



# SHADOWRUN<sup>®</sup>

## MARGIN CALLS



PLOT SOURCEBOOK





# MARGIN CALLS







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# INTRODUCTION

In the corporate world, few things are as feared as the margin call. Because in the corporate world if you stick your neck out on a particular investment, and that investment doesn't pay off, you're responsible to making good on and covering it. And for those who play fast and loose or stick their neck out too far, a margin call could mean a corporate death sentence. During the Disian Shadow War, several corporations made their investments. Some, for reasons all their own, sided with the Disians. Others, sided against them, putting it all on the line to save the Sixth World from destruction. While others, simply went on with business as usual, unable (or uncaring) as to the ultimate outcome. But when it was all said and done, after the Disians were defeated, the corporate world suddenly realized that the world had changed and that each of them would have to deal with their own margin calls.

And not everyone could cover their debts, which changed the Sixth World's corporate landscape forever ...

Starting with *Winners and Losers*, this chapter sheds light on the corporate world post-Disian Shadow War from an inside point of view as they talk about what their roles are in this post-Disian world (a.k.a. how do we take advantage of this?).

*New Order in the Court* discusses the true seat of corporate power: the new Corporate Court. This chapter looks how the court is restructuring, who's on it, the horse trading going on between members, and how some corporations are looking

to get revenge on others for their actions in the shadow war.

*All About Nuyen and Cents* touches on major financial institutions, such as the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank, that stayed neutral during the shadow war, nevertheless now have something to say about the new corporate world order.

*To the Victors Go the Spoils* is about the victors and their spoils, those corporations who managed to win BIG or came out better post-Disian Shadow War. And while they were saviors, their methods and reasons for doing so are anything but altruistic.

*Breaking Even* reveals that while some corporations won big and others lost big, some managed to make modest gains while taking only moderate losses. But they still have enough assets and corporate clout to be considered viable and still very much in the corporate fight.

In *The Harder They Fall*, we see the losers of the shadow war, those corporations that lost the most by backing the Disians and how other corporations now want their kilo of flesh. And while bloody, these corps are eager to prove that a wounded animal is the most dangerous.

*Waiting to Strike* reveals scores of up-and-coming AA and A-rated corporations who managed to survive the conflict relatively intact and are now poised to become major players on corporate scene.

*The Plebian Perspective* takes a look at recent corporate machinations through the lens of the common person, specifically those in the shadows.

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////////////////////////////////////  
**CONNECTING TO JACKPOINT VPN...**

**...IDENTITY SPOOFED**

**...ENCRYPTION KEYS GENERATED**

**...CONNECTED TO ONION ROUTERS**  
////////////////////////////////////

**>LOGIN**

**>ENTER PASSCODE**

**...BIOMETRIC SCAN CONFIRMED**

**CONNECTED TO <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>**  
////////////////////////////////////

**“You never expected justice from a company, did you?**

**They have neither a soul to lose nor a body to kick.”**

**— Sydney Smith**  
////////////////////////////////////

Welcome back to JackPoint, chummer; your last connection was severed **10 hours, 23 minutes, 04 seconds ago.**

## **TODAY’S HEADS-UP**

In business, there are winners and there are losers. But when the margins are called, *everyone* pays up

—Mr. Bonds  
////////////////////////////////////

## **INCOMING**

>>> Be nice, be professional, but always have a plan to kill everyone in the room. [TAG: DEADLY ARTS]

>>> Fortune may favor the bold, but are you willing to pay the cost? [TAG: RISKS & REWARDS]

>>> Old ways become new and new paths emerge as the next stage in magical evolution begins. [TAG: DEUS EX ARCANA]  
////////////////////////////////////

## **TOP NEWS ITEMS**

>>> Mysterious and unexplained mana fluctuations in and around the city of Cairo cause concerns as some fear new round of destructive storms.

>>> Ares Entertainment signs contract with mercenary group Thunder Corps to produce sim series chronicling the upcoming 2084 Desert Wars season.

>>> In a joint proposal, Saeder-Krupp, Ares Macrotechnology, and Evo have submitted plans and schematics to the United Nations and the Corporate Court for the construction of the Skyhook II space elevator.  
////////////////////////////////////

## **JACKPOINT STATS**

**90 Users are active on the network.**

## **LATEST NEWS**

**MCT stocks fall another ten percent as the corporation begins selling off valuable subsidiaries to offset recent losses. Insiders wonder if the corporation’s AAA-rating is in jeopardy.**

## **PERSONAL ALERTS**

>>> You have 13 new private messages.

