Manufacturing and research
Himmelsschmede Orbital Factory	Low-Earth Orbit	Saeder-Krupp	Manufacturing, materials and design research
Icarus Station	Geosynchronous	Ares	Material storage and manufacturing
Nerva	L-3 LaGrange Point	Erika	Recently repaired, operations unknown
Nimbus Shipyards	Low-Earth Orbit	Ares	Spacecraft manufacturing (operations currently suspended)
Olympia Lunar Base	Moon	Evo	Lunar tourism, research, questionable activities
Shibanojuki Free Fall Resort	Low-Earth Orbit	Evo	Executive vacations/entertainment
Sigmund Jähn Lunar Station	Moon	Saeder-Krupp	Mining, materials research
Silver Pinnacle	Geosynchronous	Trans-Orbital	Non-AAA space asset support
Skyhook I Station	Geosynchronous	Corporate Court	Cargo transport
Skyhook II Station	Geosynchronous	Corporate Court	Cargo transport
Spindle Space Platform	Low-Earth Orbit	Aztechnology	Tourism, agricultural research
Treffpunkt-Raumhaffen	L-1 LaGrange Point	Proteus	Leased space research facilities
Zurich Orbital	Low-Earth Orbit	Corporate Court	Looking down on the world

ted, bold, and calculating. A perfect foil for Johnny. She knows what she's doing, too. She took the name Spinrad, counter to her father's wishes, because she knows exactly the kind of respect it will get her on the world stage. She isn't content to hide in the shadows, but she is willing to hire them.

SPINRAD GLOBAL

With a corporate slogan like "Putting our Spin on the future," Spinrad Global is off and running. Spinrad Global is an AAA private corporation, and their president is the one and only Johnny Spinrad, the billionaire jet-setter who virtually dictates fashionable trends in high society and luxury body modifications.

Spinrad Global is the newest AAA megacorporation. As a victory lap, Johnny Spinrad declared 2080 the year of Spinrad, and we've been suffering through the insufferable gloat for more than half a year now. "An unlikely merger of European Spinrad Industries and Middle Eastern Global Sandstorm, the two were brought together by the love and eventual marriage between Johnny Spinrad and Gabrielle Al Thani, oldest daughter of Emir Jassim bin Joaan Al Thani of Qatar. Their love is a bedrock that keeps Spinrad Global on solid ground!" Part true, part bulldrek. Yeah, the marriage made the merger possible, but true love and keeping the company on solid ground? Ugh.

Johnny tried to pull this in England in 2063. He wooed Princess Caroline, same as he did Gabby Al Thani. He would have become English royalty, along with every fringe benefit attending, if a sex/parentage scandal hadn't broken out. This was a marriage arranged not just by Johnny and Emir Jassim bin Joaan Al Thani of Qatar but by the bigwigs at Global Sandstorm, too. Once they settled on getting insanely rich, they had to sell the public of the Arabian Caliphate on the idea that Johnny Spinrad was one of theirs (not an easy product to move). But it helps when the only media you get is from the corp that wants you to love this idea.

Before the merger was even being discussed, Spinrad was making another series of deals to make both it and a host of other moves possible. Johnny masterfully brought erstwhile allies together to help Spinrad achieve its goals. First, they acquired Chalmers & Cole Associates by making a deal that included an aggressive clawback provision if Johnny ever died. It was too good for them to pass up. Then he leveraged his ownership of Chalmers & Cole to finance a huge portion of his newer acquisitions, including Aegis Cognito, Sol-Media, Regency Megamedia, and Lusiada, all of which partially contained similar clawback provisions, cleverly hidden from each other. He also borrowed a ton of cash from Global Sandstorm ahead of the merger, and the rest of the liquid came from smaller loans from all sorts of companies including the Frankfurt Bank Association, Telestrian, the Pacific Rim Bank, Aithne Oak-

forest, and Aztechnology's Domingo "Ding" Ramos. Once the marriage fell into place, the stage was set for the merger, and everyone wins big. The final domino fell when Johnny made a deal with Richard Villiers to take some of NeoNET's assets, including the JRJ golden ticket, and bam! Spinrad Global is now an AAA corp.

The problem? It is all built on a lie. The Al Thani family signed an airtight Islamic marriage contract when they made a loan to Johnny, meaning that if he messes up his vows or dies, his wife would own SpIn. The fact that none of his other creditors know that Johnny made the same deal with almost every one of them is going to blow up hard when they find out. Having said that, Johnny has survived more assassination attempts than literally anyone else in the Sixth World, and he has the cutting-edge cyberware to prove it.

With its new AAA status, Spinrad has settled into the number eight position on the Corporate Court. Truth be told, Spinrad Global has the assets and influence to be ranked in the top three, but Johnny has enemies on the Court, and those enemies pushed back hard and refused to allow the rankings to fluctuate so radically after so much change had already happened. So Spinrad rests toward the bottom, but expect that to change as the decade progresses. If he plays his cards right, Spinrad's company will ascend to the greatest heights.

That's some of the facts; now on to gossip. Rumors say Spinrad Global is moving its headquarters from Lisbon, Portugal to New Monaco, France. Spinrad Industries rebuilt Monaco in the 2050s but was forced to move out after a scandal invalidated their fifty-year contract there. But now that they are an AAA-rated corp, the French are dying to have him back, even with his "I told you I'd get back at you one day" attitude. Now, Spinrad Global has their own corporate enclave in New Monaco, which they built. They may move the whole headquarters there within a year or two.

Besides the power couple at the top, here are some Spinrad personnel to be on the lookout for:

- **Miranda King:** Former shadowrunner handler at NeoNET. She's based out of Chicago but has recently been recalled to the home base. Word is Johnny has some special projects he needs deniable assets for.
- **Anise Solange:** Head of Spinrad Industries wing of Spinrad Global. She basically runs the company when Johnny's not around. Word is she hates Gabby.
- **Katie Brooks:** The female version of Johnny who heads up Spinrad Global America. She's taken over management of UCAS Steel and Global Oil as well, making her a bit of an enemy to the Global Sandstorm faction.
- **Li Junlin:** Absolutely brilliant, authentic, and loyal head of Spinrad Global. He works effortlessly with the Global Sandstorm faction and has been growing the bottom line in Asia despite intense competition. He is a priceless asset.
- **Aziz Ibn Yusuf Shammar:** CEO of Global Sandstorm and agitator on behalf of the Global Sandstorm faction. He remains quiet on the world stage (as agreed), but within the Caliphate, he is seen as the head of Spinrad Global, with Johnny playing the buffoon figurehead. He wields terrible power



and influence within the Caliphate and beyond. Sees Johnny as useful but ultimately expendable.

- **Emir Sulaiman Hamad Al Futtaim:** Leader of the United Emirates, major shareholder in Global Sandstorm, and now Spinrad Global appointee to the Corporate Court. This man is one of the most powerful people on the planet.
- **Shaheed Zahir:** Rumors persist that he might be a dragon, an alchemist, free spirit, vampire, etc. It should be said I can't confirm any of it, but he is terribly mysterious and you know how people get when a mystery is dangled in front of them. He is at every important meeting of Spinrad Global players and he seems to get his way, when and if he makes his will known. Can't say that about many people when Johnny Spinrad is in the same room, so go speculate.

SPINRAD, JOHNNY

Johnny Spinrad has always been about one thing and one thing only: Johnny Spinrad. He started out as a wealthy young entrepreneur, son of American starlet Destiny Barraclough and Monégasque Industrialist Diego Spinrad, but became synonymous for the person everyone else wants to be. Now at the head of an AAA corporation, Johnny has everything he ever wanted. Except one thing. In the 2050s, Johnny nudged Lofwyr out of a contract to rebuild New Monaco. Dragons don't forgive, so Lofwyr spearheaded the charge to get Spinrad Industries kicked out of France for uninformed experimentation on people at one of his subsidiaries. Johnny's finances, social life, and plans for the future were set back decades. Not wanting to let Johnny forget his sins, Lofwyr also is behind the plot that ended Spinrad's engagement to Princess Caroline of Britain back in 2068 by manipulating events so that Claudia Romanov's daughter was revealed as Johnny's.

Since then, Spinrad has survived assassination attempts, worked the Grand Tour, built his company up, merged with Global Sandstorm, and married his wife Gabrielle. He's had leónization treatments a-plenty and is stuffed with cutting-edge cyberware, so he's also still in peak shape. All that is left is to get his revenge on Lofwyr. He has made alliances with all of Saeder-Krupp's enemies, and most recently, he extracted his daughter, Anastasia, from the German S-K boarding school she attended.

Johnny is riding high on all of his big wins lately. He is branching out into shifting American markets in the next few years and making plans to aggressively push into traditionally Saeder-Krupp-dominated markets in Europe as well. He has even spent all of 2080 partying with Gabby and Anastasia on the Grand Tour, a sort of victory lap for being the most desirable man in the world. All the world's his oyster ... and it seems being eaten by Johnny Spinrad isn't bothersome to most people.

SPINRAD, ANYA

The illegitimate child of Johnny Spinrad and Claudia Romanov, Anya's birth name is Anastasia Romanov (dramatic, right?). Raised by her mother the spy, she spent more than a decade thinking Saeder-Krupp and the dragon Lofwyr were her reason for existing. Now

twelve years old, her birthday present was being extracted from her German boarding school by her father, Johnny Spinrad. So far, the relationship with her father is best called enmity. She was raised to think the man was the devil, after all. Anya now, with considerable guile no twelve-year-old should possess, spends most of her time with her step-mom Gabby, the only person she seems to be able to stand, and pines for her mother or Uncle Brackhaus to rescue her.

SPORTS

You're probably asking yourself, "What's an entry on sports doing in a streetpedia like this one? How do touchdowns and goals and all of that tie into shadow work and the neo-anarchist mindset?" The easy answer is, if you're asking that, you've obviously missed out on a lot of action.

The biggest piece of the sports pie is tied to gambling. If you think people only bet on horse racing, then you should probably just pack up your kit and go home. Bookmakers will take bets on pretty much any sporting event with calculable odds, and not just the über-popular tridcast mainstays. I'm talking underground fight clubs and blood sports, dogfighting rings, Russian roulette—that sort of drek. Bigger sports bring more bettors, but even shady and illegal competition will draw some money to the table. And no cow is too sacred—people even bet on Olympic sports and teams from their local high schools.