>>> You have 4 new responses to your JackPoint posts.

>>> Your primary bank account balance 5.25¥.

>>> Your FoodRUSH delivery specialist sent the following message: pinned down by gunfire, ETA additional ten minutes, has extra order of Chee-Z bread for your inconvenience.

**There are three Members online and in your area.**

**YOUR CURRENT REP SCORE: 711 (69% POSITIVE)**

**CURRENT TIME: 29 Sept 2083, 2317 hrs**  
////////////////////////////////////





## WIND AND FIRE

BY JAYMIE WAGNER

*“—the merger between Maersk and OmniStar, it’s likely that the state of shipping in and around the Pacific Rim will change. Another blow to Wuxing Incorporated, which has recently suffered a number of setbacks including the recent d—”*

A manicured hand tapped the mute button, and the anchor was silenced.

“Setbacks” was certainly one way to talk about the recent past. Sharon Chang-Wu looked around her office, avoiding the AROs and data feeds projected behind her that showed far more red than green. The lights were set to dim automatically at sunset, allowing her to appreciate the juxtaposition of the night sky and the neon aurora of the Hong Kong skyline.

She remembered the first time she had walked into this room, marveling at its commanding view of the city and the harbor.

Even for a corporation with Wuxing’s growing resources, construction of the eighty-eight-story tower had taken time, particularly with the geomancy work that Kuan-Lei had insisted on. Wei had even emerged from his latest wanderings in time for the dedication

ceremonies and sent her an invitation along with a first-class ticket for the flight. She’d been delighted to have some time together with her husband after weeks of hearing nothing, but even as he showed her into the office that they both knew he’d inherit sooner or later, she could tell it would not be long before Wei would leave once again on some quest or another.

The man she had loved had always been possessed by wanderlust. His craving for knowledge and understanding had taken him to Harvard to meet her, and it became obvious to Sharon early in their relationship that she would always be competing with that urge to discover something new. Even during their graduate classes, she might steal a few days of courtship, planning, and passion from the calling in Wei’s soul. Still, sooner or later, he would run across a lead that whispered of great things—either for his family’s business empire, or his need to understand more of the ancient magical traditions that were hidden around them in plain sight—and he would be gone. Sometimes for days, sometimes for weeks.

They’d continue their conversations, at least, but it became a thing of emails, copies of class notes, and the rare but fascinating letters that arrived at her rented house on Franklin Street covered in a myriad of postage stamps and customs tags, the paper accented with drawings of things and people he’d encountered along the way. If she hadn’t loved Wei so much for his ener-





gy, his enthusiasm, and the excitement she felt when he shared the insights he gained from his travels, she probably would have dumped him after the first time he disappeared for the better part of a month without a word.

She'd worried about him during that time, particularly after several of her messages had gone unanswered. She had just started to consider reaching out to his father to see if he'd heard anything when Wei appeared on her doorstep at 04:00 in clothes that would have taken "disreputable" as a compliment, his hair wild and his eyes full of stars.

"You would not believe the things I've seen," he'd said when she opened the door.

"I believe you, but you are taking a shower before you say anything else," she replied archly.

He'd laughed and did as she asked while she made a pot of coffee. She had spent the rest of the night listening to stories from his travels. Walking the dragon lines in Sichuan. Exploring what had appeared to be an ancient ritual temple excavated in Kuala Lumpur. Tea and snacks with free spirits in one of Singapore's food courts. He'd finished with the tale of a hired guide leading him to what was supposed to have been an "abandoned" dragon's lair that turned out to be anything but in Hoang Mai, and their rush to flee before getting singed!

Wonderful stories. Insane stories. She loved everything he shared with her and hung off every impossi-

ble word. His eyes shone with energy and excitement, and she could see the visions he had for the future and shared in his enthusiasm.

As the morning light began to shine into the kitchen, Wei had opened up a beautiful black lacquer box to reveal a platinum engagement ring, the diamond flanked by a pair of brilliantly red topaz chips on either side of the setting.

She'd said yes on the spot. How could she not?

Things had not always been easy, but she had held onto the love she felt for him even as the Crash of '29 shattered so many dreams, and the death of Wu Kuan-Lei thrust them both into the upper echelons of the "family business."

Still, Sharon had helped them endure that chaotic time together. Even when Wei's dreams for the future seemed hopelessly far away, she had clung to every chance for happiness she could grab. No matter how much time they both had to devote to their work, Sharon had made sure they would have time for each other, and Wei had been grateful to her for those quiet moments—even if it was just a quick lunch and a stolen kiss before the next agenda item.

After a while, they seemed to find a rhythm. The company grew, sometimes despite Wei's need to unearth more arcana as it was because of it. Sharon had gone from being dismissed as "the American wife" in



the eyes of many of Kuan-Lei's old guard to a respected voice in the company affairs, thanks to her seeing when the company needed to consolidate gains, and when it needed to seize opportunities.

She'd proven her business acumen and stepped into the role of a hostess and majordomo to help Wuxing improve relations with allies and acquisitions, and that had also gone a long way to easing the worries of many of their partners and employees who had been steeped in tradition. Their life had been good, then. If Wei had become the head of the Wuxing Empire, Sharon was regarded as his capable and loyal empress, and she used that soft power to help reduce the burdens on their time and energy.

She even had the chance to accompany Wei on a few of his trips, providing a bit of grounding while he chased secrets hidden in the earth and skies. It had been near the end of one such trip that an urgent call came from Li Feng, asking them to return to Hong Kong as soon as they could.

Dunkelzahn had died, they soon learned, and had left them each a bequest. What they received had changed them, changed Wuxing, changed *everything*.

The thought drew her attention to the sculpture that sat at a very specific location within her office, the reflections of the neon skyline dancing across the curves and planes of the intricately carved jade.

The Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire.

It wasn't a dragon, of course—that was part of the legend. Or the joke, depending how seriously you took the old stories. The leaping fish were so beautifully carved, almost as if each one could come to life at any moment. The water they danced in was equally well shaped and sculpted, so much so that Sharon often imagined she could hear the sound of the fish dancing in a river running nearby.

*Pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh. Pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh.*

It was just a fanciful thing, perhaps mixed a bit with the stories of the statue's creation that Wei had told her after he'd returned from the UCAS with the statue and 200 million nuyen in tow. It had been as if all their dreams for the future were coming true.

Yes. Those times *had* been good—especially considering what followed her own bequest.

Her fingers rose involuntarily to the copper coin that hung around her neck. It always felt warm against her skin, no matter the weather or temperature. It had been just a few months after she first wore the Third Coin of Luck that she'd realized she hadn't dealt with her period in that time. A day later, she had a positive pregnancy test, and Wei had hugged her close, sharing in her excitement for their unexpected boon. She didn't think he needed to know it had somehow happened despite her continued use of birth control. If anything, she felt it would have just confirmed the coin's magic in his eyes. They had agreed she would nurture and care for their child while he cared for the company, executing the bold plans he had composed for the board to perfection.

Yet the signs of trouble had already been there, in hindsight.

Lung-Wei's continued demands of their magical research departments to better understand the Jade Dragon and her coin. Rearranging several layouts of corporate holdings and even floors inside the tower to "optimize" the already-crafted feng shui. Disappearing into his studies and research instead of leaving to chase after his next goal ... but he had stopped telling her about what he had learned, or what his next goal would be.

At the time, Sharon had assumed he was throwing himself into work so he wouldn't worry over her or the baby. She had become pregnant later in life after all. Even though everything seemed to progress smoothly, she had strictly followed the instructions of her doctors and the midwife that Wei hired. She had not wanted to risk their unexpected gift.

Or gifts, as it had turned out.

Their five beautiful daughters had brought Wei back to her for a time, and they had both doted on their children, delighting in how they both grew into parents and in the unexpected joys of their new family. Wei had hoped one of the girls would be interested in following their footsteps into the business world, but Sharon had privately hoped that they'd each find paths in life that made them feel happy, and not forced into a mold out of a perceived duty to their family legacy.

Besides, if one of the girls expressed an interest in ballet, painting, or musical instruments, they could certainly afford to indulge their curiosity with lessons and tutors. They had both agreed it would help make their children into more well-rounded people.