If you're smart, you can make the odds work in your favor to either ruin someone's day or tip a windfall your direction. For example, a nice cocktail of steroids and DMSO applied on a star athlete's bare arm can make them test positive for performance-enhancing drugs and get them barred from competition. Traditional abduction works, too—you can't compete if you're a no-show. Even simple stuff, like futzing with an augmented boxer's muscle replacements, is gonna give someone a bad day in the ring/field/pitch/rink/whatnot.

The big takeaway here is that pretty much every sport you watch—be it urban brawl, combat biking, hurling, etc.—is tainted in some way because *someone* stands to gain—or lose—a nontrivial amount of cred over the outcome. So none of it is truly fair. It's all theater; the masses just don't know it (yet).

ST. LOUIS

As a border city stuck between the CAS and UCAS, St. Louis is an always-busy port city, crucial to intercontinental commerce. But now, Saint Louis is reeling from the collapse of NeoNET in ways other cities aren't. It was poised to replace Boston as the home of an AAA corp, but Villiers' fall means they're stuck in runner-up status with lots of nuyen thrown away on corporate subsidies for a powerful-but-not-AAA-level corp in Novatech. They spent an awful lot on what was supposed to be NeoNET's ARCHology, but now they are stuck with an incredibly large, indecently expensive state-of-the-art corporate enclave, with no corporation to fill it. As a result, St. Louis is in the process of outsourcing more municipal services as it struggles to pay off its debt, and Novatech is bidding on a lot of the contracts. Samantha Villiers has every bit as much ice in

her veins as her father, and word on the street is that she is hiring runners to improve Novatech's odds. The biggest pushback is from native corps who see Novatech as an interloper who isn't big enough to muscle them out anymore. Both Ares and Spinrad looked like they could make a play for the ARCHology and make a move to St. Louis in order to have both the CAS and UCAS at their feet, but Ares seems more interested in Atlanta now, and Spinrad, while still interested, is now in the driver's seat with no competition. Look for St. Louis to reinvent itself soon to try to save itself from selling its soul to pay for its poor bets.

STARDUST

*Stardust fooled them all
Hiding from nŌg and Tairngire
And the motley-faced fool*

*Played dead back in '16
Sixty-four years hence
He played with others then,
Now he just wants to break the rules*

*Once he made love with Gaia,
Mr. Jones tried to heal us all
But the elders weren't worthy
So he cursed their souls away
And now he'll make them all pay*

*Motley's really gone,
and the scribus is dour
They wasted the time,*

*the days and the hours
Nothing is sacred,
No, no not any more
Settled will be the score.*

DRJ

STARK, THEISSEN, AND VAN DER MAR

A law firm with a long and storied history, especially when it comes to stories about things that go bump in the night. They've got a weird and wild client roster, including toxic mages, a shedim or two, some free spirits, representatives from the fae, a healthy cohort of blood mages, and, if rumors are true, a bug spirit queen. The more trusting among us say that they managed to develop a practice to serve an otherwise-unmet legal need, and it exists just to bring in revenue. The more realistic say you don't bring that many villains together without some sort of a nefarious scheme going on. Their global headquarters are in Munich, with major offices in Denver, DeeCee, Geneva, Seattle, Vancouver, New Orleans, Chicago, Hong Kong, and Constantinople.

STREET LEGENDS

Why is this even an entry? You know what this is—it's someone who runs the streets so long they become a legend. Duh. But wait. There's more to it. We can get all sociological. Why are some people legends and others

not? I know a runner named Skrella who ran the streets for a quarter-century, a rat shaman who could exploit cracks in the walls and get in anywhere. Ever heard of her? Probably not. But she ran for longer than most, she survived, and pretty much everyone she ever ran with speaks of her with respect.

Now, Ryan Mercury. Heard of him, right? Quicksilver, famous drake, Nadja Daviar's arm candy, got some high-profile assignments, carried them off with aplomb. Is he a street legend? You bet. I'm not going to take a single accolade away from him, because he's earned them. All I want to say is, why him and not Skrella? Both survived a long time, both pulled off some pretty amazing exploits. So why do we talk about one more than the other?

Because Mercury has money and Mercury has power. In the course of his running, he acquired a pretty good share of each. That's the difference. Money and power are, of course, the things the corps lord over us all the time. The advantage they have over us, the things that make us dance to their tune. The things that make us resent them.

The stories we tell reflect the things we value. Should we be valuing the same things the corps use to screw us over? You can answer that question for yourself, then use that answer to shape the stories you tell.

Look, you knew when you saw the neo-a label on this thing that we were going to sneak in some editorializing. So here it is. Now back to the facts.

SUREHAND, LUGH

The first High Prince of the Council of Princes of Tír Tairngire (whew, that's a lot of capital letters), Lugh was also the first High Prince to be removed by a coup d'état, sent to wander the world with only his tremendous individual wealth and magical prowess to console him. Just like the old bigots warned us about, he actually *did* lose his job to an ork, Larry Zincan. Surehand sightings, tracked by social media and wholly unconfirmed, have pinned him back in the Tír, in Seattle, Paris, London, Dublin, Atlanta, Neo-Tokyo, and on the wrong side of the walls in the Chicago no-go zone.

SURGE

Sudden Recessive Genetic Expression (yeah, the "U" in the acronym is a little bit of a cheat, but people do that sort of thing all the time, and vowels are useful). If you're overly weary or cynical, you might view this as yet another way the world is messing with us, but why do that? SURGE gave us cat burglars with actual cat tails, guitar players with satyr legs, and the ever-popular kangaroo people. What's not to like?

But I'm getting ahead of myself. This happened back in 2061, when Halley's Comet passed by and did all sorts of weird things to our mana levels. One of them was to awaken some recessive genes in people that were unexpressed before then, so people developed all sorts of new characteristics—along with the ones I already mentioned, there were animal patterns or other colors on people's skin, feathers, cyclops eyes, and on and on. The people who experienced this were dubbed "changelings," and sometimes they got bonus abilities that gave them a nice little edge in life, sometimes they just looked

cooler, and other times they acquired small annoyances that would haunt them until they could save up enough to pay for the services of a good plastic surgeon. SURGE affected a small portion of the population and new changes do not seem to be appearing, but this is the Sixth World—you never know what's next.

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TAMANOUS

C'mon, you didn't *really* need that kidney, didja? Genetics gave you a pair for a reason.

Okay, so you're telling me you only got one kidney cuz you donated the other to a chummer of yours? No problem! Tamanous'll gladly take that from you too, whether you're dead or alive. Don't matter much to an organlegging outfit allegedly run by ghouls out of Asamando. (And that kidney you donated to a friend? Hate to break it to you, but Tamanous probably stole that one too. No wonder your friend didn't survive the transplant.)

Most ghouls ain't picky about where their meals come from, and you shouldn't be either.

TELESTRIAN INDUSTRIES

Telestriian Industries Corporation (TIC) has been around almost as long as its home nation, Tír Tairngire. It emerged from the Megacorporate Revision as an A-rated corp, even though Tír Tairngire still hasn't signed the BRA. It has always been a family-owned business, other than the mandatory five percent ownership held by the government. James Telestriian III ran the company during the '50s and early '60s, ensuring it remained a family company by hiring only Telestriians for key leadership roles. His sister, Marie-Louise Telestriian, ran the Telestriian Biotechnology division, while his cousin Thomas Telestriian ran the NeuroTech Computing division.

- Tír Tairngire not signing the BRA has allowed TIC to keep a tight grip on the Tír's economy. If they want their lost A back, Marie-Louise has to get the Tír to sign. You can bet there will be all kinds of new trade restrictions, all designed to keep TIC on top in the Tír.
- Cosmo

When James retired in 2062, Marie-Louise was made CEO. His son, Timothy, faded from public view after a failed attempt to take the company from his aunt.

- Rumors persist that Timothy's "fading from public view" was involuntary—and permanent.
- Thorn

Marie-Louise rose to Prince during the government upheaval in 2065. She passed the company to her cousin, Lynne Telestriian, who's been running it superbly ever since.

- With quiet guidance from Marie-Louise.
- OrkCEO

- Naturally. Since becoming High Prince, Marie-Louise has done everything possible to entrench the Telestriians as the major power in Tír Tairngire. Her son Sebastian runs TeleSec, the TIC security branch, while Lynne is a Prince in addition to CEO of TIC. Other relations are scattered throughout the company and nation keeping an eye on things. She pretty much runs the country as she sees fit.
- Frosty
- Now that the two-term limit for High Prince is gone, we can look forward to Marie-Louise shining brightly—and casting shadows—for years to come. Gotta love elven politics.
- Pistons

TELESTRIAN, MARIE-LOUISE

The reigning, undisputed, heavyweight champion of the wo—oh, no, I mean High Prince of Tír Tairngire, M-L was duly elected by her good citizens back in '75 and has worn the crown ever since. Ushering in an era of economic growth and stability, coupled with relative domestic tranquility, there was startlingly little push-back when the Star Chamber and Council of Princes recently announced that the two-term limit on the High Prince's time in office was removed. Backed by her family money and her Princely cousin, Lynne, M-L seems poised to reign for the foreseeable future.

Oh, the strings she must have pulled to make that happen!

TEN-MINUTE WAR

Maybe the only war in history where the explanation takes almost as long as the actual war did. Way back in 2004, for reasons the participants alone best appreciated (or as normal people say, "frag if I know why"), the Libyan government launched an unprovoked chemical weapons attack on Israel. Ten minutes later, the Israelis responded with nukes, and there was one less North African country in the world. That's it. Yes, really. No, it didn't make any sense. It hardly ever comes up nowadays, except in anti-Israel propaganda and whenever someone asks how the Desert Wars started.

TERASCA

Last year on March 7, a new dragon awakened in the swamp surrounding New Orleans. Terasca is an adult sea dragon who wasted no time in demanding the locals bow and pay homage. It took another dragon, Perianwyr, who was in the Crescent City for Mardi Gras, to explain how the world has changed, and for a while, Terasca stayed out of sight. After buying a local plantation and hiring a small army of employees, Terasca hired a personal assistant, Jolene Price. The two have since been observed wooing criminal elements in New Orleans and also online, building quite a dastardly coalition and gaining Terasca the nickname "the Crime Dragon." I know the saying is "Never cut a deal with a dragon," but Terasca pays really well, and if you can get in on the ground floor of the empire being built, you could carve a nice chunk of the Southern CAS out for yourself.



TERRAFIRST!

Forged out of the bent and bitter remains of the old environmentalist movement, TerraFirst! are the hard, passionate core of the old “save the world” crew, made angry and violent over time. No one cared until some shadowrunners blew up a power plant and spray-painted TerraFirst! all over the place. This was a bonanza for recruiting even more angry and violent people.

Not bright people, though. The group is poorly led and scattered—groups in neighboring cities have wildly different ideas of what makes a good time.

Without much money, or equipment, TerraFirst! tries hard strikes against the corps. They don’t worry about being caught, they aren’t careful, and most of the time they don’t get anything done. Occasionally a member actually gets their hands on some real firepower. Half the time they then blow themselves up— but when they don’t, they can cause real problems for the corps. Seriously, if there was a charismatic leader who was willing to step in and bankroll this rabble, they could have a literal militia walking downtown. Luckily no one good at organizing wants anything to do with them.

When they aren’t wrecking stuff, they can be good at parties and chilling out. They often have access to drugs and booze, and they are happy to share if you are happy to listen to them.

They even hire people to do their dirty work when they get some scratch. They pay if they have promised to, but like any group of fanatics, they have funny ideas

about what should be free and what should not. As always, make your terms clear at the start of a job.

TerraFirst! is one of the punk-est groups of losers I’ve ever met, and I’m proud to call some of them friends.

TERRORS

“Terrors” is a term used to describe horrifying creatures or corruption capable only of hatred, malice, and death. Where they come from is unknown, but they have some connection to so-called Elder Gods, or at the very least, Elder God cults. Terrors that could be described as evil gods are so rare as to be non-existent in our world, but the presence of weaker, lesser terrors is a dark portent for what the future holds. While exceedingly rare, at least three variations of these lesser terrors have been reported.

Crawlers are about three and a half meters long. These filth monsters look vaguely insectoid but possess eight hairy tentacles instead of legs. These tentacles aren’t used for transportation, however, as they hover above the ground, moving silently. When near prey, crawlers leap forward, tentacles extended, and wrap themselves around their prey. Three mouths behind mandibles eat flesh while three eyes (two are eerily human looking) behold the fear on their victims’ faces as they are consumed alive.

Lesser terrors known as **m’flesit** travel in dense packs called covens, and these horrifying nightmares feed on the fear they elicit with their very presence. Most resem-

ble a twisted combination of feral rats and black widow spiders. Each bite from a m'flesit causes a variety of allergic responses in metahumans. Once a coven of m'flesit has swarmed a victim, there is no hope of survival.

Toad terrors, alternatively called **gum toads**, are morbidly obese balls of goo, which ooze a material similar to tar. With a tongue seven meters long, they can trap prey with incredible speed, drawing it into their maw. Once targets are coated with drool and excretions, it is rare for them to live to tell the tale.

THULE PROTECTORATE

Officially part of the Trans-Polar Aleut Nation, the Thule Protectorate was originally Iceland. The TPA managed to pressure them into joining after the first Crash and the collapse of their fishing-based economy in the 2030s. Nowadays, though, the tables have turned—the Thule Protectorate is one of the TPA's top earners, which is why the Polar Council (the TPA government) is so keen on keeping them in the fold. Most *Íslendingar*, meanwhile, would much rather break away and either go it alone or join the Scandinavian Union with the rest of their Nordic cousins.

TÍR NA NÓC

This nation was once called Ireland, but now that's the term used by rebels and hold-outs (almost always with wounded ears). The Elven Emerald Isle was renowned for xenophobia (oops, I mean "purity"), but since their magical Veil started to fizzle, they've been more exposed, and more modern, than ever before.

All sorts of paramilitary terrorist troubles still plague them, bolstered by this new ease with which weapons, explosives, and other trouble can be smuggled in and out (thanks to folks like the UCAS-centric, rabidly anti-elven, Knights of the Red Branch). They're still just flirting with full-blown civil war instead of quietly indulging in it, but things have been ugly for a long time, and the stubborn, righteous locals show no signs of stopping anytime soon.

While the Veil is sporadic in the protection it grants, the rest of magic has settled down from the flares and fades of the last few decades (though what's going on with the Giant's Causeway on any given day is anybody's guess). Some attribute this newfound stability to, ironically, tampering from the Seelie Court; others insist it's related to the Yellowstone Calamity, still more are certain the ghost of Dunkelzahn protects them, or say that it's a literal sorcerous manifestation of the luck of the Irish settling things down and allowing for comparative stability.

Trying to run the shadows or engage in direct political action is easier than ever before, but note that still doesn't mean it's *easy*. The Veil is reliably navigable now, and outsiders (and their tourist money) are plenty welcome, but that doesn't mean internal security's a laughing matter. Their local drama means plenty of practice for the hard-working, hard-hitting lads and lasses of the Tír Republican Corps.

TÍR TAIRNGIRE

Anyone in, or near, the American West Coast knows "The Tír." Tír Tairngire is the magical elfyland that

sprouted up in the territory that used to be the state of Oregon. Rumors abound as to *why*, of course, but most folks agree it was either a shadowy cabal of influential elves who were way into ultimate Frisbee and hemp-based products, *or* it was a land grab for Mount Shasta (and the magical power associated with that nexus of ley lines), and the rest of the Tír was basically a really nice yard they built around it. Most folks lean toward the latter.

The safe haven and welcoming homeland to oppressed metahumans didn't really live up to the hype. It was a radically, openly, elf-supremacist fascist state for decades, until about half of 'em got beat up by about the other half of 'em, a bunch of Princes got scattered to the winds, and we ended up with Tír 2.0—a Horizon-made-over magical wonderland where everyone is welcome to feel safe (and comfortable, and to spend tourist money). For the most part, the promise of the "Land of Promise" is closer to being kept now than it ever was before. The push toward a genuine electoral system over the last few decades has helped, as has government transparency and less radically xenophobic border patrolling. The pointy-eared bastards really seem to have turned over a new leaf, and running the shadows there is easier than ever before.

Still, it pays to know Sperethiel if you're gonna take a trip. Some old habits die hard, and feigning ignorance of anything but the nation's official elfy-talk is still one of the locals' favorite ways of ignoring the barbarians in their midst. Tourist nuyen goes a long way, but smuggling is still their number-one export.

TRANSHUMANISM

A lot of people throw around this word "transhumanism" as though they understand what it means.

"You upload your brain into a computer."

Sorta, but not quite.

"You've got enough SURGE-related mutations to not be considered metahuman anymore."

Uh, no. Just ... *no*.

"You're fed up with metahumanity and just want to leave it all behind."

Close, but no e-cigar.

The Latin prefix *cis-* means "on this side of." So if you're in cislunar space, it means you're in the moon's orbit: you're closer to the moon than you are to Earth. If you're cisgender, it means you identify as—or are "on the same side" of—the gender that's stamped on your birth certificate or SIN paperwork (or whatever gender your parents gave you, if you're SINless). So cishumanism means "on this side of metahuman," a.k.a. someone who's baseline metahuman.

Trans- means "on other other side of," so if you're in translunar space, you're somewhere outside of lunar orbit. (And good luck trying to get home, chum.) If you're transgender, you're on the "other side" of the gender you were assigned at birth. (Huzzah! Go be yourself, you rock star!) Transhumanism then means "on the other side of metahuman," which means someone who is—or is striving to be—something other than metahuman.

Now, I'm not gonna delve into a discussion of what it means to be metahuman. (Go educate thyself with philosophy textbooks.) But the average transhumanist seeks to evolve beyond the physical and mental limitations of the metahuman body, and thus no longer be

traditionally “human.” They want to be faster, stronger, more durable, and more intelligent in ways that mere biotech and magical augmentations can’t begin to reach.

Some folks do indeed try to upload their brains into the Matrix—and some Matrix anomalies may in fact be a product of that. Some folks try to replace parts of their brain, even more than the average cyberdoc would advise as being healthy (a.k.a., “extreme cyborg-ing”). Some have turned to nanite hives (but the rise of CFD risk put a major damper on that nonsense.) Other folks conduct magical blood rituals that would make even Azzie shamans blush, in hopes that their astral forms can permanently separate from their flesh prisons without fading after their body dies.

I’m not one to judge, or even make a claim whether any of this stuff works, but I’m perfectly fine with my metahuman limitations. Nothing beats a good authentic steak, and you can’t enjoy that if you’re just bits in the Matrix or you’ve evolved beyond the physical need for taste buds. But I’m also not going to stop people from pushing beyond the limits to see what they can become.

TRIADS

When the Triads first formed, they might’ve had more in common with neo-anarchists than any other criminal syndicate. The original Triads were called the *Tiandihui* and were secret societies of anti-government rebels, forming an underground resistance network against the Qing Dynasty in eighteenth-century China. Once they’d succeeded at overthrowing the Qing Emperor, some *Tiandihui* groups went legit and became “benevolent associations” that supported Chinese communities, especially those who emigrated overseas. Other *Tiandihui* groups didn’t adjust as well to “civilian” life. Unfortunately, instead of carrying the revolution to other countries, they slipped fully into a life of crime and became the Triads we know today.

Nowadays, the Triads are involved in a wide range of criminal activities. In general, smuggling of various kinds (including metahuman trafficking) is probably the biggest one, thanks to Hong Kong’s status as a trade hub. The Triad’s involvement in the drug trade was a natural extension of that, focusing mainly on opium, heroin, and their Awakened cousins like red orchid. Oh, and don’t forget Kong chips, Triad-produced BTLs that are so popular, the Triads control most of the world’s beetle trade (CalHots being a somewhat distant second). Counterfeiting brand-name products is another Triad focus—if you’ve ever wondered why so many cheap knockoffs come from Hong Kong, well, now you know. Ironically, the “cheap knockoffs” can end up being more reliable than the original products, since the Triads don’t do the whole “planned obsolescence” thing like corps do. Matrix crime and prostitution round out the Triads’ criminal enterprises.

Besides their activities, the Triads are notorious for their arcane, ritualistic structure. They use membership titles inspired by classical Chinese literature and numerology, and each new inductee takes an elaborate series of magically enforced oaths, making your average Triad soldier *very* loyal. Oh, and the fact that the great dragon Lung is reputed to be involved in a range of Triad activities keeps the money flowing and the foot soldiers alert.

TRUMAN TECHNOLOGIES

Holy drek! It worked. A runner team I’m acquainted with was hired to dig up some dirt on Horizon. They found that Horizon’s representative in Chicago, a Truman Tech nerd named Dr. Martin Tate, was helping to facilitate a new bug spirit invasion of Chicago, complete with a queen-wasp-spirit-infected-dragon! The point of this was to give Horizon a black eye and drive down Truman Tech stock. Well, it fragging worked. And the Johnson was none other than Melissa Truman, daughter of Daniel Truman, who was thought dead after being trapped inside Bug City back in the ’50s. She was found alive and reunited with her dad, and they apparently staged a coup. As a result, Daniel and Melissa were able to convince Horizon to sell them back a controlling share of Truman Technologies, spinning it back out into an AA corp, and Horizon gets to distance itself from Martin Tate, Truman Tech, and the bug/dragon debacle, all while looking like the good guys giving a long-lost daughter her birthright back.