Even when Wei worried over the corporation, the Pacific Prosperity Group, or the Wu legacy, Sharon could ease him by helping him see how much they had built. The company and the prosperity group would live on in one way or another, even if none of their children sat at the helm. Their personal legacy was assured, and so were their professional ones.

It had been a truly arrogant attitude in hindsight, but she'd had her reasons.

After all, Wuxing had just ascended into AAA status. The PPG that Wu Kuan-Lei had dreamed of had finally been made reality a few months after the birth of their children, and it had grown strong enough to fend off an alliance of the Japanese megas before the girls had learned to walk.

There seemed to be no stopping their rising star. But oh, she now knew the cost of that hubris.

Lung-Wei's infallible business sense seemed to evaporate over the next few years, with missed goals and flawed projections casting doubt on his ability to continue as CEO—but for Sharon, there had been something more.

That long familiar wanderlust in her husband's eyes had changed from a curious mind seeking out new discoveries, to something darker and colder. It was one thing for him to be unavailable during a board meeting or even their own wedding anniversary, but when



he began to ignore their children's birthdays, Sharon knew in her heart that her husband had changed—or had *been* changed.

His incredible drive had turned into a consuming obsession, and it was focused more and more on the deepest and most obscure topics of magic and myth. Her husband stopped coming home to share her bed—and even as she tried to salvage both corporate image and their marriage, it was clear the man she loved was withering away to nothing inside of this cold creature.

Sharon didn't know if he had pledged himself to the Disians at that point, or if that came later in his descent, but it became clear that even moving him into a role where he could wander to his heart's content was not enough to bring him back to her.

Even the support of the Harper-Smythes and Fu Teng's tacit approval of her elevation to the CEO's office had not stopped many of the old knives from coming out of the dark. Grudges from within and without had flared in the wake of her appointment, and while she had used the fallout of the second crash to pull resources and allies to her, the moves that Lung-Wei and his cronies had used to bring Aztechnology into the PPG and acquire the Malaysian Independent Bank had undermined many of what had once been their shared goals.

Still, she had endured the attacks, the insinuations, and the controversies—and so too had Wuxing.

*Pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh. Pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh.*

Without really thinking about it, Sharon stood and walked to where the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire sat within the room that linked the tower and the dragon lines that lay beneath the foundation. For all that Lung-Wei had focused on discovering the magical properties of his gift, he had never seemed to grasp the meaning of the statue itself.

In some of the legends he had shared with her, the sculptor had been imprisoned and tortured for defying the emperor's wish for a Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire. Others claimed he had been maimed for his arrogance and reduced to a beggar until the emperor finally saw the truth in the jade and begged forgiveness for his arrogance and cruelty.

Regardless of the punishment, every version of the statue's legend ended with the sculptor being vindicated—he had seen the true form of the jade and brought it forth. He did what he knew was right and true, and it gave him the strength to endure the insults visited on him. He knew that in time, it would be made right.

Wu Lung-Wei had chased after each new lead, each new dream, but he had never understood the value of patience and endurance the way she had—and of choosing to do what was right and true despite the costs that might follow. She dearly hoped that Moag and her other daughters had learned from her example, and not his. They would need to be strong now, and she could only do so much to shield them from the coming storms.

That train of thought drew her back to the desk

with a pang of guilt, and she opened her email program with a flick of her fingers, beginning to type as soon as the window appeared.

*Daughter,*

*With the shares of the company and seat on the board you have inherited, there is much you should know before you begin this new chapter in your life. Could you meet me for breakfast tomorrow? I would like to make sure you are aware of the current goals of the company, and perhaps to share a bit of hard-won wisdom. I am truly sorry that I could not bring you or your sisters the news about your father's death. I hope I can begin to make up for that in some small way in the coming days.*

She hadn't dared tell them of Wei's death in person or even over a vid call. There had been so much that would have needed to be explained, and it would have been far too easy to spill some of the secrets that needed to remain hers alone until the grave. It was better this way, both for her husband's corporate legacy, and for the happy memories her daughters still had of their father.

No one else needed to know how he had twisted the dreams and the empire they had once shared into the Disians' service. No one else should bear the burden of knowing how the man she had once loved more than anyone in the world had become a cold, foreign creature that had to be put down.

She did not wish for her girls to know how likely it was that their father had been dead for ten years or more, and what would be cremated and placed in their cenotaph in the coming days was simply a shell who had worn his face. No one else needed to bear the burdens she willingly carried to protect them, protect Wuxing, and protect the Wu family legacy—no matter how many threats she might face.