Melissa was named CEO in a recent press conference, while at the same time announcing plans to clean out, refurbish, and re-inhabit Truman Tower and its surrounding area. Gentrification before your very eyes. Looks like Chicago is going to be Truman town once again. The corp is going to focus on the things that made them great in the first place: Truman Simsense making hardware, Truman Distribution Network getting the chips out there, while dozens of other Truman-brands keep merchandising. Oh, and don’t forget all those old *Neil the Ork Barbarian* trids!

- ▶ I’ve heard licensing with Horizon is keeping Truman from reviving Neil as an adventure property. Instead, they are working with ork-rights groups and arcanoarchaeologists to create a more realistic and less exploitative series with *Scratch* and *Shelur: Orks of Action!*
- ▶ Old Crow

TSIMSHIAN

A nation located on the north-central west coast of North America (how’s that for too many directions?), including the Haida Gwaii islands. Tsimshian was originally one of the Native American Nations, but seceded in 2037 after getting tired of Cheyenne dictating their lives. It’s now known for being a toxic hellhole, stripped bare of natural resources by MCT and left to rot, and for its virulent inter-tribal and anti-meta prejudices. Since the Crash, Tsimshian’s been annexed by the Salish-Shidhe Council as a “protectorate” after years of border skirmishes, and some of the corps (Shiawase and Wuxing) are working to clean the place up.

TZURI GROUP

An A-rated corp based in Mumbai. They bought their way up the ladder selling artifacts they “found” in twin sunken cities in the Gulf of Khambhat. Since then, the Tzuri Group has been hocking talismans, fetishes, and other magical crap. Their biggest seller is their image. Tzuri has been doing PR for Necro Magic as the hip, new magic of choice for the “enlightened and rational mage.” When their chairperson, Dr. Jennifer Stinson,

saved Milan back in 2075 from the VITAS-4 outbreak, the media ate it up. There are those disgruntled former employees that have wound up dead or nuts, though ...



UNITED CANADIAN AND AMERICAN STATES (UCAS)

What you don't know will probably find a way to kill you, so I'm here to help. I've spent the past thirty of my thirty-five years here on this rock in the out-of-doors. In short, I've been hunting and fishing these parts for years, and there's so much more to the UCAS than those few urban centers. Seattle, Denver, the Minneapolis Metroplex, Chicago, St. Louis, Detroit, New York, and Boston are all places I avoid. Of course, Seattle is like a little city-state out there to the west. I don't see the point of having one of the largest cities of the country isolated out there in a neighboring country's territory. You've only got communication with this huge part of the country through Matrix access—we all saw what happened in '64 when that failed, and it wasn't pretty. Frankly, it sounds like a recipe for disaster, but I don't run countries, so I just stay the hell out of the area, lest it self-destruct. Leave that for the urbanites.

I'm here to talk about the *rest* of the UCAS—what far too many of you call “flyover territory,” and what makes up the large percentage of physical space in the UCAS, if not the population, most of whom are relegated to the urban areas. The people who live in these areas enjoy a lifestyle not unlike what they've been accustomed to for the past half-century, with the notable exception of the social reforms carried out after Big D's short presidency. A bunch of folks who were never officially recognized as UCAS citizens received their citizenship about twenty years ago. So, now you might have a naga knocking on your door, asking to borrow a cup of sugar.

First, a little history: the United Canadian and American States, founded in 2030, comprises much of what was once the United States of America and a sliver of what was once Canada. It was a rocky start, with a group of the southern states of the former United States, California, and Hawaii all seceding from the country.

But eventually, the borders stabilized—at least, for the time being. From the northeast coast (including Maine to the north, but also New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), running south to the southern border of the Federal District of Columbia, across the southern borders of West Virginia and Kentucky, then straight across Missouri, to encompass most of Kansas. The western border runs from the northwest about a hundred kilometers north of Weyburn, south to catch the Missouri and follow it down through the middle of the Dakotas, then straight down Nebraska and Kansas and just barely into Oklahoma. The northern border extends from just north of Weyburn and cuts a jagged line east to include the southern edge of what was Manitoba and a good portion of what used to be Ontario: Ottawa, Sudbury, and Sault Saint Marie, but excluding Thunder Bay, which remains on a peninsula of Algonkian-Manitou Council land.

That said, the western border of the UCAS *proper* (yeah, I said it; bite me, Seattle) lies along the course of the Missouri and runs past Bismarck—a town that never really lost its loose skin after the mining industry bloated its borders seventy-some years ago. Bismarck has been a hotspot for frequent flare-ups between the UCAS and Sioux Nation.

The grain belt, or what's left of it after the war and the Awakening and the drifting fallout from Chicago-way, has a significant presence in the nation. There are still a few pockets of wilderness, or close to it—mostly old U.S. national parks and the like that weren't plundered for the riches beneath them. They have managed to grow wild, and we are richer for it.

Once upon a time, maybe when I was—let's see—maybe ten? A long-ass time ago, anyway, we'd drive to my grandparents' house. They lived in a big house out in what my dad called “the boonies.” It took us about an hour or two to get there—I don't know *exactly* how long it took, I was ten! But today, if you had to traverse the same route, never mind the increased speed of the car we drive, you'd probably die, because the place is overrun with these Awakened critters called montauks. What I guess I mean by all this is, if you see someone who tells you they're living on the frontier, give 'em a little extra respect. The vast majority of the land in the UCAS is dangerous territory.

To be fair, though, most of what makes up the UCAS is either city center or wilderness. Ever since the Awakening, ever since Goblinization, you name it: if it's caused rioting, if it's caused you to look over the horizon every now and again and ask yourself, “How is everyone not dead already?”—the wilderness reawakened. A long time ago, everyone lived in cities and everything they knew nothing about was found out in the wilderness. It's like that again—what with all the monstrosities out there. Have you *been* out in the wilderness lately? Once you get to a one-hundred-kilometer radius from people, you start to see it. The metahuman population per square kilometer drops, the things-that-want-to-eat-you density climbs.

Speaking of wanting to eat the locals, I have to say that the UCAS lucked out in gaining control of all of the Great Lakes—I can be counted on to make my regular home near one of them for half the year, every year, because I love to fish. I'm also fond of the Appalachian trail and much of the Mississippi River. Not to make my home, of course, but merely to get away and into the wild. I prefer to stick around anywhere I can flash my (best) SIN. Less trouble that way. But I suppose for the capitalist-minded among us, control of all the Great Lakes means more than just more fishing for me. The Great Lakes continue to attract all manner of sports-minded folk like myself, but whatever they're keeping under the Great Lakes continues to maintain a no-visitor policy.

For the casual traveler in the UCAS, the official currency is the UCAS dollar (\$), but we just about as often use the international nuyen (¥), and we don't have an official language, but we usually use English or a version thereof (“city speak,” I'm looking at you), but that varies, too, depending on which coast you find yourself nearer.

A big country has a lot of neighbors. To the north is the Algonkian-Manitou Council, to the south-southwest is Aztlan, otherwise, the Confederation of American States lies all along the southern border. To the

west-southwest is the Pueblo Corporate Council, and to the west-northwest is the Sioux Nation. And with a lot of territory, not much of it filled with much population, there's a lot of room to disappear. Smugglers run anything you can imagine across land and sky, but also river, and we have the mighty Mississippi river running down nearly the entire country, down into the CAS, and that river gets a *lot* of traffic.

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN (UK)

You probably know a lot about the United Kingdom already—merry olde London, the misty moors of Scotland, the ley lines of Stonehenge, the whole nine meters—but those are all surface details. Items on a whistle-stop tour. You're not a tourist, you're a professional, so here's the real lowdown on the "Divided Kingdom."

We Brits have run into a lot of problems since the Awakening. Natural and ecological disasters, ley lines covering the once idyllic English countryside, monoliths suddenly appearing out of nowhere, and so forth. But our stiff upper lip didn't help, and we got a Lord Protector out of the deal, who—surprise!—abused the powers of his office. That didn't go too well—nothing in government ever does for us neo-a's. So some strange slot calling himself "Pendragon" showed up out of the blue, dropkicked the Lord Protector, abolished the office with Queen Caroline's blessing, and then vanished like he was never here.

You'd think that such a revolutionary change in government—putting the power of governance back into the people's hands, a very neo-anarchic sentiment—would solve our problems, but no. We are, more so now than ever, a deeply divided nation. For every Briton who champions forward progress and technology, there's someone who advocates a return to the "old ways"—whatever the frag that actually means—often to the exclusion of all other social matters. And that means the important issues, such as trying to curtail the ecological and social disasters that plague this nation, remain deadlocked in Parliament, and the people suffer for it. We can't count on another Pendragon to come save us, so we have to do everything we can to save ourselves.

UNITED NATIONS

The distorted echo of a decent idea. After two gigantic wars that killed 100 million people or so, it kind of made sense to try to get the nations of the world to sit down and talk about things, and maybe have a way to deal with conflicts before they descend to everyone beating the crap out of each other. The devil, as always, is in the details, so getting everyone to agree on what course of action to take to stave off conflict, or even to agree on the process of making those decisions, has never been easy. The organization has always struggled to carry out its vision, but the earthquake that destroyed its headquarters, the First Crash, and the Euro Wars pushed the UN to the brink of dissolution. It only was saved by the intervention of the Corporate Court. Yay? There's a not-bad side to this, in that the corps' main interest is keeping the peace in the world so they can do business, and peace, generally speaking, kills fewer people than war. So that's good. But you can't count on the Gene-

va, Switzerland-based organization to do much to check the corps' various abuses. Still, they have occasionally pushed for the rights of different forms of sentience, including AIs and the Infected, showing their history of human rights advocacy somehow has not been entirely stamped out. They just have to figure out how to do something about it.

UNIFIED MAGIC THEORY

Ask ten mages where magic comes from, and you'll get 22.3 answers, give or take a few dozen. For all the research we do into the nature of the arcane, we always end up with a few new questions for every single answer we get. More often that answer makes the question seem irrelevant and essential at the same time. Confusing? Yeah, no drek.

My mom had a saying: you get lost, you find your way back to what you know. You don't get along with someone, find common ground. Basically, that's what Unified Magic Theory does.

You've heard of Chaos Magic, right? That's when you take the bits that work and cobble it all together into a tradition that works for you. Unified Magic Theory takes that to the next level by exploring the underpinnings of different traditions to find their common denominators. Theoretically, this is like finding the source code of magic. UMT says all magic comes from a single source, and our differing paradigms exist so our tiny mortal brains can handle all the big cosmic truth that won't fit inside. Hermetics call it by that name because that's the only language they understand. Shamans need an external factor to comprehend magic.

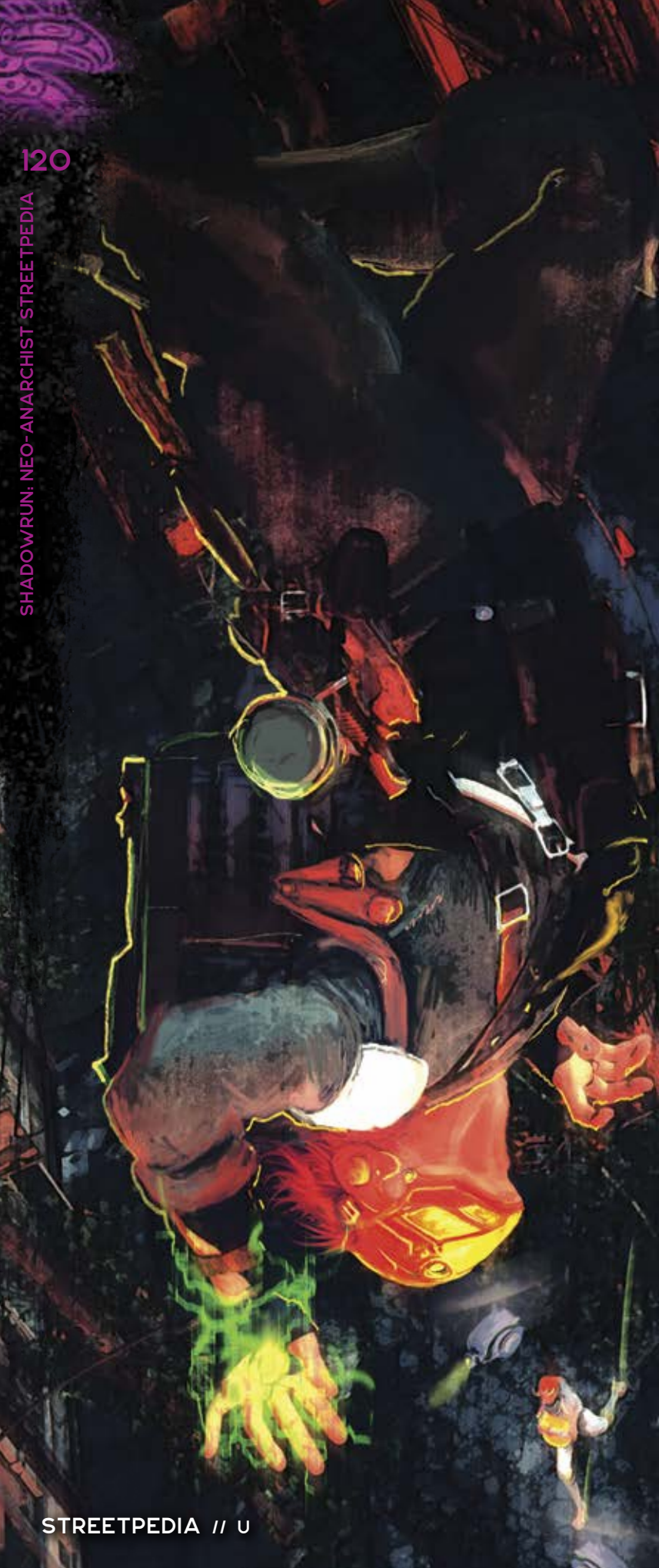
Of course, this pisses a lot of folks off, because it implies that traditions and even religions are just half-truth crutches compared to the "true" nature of the occult. The fact that Schwartzkopf, the great dragon who teaches magic in Prague, thinks it's hot shit only deepens the division. Is UMT the way dragons do magic? Or are they trying to throw us off to keep us under control? Who knows?

UMT is in a bit of flux right now. As it stands, it has some merit in helping hermetics figure out how other traditions work. On the other hand, there's a lot of new insights about how traditions work that UMT can't seem to crack. And don't get me started about how totems fit into the mix. In the end, we're left with one unfinished answer and about twenty fresh mysteries. Back to the drawing board, as always.

- There's a seed of truth in UMT, and it can help many Awakened individuals to find their paradigm. It doesn't explain everything and can get in the way, but in general it's useful. Ish.
- Canis

UNIVERSAL OMNITECH

The ever-expanding corporate baby of Thomas Roxborough, UO has grown far beyond its original focus on biotechnology and genetic research through a steady series of acquisitions. Notably, the recent addition of DeBeers-Omnitech has introduced mining and mineral extraction into UO's portfolio. Headquartered in Vancouver, it's the largest corporation based in Salish-Shidhe territory and is always watching other Salish corps for takeover attempts.



CEO and largest shareholder Thomas Roxborough originally bought it after discovering in 2049 that he'd contracted a terrible disease. Hu subjected himself to aggressive, untested genetic treatments in an effort to postpone his death. In the end, he survived, but his body was reduced to a dispersed liquid-like state that requires him to live in a vat. With his physical form ruined, he turned his mind to the Matrix and has become one of the most competent deckers on the planet. Rox-in-the-Box has made several attempts to restore his physical form without success, and it continues to be his single most important quest, followed by expanding his financial empire and, lastly, exploring assorted Matrix phenomena.

UNSEELIE COURT

There's a lot of bad info about the Unseelie floating about, so let me correct the record. Some will tell ye the Unseelie Court doesn't exist. Well, that's crap. The Unseelie are real and sure as pop smacked my arse, they are moving and shaking in the real world, grassroots revolutionaries, beard to balls. They've been battling the Seelie, the rulers of Tír na nÓg, since the Se'elites first appeared again. They've a long and muddy history of fighting against elves in power, and have taken their licks for it. But they aren't the bad guys, no. They want freedom, just like the rest of us. While the Seelie've pulled back their obvious meddlin' and are lookin' inward of late, the Unseelie have not. Rather, they've branched out, pushing beyond the boundaries of Tír na nÓg, just like they did when they helped the Rinelle overthrow the princes of Tír Tairngire. Beyond the British Isles and Europe, they have targeted operations in Asia, the Middle East, and North America. They are full of noisy, uncouth, and bizarre characters, sure, but being pretty isn't a qualification for being good now, is it? They aren't picky, either. If you're willing to fight against Se'elies, elves, or other oppressors, you'll find a home.

Recently, the Eolaí of the Unseelie, Lord Gwyn, took ill, and if he didn't die, he's good at fakin'. A lass, Aina, the Ebon Queen, now rules the Unseelie, though "rule" isn't precise. She is more of a guide, protector, muse, and compass, really. She's brought hope to the Unseelie, despite being an elf herself. Still, the Unseelie masses are all aware of who Gwyn was, what the Ebon Queen suffered, and that makes them both welcome, like any other true freedom lover, among the brave revolutionaries.

URBAN BRAWL

Take a gang fight, put a ball in the middle, and cover it with corporate sponsorships (because why not?) and what do you get? Everyone's favorite sportsball game!

Scouts, bangers, heavies, and blasters move the ball (or blow up the opposing team), while outriders and medicos keep their side alive. Personal sidearms are the rule, but some positions allow shotguns and assault rifles for a ratings-happy good time. Teams can field spell-slingers instead of cybermongers, so long as spells are flashy enough for the cameras.

Except for the fact it's a two-hour, nonstop slog, it's not too different from shadowrunning, really.

URUBIA

The dragon Urubia lives in the Redmond Barrens. She was first sighted in Forks, Salish-Shidhe Council, in 2045, and is a rather striking example of her species, with vibrant crimson scales and a spiked tail. Urubia has taken a liking to metahumans and is known to be an ally of Hestaby. She has interests all over Seattle and beyond, much of it co-owned by the dragon Kalanyr, who may have at one time been her mate. Since 2061, the two of them have not been seen together. Her lair is in Central Redmond. It used to be four sixteen-story low-income apartment towers, but Urubia transformed them, along with the neighborhood, into a neutral campus for Seattle's criminal element. Three of the towers function as apartments and offices, with the top three floors of each being large, open-space areas, reinforced to hold great weight.

The fourth tower is the Funhouse. Urubia has her lair on the top four floors, and the lower ten floors house hundreds of metahumans, mostly Awakened. The two floors below Urubia's lair and the apartments offer every form of wild, wicked, or wanton activity. The place is always packed with gangers. Specifically, gang leaders from every Seattle gang beside the Ancients, who often visit its top floors. Inter-gang violence has been almost non-existent in Urubia's territory since the early '70s, mostly because of the dragon's vengeance on those who break her imposed truce. Some eagle-eyed observers have noticed gang-on-gang violence outside the Funhouse has been on the decrease as well due to Urubia's influence. Whatever she is planning, it is likely not good for Seattle.

URUGUAY

A bastion of civility and calm in the tumultuous sea that is the rest of South America, Uruguay managed to maintain stability with early acceptance of Shiawase and MCT as leaders toward the future. Shiawase made inroads with renewable energy resources, while MCT came in to help construct their Matrix infrastructure, and neither has ever left. Both share equal influence over the nation's government and have managed to keep the majority of other megacorps out, but not without frequent efforts to undermine the resident powerhouses.

Rebellion still exists but is mainly pointed across the border toward Amazonia by the Cachoeira Cartel in efforts to keep border patrols focused in places other than where their drug shipments are slipping across Uruguayan soil.



V'GOLKATL

According to the ASPS, V'golkatl is one the largest single threats to the world's continued existence. V'golkatl emerged from the astral corpse of Calumet (previous spirit of Chicago) and is served by swarms of lesser terrors. Dwelling in Chicago's astral space, V'golkatl has made no moves to influence the world at large. It seems content to feed off a city with no soul. Chicago's astral

space, tainted with pain and suffering, feeds its gargantuan power. The ASPS researchers who first reported their sightings have since all been removed from their positions for either gross violations of ethical standards or violent assault.

The ASPS have contained V'golkatl with the help of powerful Chicago spirits, but it isn't gone, and Ghost help us if it gets free.