*I cannot tell you what the next few years will hold for us all, Moag. But I can tell you that no matter what, we will endure it. You are stronger than you know, and I will give you every measure of support that I can.*

*Your Mother,  
Sharon*

Aztechnology. Disian remnants. OmniStar. Ryumyo. Lung. The Corporate Court. The last gasps of the Wuxing old guard, and those who had been seduced into the darkness along with Wu Lung-Wei. Their enemies were legion, and Sharon knew all too well that more trials and threats lurked in the long shadows, but she was ready.

Her eyes returned to the statue, and she meditated on it for a time.

*Pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh. Pah-tah, pah-tah, shooosh.*

Let them come. She would endure. Wuxing would endure. Her children would endure. In time, even if she did not live to see it, all would be made right.





# WINNERS & LOSERS

- › If there's one thing we can count on in the wake of any crisis (let alone an interdimensional war for survival), it's that the corps will struggle to adapt and profit from it. Some call it the strength of capitalism; others have called it auto cannibalism. But two things remain true: Information is power, and the shadows thrive on conflict. To that end, it is my very great pleasure to present the winners of last week's Hack-Off Challenge! We put it to you fine deckers and VKs to cut the code and pull out some internal docs to kick off this latest data dump covering the corporate angle on a post-Dis victory state. Winners will be labeled in each upload. Collect your custom agents from Glitch and enjoy!
- › Slamm-O!
- › Now this is what I wanted to see more of! Old-school decking the corps, big steamy secrets exposed ... makes me pine for the Dead Deckers' Society. One day, hey chummers?
- › Bung
- › Are you going to drag his drunk hoop home?
- › Red
- › Fair enough.
- › Tauren
- › Chummer, this agent is extremely customizable! Who worked on this?
- › Woz
- › Slamm-O, Bull, and I each contributed.
- › Glitch
- › Very cool stuff.
- › Woz
- › Which reminds me: No sharing war stories about how you got these documents, at least not on this board. I'll set up a chat for anyone who wants to ask or answer how these bits were acquired, but for the sake of staying on point, let's keep that over there, shall we?
- › Glitch



## ENTERING PRIVATE CHAT 404-002 'BRAGGING RIGHTS'

- > I always knew you kept a close eye on Renraku, but how did you get a hardcopy from Nakada's own office?!
- > Miko
- > A gentleman wouldn't ask, a lady wouldn't tell, and I'm not admitting a single thing that would lead back to me.
- > Renraku Fox
- > At the levels you're operating at, that's the minimum level of professionalism to survive.
- > Fianchetto
- > Let's hope the minimum is all you need.
- > Sam-R-Eye

## PRESENTATION (ROUGH DRAFT)

BY HARUHIKO 'HARRY' NAKADA

POSTED BY: RENRAKU FOX

### <BEGIN TRANSCRIPT>

Esteemed members of the board, honored shareholders and guests,

It is my deep and sincere pleasure to report that this is the era of Renraku ascendant.

While the world at large is unaware of the extraordinary events of the past several years due to our highly successful inter-corporate cooperative efforts, this has not dimmed the glory of our soldiers, our workers, and our leadership.

### \*PAUSE FOR APPLAUSE\*

We have every intention and every means of capitalizing on this extraordinary opportunity, and have, in fact, already begun. Working at the front line of conflict carries as much opportunity as risk, and we have had our pick of low-equity acquisitions denatured by conflict and corruption. We accept them as our just reward and have already considered how to not only consolidate our position as the premier Matrix infrastructure corporation in the world, but also our status as

heroes and defenders against future antagonists. Perhaps the sweetest prize of all is that even our most hated rivals will come to think this way when they see what we offer, a feat Inazo-sama Himself would have viewed with pride.

### \*PAUSE FOR APPLAUSE\*

The nature of recovery from any tragedy is reconstruction. With market projections showing a public backlash against Awakened individuals and culture, we confidently believe the Matrix will continue to be a reliable growth sector, one that we are optimally placed to expand and exploit. While I cannot comment on every detail at this time, we have reliable projections that threats to this space are almost certain within the next decade.