VILLIERS, RICHARD

You've already heard of him, right? The man who brought the first cyberdeck to market with Fuchi, way back in 2032? The guy the "Villiers Maneuver" that killed Fuchi, birthed Novatech, and crashed the Neo-Tokyo Stock Exchange was named for? The one who set up the Crash 2.0 when he went public with Novatech and Winternight showed up for the IPO? The one who got kicked out of The Powers That Be over NeoNET's involvement with CFD? Yeah, *that* Richard Villiers. Ever since his unwilling departure from the Corporate Court, he's been going after Evo with a vengeance. Never sleep on this guy.

VOGEL, ARTHUR

The biggest mystery about Arthur Vogel, executive director of Ares Macrotechnology who ran for UCAS president in 2057, isn't how he amassed enough wealth to buy a controlling interest in a triple-A megacorporation. It's how he's managed to stay alive this long, especially considering the other vipers on Ares' board of directors (namely CEO Damien Knight). This sexagenarian has been targeted by several assassination attempts, but only one came close to nailing his coffin shut.

Thankfully, you just can't keep a good dwarf down. Many see Vogel as the patron saint of rational thought within Ares—although most of us will take literally *anyone's* leadership over Knight's—but it could very well be that he's just another corporate stooge catering to the whims of whoever's pulling his (purse) strings. Who is it, you ask? If I knew, then I probably wouldn't be alive to write this.

VORY V ZAKONE

Roughly translated (and I mean roughly), it means "criminals who follow a code." What that means varies between the different factions, which come from all over Eastern Europe. What it means for most of us is "Russian Mafia," even though it's more like "Georgian, Armenian, Chechen, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Azeri, and Jewish Mafia Alliance for Prosperity and Legbreaking."

So let's start with that code, and how it plays into a small history lesson. It originates from a network between independent criminal syndicates in the old days of Russia, based off a code of prison conduct. Back then, the mobs worked a lot like others around the world, but with one major difference: They usually had connections to local government for back-channel black ops. Basically, the Vory was the Ministry of Crime. What kind of crime? Oh, buddy. Smuggling, prison culture, white-collar, prostitution, metahuman trafficking, and anything that involves breaking legs. Seriously, these guys love to fuck people up. Remember that code? Now it's "Do

whatever works.” Which means no limits to getting the job done. Vory are notoriously brutal and ruthless. Insult them and only get maimed. Betray them and get killed slow and bloody. There isn’t even the pretension of honor like Yakuza *machi yakko*. This is straight up “We are not ones with whom you fuck.” Which sounds absolutely intimidating in Russian.

As far as shadowrunners go, there’s two things to know: One, the Vory are absolutely prejudiced against them. But not against any metatype. They just don’t like anyone not from the motherland. They’re not too keen on the Awakened, either. Two, aside from that, they’re liable to treat you pretty well if you do the job. A Triad or Cosa Nostra outfit is probably gonna pay, but they’ll still turn up their nose at you like their own crime has some respectability to it. Vory are results-driven, and odds are they’ll buy you a stiff drink when they pay you, so long as you deliver. You may not be Vory to them, but they may treat you with something like respect, or at least affection. Like I said before, there’s hundreds of factions, so there is no hard and fast rule here.

Of course, those factions? Not quite so simple. On the global level, you’ve got Red Vory and White Vory (the Red being more aligned with Russia and its government, the White having more presence in Western Europe. Each group sees the other as inauthentic traitors). What does this mean to you? Less than you think, because you’re dealing with individual organizations, who may love or (probably) hate each other even if they’re part of the same overall movement. And distribution is spreading and diluting at the same time. While they once had a solid foothold in Russia, these days they’re seeing competition from all angles, even while they seep into every other corner of the criminal underworld. With the UCAS on the ropes, you can bet we’ll see a big push for North American markets. That means more work for us, because Vory don’t bring stability with them, and their entire concept is looking out for themselves and no one else. Maybe that works for a runner. It won’t work for a neo-anarchist.



WILD HUNT

Straight out of European folklore, this collection of hounds, horses, and hunters, all in black fur or cloaks, with swords, spears, and bows bristling, is fearsome to behold. The leader is called the Hunter, sports antlers on his head, and is impossible to defeat or evade. They hunt relentlessly from sunset to sunrise and always catch their prey.

- ▶ It’s rumored that the Wild Hunt owes allegiance to Lady Brane Deigh, can only be summoned with her permission, and only by elven magicians following the Path of the Wheel.
- ▶ Elijah
- ▶ The Hunt is fiercely loyal to the Queen, that’s true. Surprisingly, Herne likes Stuffer Shack burritos, but refuses to believe there’s no meat in them.
- ▶ Bifrost

- ▶ Bulldrek.
- ▶ Elijah

WINTERNIGHT

Hollywood villains boast about destroying the world, but these guys almost did it for real. Led by a trio of psychopaths calling themselves Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday (after Odin/Wotan, Thor, and Freyja), Winternight used a combination of bleeding-edge BTLs called “god chips,” nano-plagues, enchanted nukes (yes, you read that right), and toxic ritual magic to set off the meatspace side of Crash 2.0. The three leaders of Winternight were all geeked, two during the Crash and one in Chicago in ’72, but the group’s remnants pop up every so often to commit random acts of destruction.

WU FAMILY

As everyone knows, the Wu family is the power behind Wuxing, and probably the top celebrity family in Asia today. The first to rise to prominence was Wu Kuan-lei, the business magnate who founded Wuxing. Grandfather Wu passed away in 2039, and his son Wu Lung-wei stepped into the spotlight.

Wu Lung-wei (sometimes known as “Young Superman Wu” in Hong Kong media, after his father, “Old Superman Wu”) has been called the “Asian Damien Knight.” Growing up, Mr. Wu was the quintessential faithful son. He was educated overseas, including at Harvard, where he met his future wife, Sharon Chiang. At some point, Mr. Wu also had links with the great dragon Dunkelzahn, leading to him receiving the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire in Big D’s will. In recent years, however, Mr. Wu has stepped back from Wuxing and faded from public view.

Sharon Chiang-Wu was originally known for three things: being Wu Lung-wei’s wife, being an outsider (her ancestry’s Hong Kong Chinese, but she grew up in San Francisco), and having identical quintuplets after receiving the Second Coin of Luck. Thankfully, she’s earned acclaim in her own right since taking over the helm of Wuxing.

Then, of course, there are the famous Quints: Fo (Fire), Shui (Water), Tou (Earth), Moak (Wood), and Gum (Metal), named for the Chinese Five Elements—or as they’re called in Mandarin Chinese, *w xing*. The Quints started college last year, and the girls are all attending different universities: Stanford, Princeton, Oxford, the National University of Singapore, and their hometown HKU. (A few Hong Kong media personalities have joked that the devastation of Boston was fate accepting Sharon’s challenge, after the Wu matriarch said it would take an act of God to keep her from sending her daughters to Harvard.) In their spare time, they’ve started a fashion line called, naturally, Quint-Essentials.

WUXING

They might not be as prominent as other megacorps, but in some ways, Wuxing has a longer reach than any other. Wuxing was founded in the early 2000s, when Wu Kuan-lei consolidated a bunch of import/export firms in Hong Kong into a single corp. Even in those



early years, Wuxing was marked more by its slow and steady approach to business, making others reliant on them while never drawing too much attention to themselves. Wu Kuan-lei ran Wuxing until his death in 2039, when leadership passed to his son, Wu Lung-wei. The younger Wu guided Wuxing down the same path his father had, and the results were a consistent success, if not a spectacular one.

Then Dunkelzahn croaked, and Wu Lung-wei was granted the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire (actually a sculpture of three carp playing in a river, don't ask why it's named the way it is) in the Big D's will. When Wu had the sculpture installed at Wuxing's headquarters in Hong Kong, the results were incredible: thanks to a streak of impossibly good luck, Wuxing climbed from the middle of the megacorporate pack to the ranks of the Big Ten within a year.

- It might not explain the name, but the sculpture itself is a pun: in Cantonese, "three fish" (saam yu) sounds very similar to "life of prosperity" (saang yu). It's the same reason people usually eat fish on Chinese New Year, in the hopes of a prosperous year ahead (although you have to be "prosperous" already to get real fish nowadays).
- Lei Kung
- Well, that's my random trivia quota met for today.
- Sunshine

Soon after Wuxing's ascent to the Corporate Court, Wu Lung-wei partnered with Yamatetsu to form the Pacific Prosperity Group—a coalition of non-Japanese corporations (and the exiled-from-Japan Yamatetsu) that worked to check the Japanacorps' influence in the Pacific, a dream that had begun with Wu Kuan-lei but was never realized before his death.

Crash 2.0 hit Wuxing hard, but it also devastated most of the smaller corps in the Pacific Prosperity Group. Wuxing and Yamatetsu (now rebranded as Evo) went on a feeding frenzy, snapping up as many of their smaller counterparts as they could. The crown jewel for Wuxing was the Malaysian Independent Bank, which made them an even bigger player in the financial services industry (at the cost of strained relationships with its fellow PPG members).

Today, financial services are still one of Wuxing's core businesses. They give loans to companies all over Asia and don't hesitate to use those loans as leverage when it benefits them. They have a reputation for uncanny insight in the stock market, regularly being touted as financial wizards (which is more literally true for them than most, but more on that later). Wuxing is also one of the biggest insurers in both Asia and the Americas.

- Which was almost a disaster for them during the Boston lockdown and the reason that Wuxing pushed so hard for the Corporate Court to rule that NeoNET was liable for the damage. Those kinds of insurance payouts could bankrupt even an AAA.
- Icarus

Likewise, Wuxing has stuck to its roots as an import/export business in becoming one of the largest shipping companies in the world (which puts them in near-constant conflict with Maersk). They'll even use their corporate extraterritoriality to sidestep any legal issues with the contents of their shipments, if the customer's willing to pay for it.

- > It gives Wuxing even more leverage over them, too, since there's nothing stopping Wuxing from tipping off the cops that so-and-so is carrying that stuff around—which is why you should always turn to the shadows for your smuggling needs. No need to worry about us selling you out when you can sell us out right back!
- > Traveler Jones

Wuxing's financial and shipping divisions get all the screen time, but they're a heavy hitter in other areas. Ming Solutions is their magical consulting division, offering all the typical stuff (magical security, education, etc.) alongside Wuxing's trademark *feng shui* (geomancy) services, redirecting mana lines to do everything from attract good fortune to cleanse toxic magical domains. They also have a growing medical-response business, developed since the post-CFD split with Evo, that's quick to trumpet how good they are at treating Awakened patients without damaging their magical abilities.