To this end, we are preparing the groundwork, both in research and infrastructure, for a stable Matrix^3, a bulwark system fortified against hostile intent from both within and without. With an eye toward security and safety, not only will we be ideally positioned as the primary Matrix provider for the entire world, but we will also control the means of all information in modern society.

With world-shifting reliance on Renraku, we can see the ascendancy of our values, our culture, and our guidance as we move toward the twenty-second century.

- > Pause for applause.
- > Bung
- > Beat me to it.
- > Whippet
- > Strictly speaking, it's not a bad idea to create secure infrastructure, but consider their motivations before you praise them.
- > Chainmaker
- > I don't think anyone outside their shareholders is doing that.
- > Pistons
- > Oh, we're applauding. This is utter gold for investments and shorts. Let us know if you have a favorite charity, Fox, We'll make a sizable donation when this pays off.
- > Corporate Raiders



## ENTERING PRIVATE CHAT 404-002 'BRAGGING RIGHTS' <CONT>

- > So you had a tap the whole time?
- > Pistons
- > When your currency is information, you cast nets where the fish swim thickest.
- > Woz
- > Aren't you afraid you're compromising it, posting here? JackPoint isn't half as secure as we might wish.
- > Icarus
- > It was getting long in the tooth, anyway. No tap lasts forever, so when it's time to cash out, you try for something big, and this was as good a time as any.
- > Woz
- > I miss when deckers thought about that kind of thing, downtime hacks and backdoors and data taps. The DDS used to have hundreds of those things all over the place, and Shadowland was a better place for it. Hackers these days don't sling code until Mr. Johnson is willing to pay for it, and it shows.
- > Bung
- > Is the Dead Deckers Society coming back? I've been hearing rumors.
- > Netcat

## FIREWATCH EMAIL TO EDUARD AGUSTO, COMBATOPS DIVISION CO

POSTED BY: NIGHTFIRE

## ENTERING PRIVATE CHAT 404-002 'BRAGGING RIGHTS' <CONT>

- > Woah! Telling on your bosses?
- > Sunshine
- > It doesn't hurt the Ares I love to expose the rot. Aren't you the one who says, "Sunshine is the best disinfectant?"
- > Nightfire
- > Yeah, but this is putting your ass right on the firing line, and Ares is kind of known for its firepower.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > I've made arrangements. I'll be fine. So will the trooper who sent this. Augusto can rot in hell.
- > Nightfire

TO: COL. EDUARD AGUSTO, CDCO FIREWATCH DIVISION

FROM: <REDACTED>

Consider this my resignation, effective as of twelve hours ago. You're not going to find me or what's left of my team, and we'll shoot anyone fool enough to follow your orders if you send them after us. You know what my team was capable of when there were twelve of us. The remaining four are mad as hell and strung out. You have no idea what we can do with our backs against the wall. You weren't there when it went down.

*Operation: Cheshire* was, by all internal accounts, a complete success. The best of the best from Ares, the best of any other corp or government with the stones to follow, and the finest shadowrunners I've ever had the misfortune to serve beside. We dove into a place that makes Hell sound comprehensible—sane, even. I say that as a survivor of eight combat deployments into the Hive. I say that as someone who has faced down toxics, shedim, and every other kind of monster the egg-heads have put a name to. If there's a briefing for it, we've had it. And you sent us into a place with little intel, little support, and against an army of abominations.

We stood our ground, held the line. We took out the targets, stepped over our own and pressed forward because Firewatch is what it always has been: the line between Earth and the things that want to eat it. We are defenders of metahumanity. Not because we're heroes, no matter how much you try to tell us that. We do that because we're soldiers. We know the stakes, we know the risks, and we signed up for this.

So I want to ask you (even knowing I won't be around to get an answer): How deep were you into the profiteering?

The soul of the planet was being sucked dry like a hooker with a vampire. Who made the call to shift mission priorities mid-battle to seizure of enemy chimeras when the world was on a string?

That's something Firewatch has always known. Ever since the bugs, when your R&D department heads started planting them in animals (and later troopers!) trying to tame them. Ever since you tried to put "converted" toxic shamans on the payroll, or tried incorporating blood magic into tactical protocol rather than the threat assessments they belonged in. Knight, Bishop, whatever chess piece you want to name, you jackasses keep trying to tame evil and make it heel like a dog. You can't.