- > More like "attempt" to cleanse toxic domains, although Wuxing's better at it than most, and people have noticed that. Wuxing wujen (followers of a Chinese magical tradition also called wuxing) have been spotted helping with the astral cleanup in the Philippines since the Japanacorps pulled out, and even as far afield as Tsimshian.
- > Jimmy No

Lastly, Wuxing has their fingers in just about everything on the consumer goods front. Kong-Wal Mart has been their biggest competitor (and sometimes retailer) for as long as anyone can remember, but that relationship might be changing. The Asian shadows have been buzzing with rumors that Kong-Wal Mart was spooked by the Megacorporate Revision and has been talking to Wuxing about possible acquisition. I've also seen what looked like an internal Wuxing memo that referred to the "Chinese Commonwealth." I wasn't able to verify that the memo was legit, but if it is, it makes me wonder if Wuxing isn't trying to do something in the various Chinese splinter states like what Lofwyr did with the NEEC in Europe.

So, that's it for Wuxing—nah, just kidding. We all know we can't talk about Wuxing without talking about the Triads. The Ten Thousand Lions Triad (like their Yellow Lotus predecessors, before the Red Dragons wiped them out) has a longstanding partnership with Wuxing, being the ones who distribute Wuxing-produced better-than-life chips (the infamous "Kong chips") in countries where Wuxing can't or doesn't want to be seen selling them openly. Having said that, aside from their BTL distribution, Wuxing tends to keep the Triads at arm's length. You won't (usually) see the Ten Thousand Lions doing Wuxing's dirty work like the Yaks and MCT or the Vory and Evo.

- > Here's another one for the "wild speculation" pile: Wuxing might cozy up to Telestrian Industries.
- > Frosty
- > Uh, what? I can see why the elves would be for it, but how does it help Wuxing?
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Actually, that kinda makes sense. Telestrian's biggest businesses have always been computing and biotech. With NeoNET gone and Telestrian losing their second A, their biggest competitors will be MCT and Renraku in the Matrix, and Shiawase and Evo in 'ware. If they cut a deal, Telestrian's strengths cover Wuxing's weaknesses, and Wuxing protects the elves from a hostile takeover.
- > Bull
- > Admit it, you just enjoy seeing the elves get taken down a peg.
- > Pistons
- > Well, yeah. Better question is, what made Frosty bring it up?
- > Bull
- > Of course. Fraggin' elves.
- > Bull

X

Nothing. Not an entry. Nothing starts with X. Come on, all you Xaviers, you xylophone players, you xeriscapers, you xoanon sculpters—go out there and shake the world, so we can write about you.

Y

YAKASHIMA TECHNOLOGIES

An above-average-sized AA-rated corp headquartered in Japan, Yakashima focuses on agribusiness, biotechnology (especially botanical), chemicals (drawn largely from organic compounds), and pharmaceuticals. They're the number one producer of chocolate confectioneries in the world and the fourth-largest coffee producer as well as being heavily invested in sugar, rum, and nuts. With heavy investments throughout South America and the Caribbean, they are said to have "working arrangements" with several pirates. They are part of Mitsuhamas's "opposition coalition" facing the current emperor of Japan, being fiercely racist and long supporting the Humanis Policlub and, according to rumors, the Human Nation.

YAKUT (AWAKENED SIBERIA)

Holy shit, where do I even start with this place? So okay, the Evenks, one of Russia's indigenous peo-

ple, saw other Native groups getting power and even their own nations back in the day, so they're like, yeah, we'll take some of that. And they know it takes power to get power, so the power they latch onto is this hella powerful free spirit named Vernya, who says, sure, you can have your own nation, but here's the thing—you all gotta move toward the border, and Imma put my shape-shifting friends in the heart of the nation, but with some of them to spy on you, so watch your ass. The Evenks start to think this deal sucks, so they form this group called the Sagan Zaba, who you would think would be overmatched, but no, they somehow got a magical artifact called the White Rock, plus some other artifacts, and no one knows how these artifacts keep falling into their hands, but they have them, and they're slowly taking their nation back. But wait, Vernya has a dragon friend named Booryazmei helping out, so a free spirit with its dragon ally and shapeshifting friends is taking on a bunch of magically heightened Evenks in an ongoing fight that never breaks out into open warfare but is an unending series of sniping from the shadows. This is so much the world we live in that it makes my teeth ache.

The place stretches from Novosibirsk in the west and runs all the way to the Sea of Okhotsk in the east and is among the hardest nuts to crack in the Awakened World. Not only have they not signed the BRA, they have repeatedly kicked the hoops of any corps that try to force their way in. Evo and Wuxing have made some progress on getting in to negotiate with whatever the nation calls a government. Their capital is in Yakutsk, which is deep within the Siberia stretches and hosts a population of over half a million sapient. And is so cold that it's good there's lots of Awakened to regularly sustain heat spells and drek.

Shapeshifters make up an immense and disproportionate amount of the governing body, but that's changed some in the last decade or so. Buryat tribals, nomadic and other peoples still roam, but so do members of the Infected, as well as free and wild spirits. It's the kind of place where the definition of "normal" is so broad that if you don't fit it, then you probably are a form of life that hasn't been recorded yet. Shedim nests have been reported there, because of course they have, and people think they're way interested in getting into to the Tunguska Crater.

Which brings us to the Tunguska Crater's there. Might have been formed by a meteor, might have magic, but everyone researching it lately keeps turning up dead, so yeah, you go and try to find out what's going on there, and good luck with that.

In the central south lies the place with the most fighting: Lake Baikal. This thing holds more than twenty percent of the world's surface freshwater supply, and it has, for the most part, remained clean, by some miracle or some terrible corporate oversight that will end up with a dozen directors of corporate Departments of Laying Waste to Everything losing their jobs.

The country gets constant border conflicts between Yakut forces and Russian (whatever name they use these days) military. Evo and Wuxing have been focused here especially at Irkutsk and the uranium enrichment facilities that date back all the way to the Cold War of the previous century.

Vernya still rules over the nation, even though no one can agree to just what she is. Early reports was "she" is

a massive forest spirit, but not everyone wholly believes that. Next to no one ever gets to speak directly with her, but her guiding roots are in everything.

YAKUZA

Named for the worst hand in the card game *Oicho-Kabu*, the Yakuza (literally ya[8]-ku[9]-sa[3]) see themselves as an honorable organization, providing service to those members of society that the government or elite cannot, or will not, help. When a crooked gambler cheats a desperate man out of the rent money, for instance, the police will do nothing since the entire activity was illegal, but the Yakuza can be asked for aid. These favors require repayment, of course, creating a circle of dependent persons who can only turn to the Yakuza for aid and who, in turn, protect them from the authorities. Prospective members of the Yakuza are drawn largely from teenaged gangs and "adopted" into the Yakuza family. Indeed, the core Yakuza model is based on the creation of a stand-in family, with the *oyabun* referred to as "father," while the *kobun* call one another elder brother/younger brother as appropriate, a tradition that is extended to the rare big sisters/little sisters who join as well. This intense family loyalty binds the organization tightly, and the son-to-father bonds, created over shared cups of sake, continue to the very top of the organization. There is no true "boss of bosses" atop the Yakuza families; instead, the five largest families meet in concert and try to defuse situations between their subordinates.

As Japan replaced the United States as the greatest economic force in the world, and Japanese corporations spread out in a form of economic empire, the Yakuza followed in their wake. This has established the Yakuza across the world, operating in the shadows (and some boardrooms) of their corporate benefactors. The corps, in turn, have "working arrangements" with the Yakuza that protect their businesses and allow for the exchange of goods and services between the two (such as corporate money buying drugs or the Yakuza providing young women for executives). Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies is the most famous cousin of the Yakuza, and persistent rumors circulate that one or more of the major stockholders are Yakuza leaders.

The Yakuza consider themselves to be an honorable organization and strictly enforce this by never preying on the innocent. They make offers, such as gambling, drugs, or revenge, but if rebuffed they are forbidden from lashing out. Those who enter a bargain with the Yakuza, by definition, are no longer innocent, but this restriction prevents the Yakuza from engaging in theft, and several other crimes. In contrast, those who enter into Yakuza business, such as gambling at *pachinko* parlors, understand that they're dealing with criminals and accept being cheated from time to time. Those found guilty of violating someone's innocence can be expected to engage in *Yubitsume*, or finger-cutting, at the very least.

Yakuza members undergo an extensive tattooing process, starting from when they're first accepted into the gang and carried on for the rest of their career. These tattoos are unique to each member and are ordinarily applied in ancient ways. The upper torso, lower body, and genitals are all appropriate areas to tattoo but the face, upper neck, hands, and center of the chest are generally left untouched, allowing members to still wear

long-sleeved shirts in public without betraying their gangster status. When in private and dealing with fellow Yakuza, tattoos are frequently on display as a show of trust between brothers. Those worried about dealing with Yakuza members often hold meetings in bathhouses or similar areas where shirts cannot be worn as a way of keeping the criminal element out.

YAMA KINGS

Nobody's completely sure what the Yama Kings are, but everyone agrees they're bad news. Named for the rulers of the hell realms of East Asian mythology, the Yama Kings hold a great deal of influence over Hong Kong's Kowloon Walled City, feeding on the misery and suffering of its residents. The Yama Kings have also been known to make deals with mortals, with one in particular offering wealth and influence for the low, low price of the hearts of forty-four of the petitioner's family and friends, supporting the theory that the Yama Kings are powerful free spirits.

YAT GWAN

Nobody knows much about this dragon. The only things we've been able to confirm are that he's one of Lung's "vassals" (or whatever dragons call them) and is in charge of looking after Zhurong Peak in the Canton Confederation. Apparently, the only tribute he demands from local residents for his protection is thirty rubies, presented to him on the summer solstice. He also seems to have a fascination with nuclear energy. You'd think that goes against the back-to-nature mentality a lot of dragons seem to have, but Yat Gwan's rumored to own a majority stake in Nucor Energy, which maintains nuclear medicine and power facilities all over Greater China.

YELLOWSTONE ANOMALY

Yellowstone is a huge park in the area where Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho meet. It's an amazing place if you're into nature, with birds, beasts, trees, flowers, and drek like that. What's more interesting is what happened a couple of years ago—July 27, 2078, to be exact. The Yellowstone Calamity, as it's called, started off as a regular, ordinary eruption of a supervolcano. As if that's regular or ordinary. All we felt in the physical world was a massive earthquake, and then ... nothing. Somehow—it's not entirely clear how—the Yellowstone Caldera spewed into the astral. When it settled down, there was one lasting effect from it—a permanent hole in the world, leading through the astral, into the meta-planes, and ending at the fraggin' Seelie Court. And the hole likes to move around occasionally. It's been slowly drifting east, but randomly disappears, reappears elsewhere, then pops back to where it was before. There's no telling how many folk have stumbled into it, never to return. Naturally, the corps are all over it, sending envoys and goods, trying to maximize their advantages and profits. So far, Renraku's been the favorite in the Seelie Court. They've even brokered a deal to bring real food over! Check out Festival Food's host, and you'll see their new line of real foods, priced about the same as the fake stuff we all know and choke down. It's selling

faster than they can ship it. But—it comes from the fae. Is it safe?

- Seriously? Everyone knows fae food isn't safe. You'll get stuck there.
- Chainmaker
- That's not entirely true. Honey cake and leann daerg will slow time for one who consumes them, but most fae food is safe—unless it's deliberately enchanted. Assense before you indulge.
- Bifrost
- Tread lightly. Rumor is that Aztechnology's working with the Sioux, but no one's sure what they're doing.
- Hard Exit

Z

ZEBULON

There's a lot we know about Zebulon, the Spirit of Denver, and a lot we don't, so rather than speculate on the major gaps in our knowledge—which I attribute to the great dragon Ghostwalker's possessiveness and/or Harlequin's interference—we'll focus on what we do know.

The free spirit Zebulon has been inextricably tied to Denver for a long time—since even before the Awakening, if you believe the folk who claim she settled there during the Gold Rush in the mid 1800s. Problems arose in 2017 when two magicians on opposite sides of the US/NAN conflict each tried to summon her to fight for their respective side, which ultimately tore her into two fragments because Denver itself was also being torn in two. What happens to Denver happens to Zebulon, and vice versa. Those pieces fractured again after the Treaty of Denver was signed in 2018—one fragment for each district in the city.

Not long after Ghostwalker took up roost in Denver, he started collecting pieces of Zebulon and ultimately kicked out every nation's citizens from the city to help unite her. But the now-unified city wasn't enough to put her back together, so the story goes. Rumors claim she had something to do with the rash of disappearances that cropped up in Denver over the past few years, but one thing is now painfully certain: the Spirit of Denver is no more. Ghostwalker is slotted off something fierce, and there is a listlessness within the city itself; you can feel it. But there is also a kind of calm that defies words. Whether it is a sense of peace or the serenity before a raging storm remains to be seen, but if the storm is indeed coming ...? It's a good time to start boarding up your windows and prepping that doomsday shelter.

ZETA-IMPCHEM

This Switzerland-based AA mega is a massive pharma giant, and you've probably taken some pills, patches, or injectables they developed and manufactured. But don't let their main business or their tagline—"Committed to Cure"—fool you. If there was an Evil Megacor-



poration event at the Olympics, Z-IC would at the very least end up taking home a bronze medal.

Their first major frag-up was having the gall to start developing some nasty biochemical weapons somewhere in the '30s. *Yeab*. Fraggers were just a nanometer away from deliberately causing a stronger, harder, and deadlier VITAS outbreak. That kinda drek alone wasn't enough to severely damage their reputation. Z-IC claimed their R&D was for developing preventative measures for potential outbreaks, but only the sheep believed that. Biochemical weapons research was outlawed in '41, but that hasn't stopped anyone, and there's no hard evidence Z-IC completely shuttered those projects.

Z-IC used to have a seat on the Corporate Court, but they lost it over a drug-testing scandal in '42 because they didn't follow the Second Commandment of Evil Megacorps: Thou shalt not get caught. (The First Commandment: Thou shalt make profit by any means necessary.)

Fortunately the comeuppance doesn't stop there. Z-IC made the mistake of heavily investing in nanotechnology, allegedly for biotech applications. Fortunately, Z-IC was linked to a nanotech weapon used by terrorist group Winternight in '64, and the role of nanotech in proliferating CFD infection led to this investment blowing up in Z-IC's big fat faces. That cost them a lot of money, which they've been scrambling to recover from.

But they likely won't have to worry about it in the long run. Your medicine cabinet is probably already

filled with pills from various Zeta-ImpChem subsidiaries. I wouldn't blame you for thinking twice about taking them now. But good luck finding a comparable replacement for them. Ain't drug patents and generic-substitution laws grand?

ZHIGUL MAKERS

You ever wonder why the dwarfs never made themselves a kingdom like the elves did with Tír Tairngire, Tír na nÓg, and the Zulu Nation? Ever wonder why they instantly integrated after the Awakening and are now among the most overlooked and unrecognized races in the Sixth World? There are conspiracy theories aplenty. Some suggest that there is a vast, secret cabal of dwarfs who control all the world's money and have sunk their hooks into big media and corporate culture. Before the Awakening, people blamed the Jews or other minority groups for that stuff, and it wasn't true then and isn't true now. Having said that, what if I told you that there was indeed a secret society of dwarfs and they are stockpiling resources away from the public markets?

Far from the "let's rule the world" illuminati, these dwarfs—called the Zhigul Makers by the Seelie Court (although I believe this to be a pseudonym intended to mislead visiting humans)—seem to have a very, very long history and culture stretching back millennia. Some of them claim to have enormous lifespans rivaling the oldest elves, although how they maintained their youth during the downtime of magic is a mystery that

throws their claims into question. Point is, they don't seem to want to control anything but are certainly preparing for something. They believe some great calamity is imminent, and they have been preparing their vast, underground "kingdom," for lack of a better word, to be a haven and fortress against whatever they think is coming. They have technology, particularly architectural and arms making, that continue to be valuable to the Seelie, so I hope it isn't just a matter of time before the corps start wanting to make deals with them. They have deep relations with the Stonecutters Guild, and through them, access to many dwarf names they use to bolster their ranks, ever so secretly.

ZULU NATION

A part of the Azanian Confederation, the Zulu Nation is ruled by the Wakyambi elves of the Zulu tribe. During the Awakening, nearly all of the tribe Awakened into wakyambi. The Zulu have a distrust for non-wakyambi elves, but the nation is a haven for non-human sapient, free spirits, and shapeshifters, which comprise one fifth of the population. They remain relatively reclusive but have been known to act aggressively toward other tribes, making an enemy of the dragon Mujaji, who has opposed the Zulu. The largest corp in the Zulu nation is Izolo Inc., an A-rated corp controlled exclusively by Zulu wakyambi.

ZURICH-ORBITAL GEMEINSCHAFT BANK

A fascinating case study in having mammoth power without being able to wield it—at least, it's fascinating to ponder if you can spare a minute while being ground under their feet. While it would be great to get into all the details of currency theory and how it's manipulated, let's keep it to this: ZOGB issues the nuyen and is charged with keeping it stable. The purchasing heft of the Big Ten and most major governments help them in this effort—when all the major powers of the world share a common goal, it's a reasonably easy thing to accomplish. Perhaps the most important part of the job is security, since the last thing you want to happen with a primarily electronic currency is for it to be hacked or illicitly copied. The greatest cryptographers in the world are employed here, along with plenty of drek-hot deckers. There are also investors and financiers, since the executives at the head of the bank want to keep wealth without having to print it, because inflation.

The bank has tremendous wealth and the power to bring down the economy of the whole world, or even sections of it by freezing up their cash flow. And for the most part, they can't use it. Their job is to keep the world moving, not to go on some power trip, and the Big Ten carefully appoint board members who will be actively engaged in keeping the bank in line. If you successfully navigate a term as a bank executive, any job you want is yours for the taking. Cause any instability, or make one of the Big Ten think you're screwing them over somehow, and you'll be devil-rat chow before the day is up. Those in charge tread carefully.

ZURICH-ORBITAL HABITAT

Ever seen one of those trids where the earth gets just totally wasted and the wealthy take off to something nice in orbit so they don't have to deal with the mess down on the ground? The Zurich-Orbital Habitat is a limited form of that. It can't hold too many people, and it doesn't have vast areas of simulated gravity where you can stroll around, but it's incredibly secure, and the view can't be beat. The ZO started as an old United States research station named *Freedom* that was snapped up when Ares Macrotechnology bought NASA, refurbished, and eventually sold to the young court in 2023. Immune to magical observation due to being located above the manosphere, immune to hacking due to timed broadcast gates, and immune to infiltration due to tight controls over entry and egress, the habitat was the ideal place for the Corporate Court to gather and make rulings on the world's businesses. Literally ruling from on high, there is no appeal to their decisions, nor opting out once the Business Recognition Accords are signed into law by a nation.

In addition to housing the Corporate Court, the ZO serves as the headquarters for the Grid Overwatch Division, the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank, and residences for a handful of the wealthiest people alive. The zero-gravity environment reduces the strain on the body and adds years, perhaps decades, to a natural lifespan but comes at a cost ... your residency is bought with the majority of your wealth, including (and especially!) stock ownership. When you eventually pass on, the Court takes it all and resells it as they see fit. This overrides any other will or intent with someone's wealth, but appeals may be made to the Court itself. You can guess how they rule on the issue.

ZO's critical functions mean that it will never be neglected, and the wealth and taste of the residents means it is always well stocked with the luxuries of the world below. The completion of mass drivers and space elevators and whatnot on terra firma mean that getting goods—and expansions—up to the habitat will happen at a greater pace. Will that mean more opportunities to smuggle illicit people and cargo? Depends—do you have enough guts?

If the habitat is set for more rapid expansion, how will that change it? Smart money is on the antigravitational-matter research that has been happening at MIT&T (an offshoot of this work gave us gravjack grenades). Working with states of matter only made possible through magic, scientists believe they can make a pod with plates embedded in the top and bottom (terms that often have little meaning in microgravity) to create a gravitational effect without the need for the rotation that is the traditional way to simulate gravity in space. Being able to walk normally in their quarters is likely to be a hot commodity among Zurich Orbital residents, but you can bet they'll keep some low-gravity areas, both for efficiency in using space and for the joy of flying.



ALL IN!

They're all here. Everyone of them. The legends, the liars, the betrayers, the winners, the craven, the brave, the powerful, the down-trodden. The people who leaked secrets and got killed for it, and the secrets that no one has discovered yet. The dark bargains, the shady deals, the desperate maneuvers. Everything that makes the Sixth World the high-revving nightmare machine its residents know too well is right here, between these two covers

The Neo-Anarchist Streetpedia is your definitive guide to the Shadowrun universe. With hundreds of entries, it covers corporations, shadowrunners, politicians, nations, cities, criminal organizations, and more. Even better, it gets to the point and tells you what you need to know now, so you get hit the streets a little smarter than you were when you woke up this morning.

The Neo-Anarchist Streetpedia is for use with whatever form of *Shadowrun* you play. Don't play *Shadowrun*? Read this, learn about the Sixth World, and then find a game to dive into!

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