You know how many times me and mine sat at the bar, questioning the new directives? In public, even. No one was going to believe us. It sounded like commentary on a bad horror movie, the kind of sci-fi trids that have floated around for a literal century: Big bad corporation tries to use monsters instead of exterminating them like any reasonable person would. It never works out. Never has, never will.



So you sent us into the meatgrinder. No complaints, there. That's the job. But you set us up to play fetch for Dr. Frankenstein while our friends lay in pools of their own blood. *You ordered us to leave our own behind just to drag back samples.* Firewatch does *not* leave their own on the field! Not Ares, not Renraku, not the razorgal (who pulled something that will haunt my nightmares forever off me), saved my hoop to write this fragging ... this ... this letter that doesn't mean one ghostdamned thing to all those we left behind.

And for what? Crystals? You think I'll be able to get the memories that leaked out of them out of my head? You think we can be normal humans with the drek that we bought back? Monsters? You think you can tame these things? They're all the fucking same as the bugs, people made into slaves to kill their own. How many times will it take before you people fragging wise up? You don't slay leviathans and bring the eggs home for pets. You torch the fucking nest and salt the ground and find the next one. You're becoming the world's leading provider in sequels when it comes to drekshows, and I'm not putting my life, or the lives of those under my command, in jeopardy just to perpetuate this cycle for the sake of ego or profit or whatever misguided bulldrek you've convinced yourself is next-level tactical brilliance.

Action flows down, but responsibility flows up. It flows to you.

Sleep tight, Colonel. I never will again.

- > Hold on, I know a LOT of crews who went in on Cheshire. Not a lot of them came back. And you're telling me Ares was using them as smoke to pull another harvesting job?
- > Prime Runner
- > Yeah. That's what happened. Command set priority to the objectives other corps and runners were given, but secondary teams were deployed for raids and salvage ops. The Hive operations almost look like a blueprint for what happened, a prototype. And if an asset was designated of sufficient strategic value, primary assault teams were pulled back to get it back to base. That includes search and rescue teams being diverted from bringing ours back home.
- > Nightfire
- > Frag me. I knew Ares liked playing with their food, but that was a doomsday clock. That was the big space station with the death ray coming around the bend. How the fuck do they find the time to still think about lining their own pockets?
- > 2XL
- > Nightfire, message me at your earliest convenience. My people died ... Picador died holding the line to help bring Cheshire home.
- > Rifleman





- > I'm no strategist, but there is a kind of logic behind it. The Disians, as far as we can tell, were successful in conquering other planes of existence, other dimensions with their own native species and technologies. When Dis collapsed, all of that would be lost. For the sake of future developments and extradimensional incursions, it would make sense to understand how the Disians were so successful for so long. Even from a pure conservationist position, samples may represent the last vestiges of truly lost worlds.
- > KAM
- > Tell that to those who could have been saved but weren't. Oh wait, you can't.
- > Brutus Ex-Mechina
- > I can think of a better time to pick up souvenirs than the literal Apocalypse.
- > Pistons
- > I'm not justifying it, by any means. And while I personally find their priorities flawed, I believe they could justify it to themselves by that route, particularly when it sweetens their position with entirely novel samples and potential basic patents. Even beyond pure research, the potential profit is beyond imagining.
- > KAM
- > Yeah. And death camps are a great place to advance medical science. Sing me another.
- > Chainmaker
- > That's okay. Those who are guilty will get their just rewards, and not just from within Ares.
- > Lady Greenfire

## INTERNAL SHIAWASE MEMO #009-1313

POSTED BY: WOZ

Mamoru-sama,

Per your instructions re: Project Archimedes, our backchannels indicate the Empress would be amenable to further clean-energy initiatives. They made a particular observation that she would be pleased by the tangible good it would do for the planet. If I may presume to observe, it would seem the Empress is more concerned with concrete industrial shifts than the mere perception of them. This indicates a much higher investment-ratio than simple PR would generally engender, but the support of the Empress would likely offer significant ROI as a consequence. Given the increasing tectonic shift bringing Shiawase and JIS interests into alignment, this would appear to be an excellent opportunity to cultivate greater interdepartmental influence and trust for future opportunities, both industrial and diplomatic.

Project Archimedes, at present, is seeing steady progress. Purchase of the collectors has been only somewhat stymied by oppositional forces, but MIFD assures us this is a matter of obstinacy rather than any rival plans. If anything, I must commend Mr. Coltrane on his handling of operations, particularly his use of isolated deniable assets both for driving down purchase prices and seizing properties and equipment, and their series of disinformation campaigns to avoid any exterior forces realizing Shiawase and the JIS are potentially revolutionizing the energy industry.

I must unfortunately relate two potential obstacles to completing the project on schedule. The first is a matter of hardware. Many of the collectors possess extremely neglected, obsolete equipment. Ground-based systems, particularly in metroplexes and especially across the JIS, are exceptionally degraded, yet remain valuable uses of limited Earth-side real estate, and it will take fairly expensive and likely highly visible work to bring them up to date. The few satellites still capable of operation are using technology levels at least a decade old, and it is likely we will require replacements and factory-new supplements to achieve objective completion. This may increase our operational costs significantly, though I am liaising with Mr. Coltrane to see if there are alternative vectors for achieving our goals without drawing undue attention.

The second is more delicate and suggests a global-political arena, as these satellites are capable of weaponization, at least from the perspective of several corporations and governments across the world. Assets are reporting a minimum 40 percent resistance to the establishment of a potential series of energy-based orbital weapons in the hands of one megacorporation, even if they are less powerful than extant orbital bombardment platforms. This tension increases with the involvement of the JIS, bringing national diplomacy concerns into play. On the upside, 30 percent show active interest in leasing or even building their own collector sites to supplement their own energy production, which presents us with franchise and trade options. The remaining 30 percent are either indifferent, dubious of success, or unknown or undecided. Demonstration in an isolated environment or independent city would likely go a long way toward shifting public and purchaser opinion. To this end, I will have my team draft potential design spec amendments to run concurrent with our plans within Free Seattle for this purpose. The implementation is, of course, at your discretion, but I hope the proposal pleases you and the Board.

I am, as ever, your servant.

<REDACTED>

- > Why'd you redact their name?
- > Kia



- > I don't mind sharing big corporate plans and secrets for a shiny prize, but I'm not going to burn a useful contact. Ones who are no longer useful are a different story.
- > Woz
- > Okay, so, decoding: Archimedes was an ancient Greek mathematician who, supposedly, built some kind of solar mirror system to repel invaders. They keep saying collectors, ground and satellite. Mix in clean energy ... we're talking about satellite solar collectors.
- > Icarus
- > Not exactly thrilling tech. Japan started using those decades ago, helped push them up in the early energy wars. Big collector dishes on the ground while orbital collectors shot it down. Operational costs aside, free energy. I highly doubt they're abandoning their atomics division for that.
- > KAM
- > Yeah, but the tech has evolved a lot since the last time it made the screeds. Solar tech and beam transmission have increased in viability by a huge factor. We're not talking Thor shots, like they said, but roasting cities, frying crops, all kinds of wicked drek if they wanted to.
- > Smiling Bandit
- > Not all that green, when you get down to it. You can't release that much energy by beam transmission without significant effects on the ozone, heat dispersion and disruption, EM shifts ... either Shiawase is playing with tech no one else knows about, or they're fooling Hitomi and everyone else with clean-sounding tech, not the real thing.
- > Nightfire
- > Either way, sounds like Shiawase is hiring hard, and the competition is going to dash firm in the opposite direction. Time to call my SINDicate dealer.
- > Alpha
- > So, they're going to test fire a sunlight beam on Seattle? You know what? I've been thinking about taking a long vacation.
- > Red

## HORIZON, DAWKINS GROUP INTERNAL MESSAGE (?)

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS

- > Special note, we got this one without any identifying info. It showed up from a burner, no prize claimed. Feel free to speculate whether this is real or a Dawkins Group op. And before anyone asks, we've quadruple-checked it for any nasty surprises.
- > Slamm-O!

Per [Narcissus] Directive, Operation remains in effect with projected 97 percent success rate

## ENTERING PRIVATE CHAT 404-002 'BRAGGING RIGHTS' <CONT>

- > Yeah, but they would have claimed the bot, taken a space and spied on us through that, right?
- > Plan 9
- > All respect to our Magnificent Trio, but no bot is so essential in its code that dissecting it would somehow give them the keys to the kingdom, here.
- > Agent X
- > Right! All you have to do is apply!
- > Slamm-O!
- > Are we seriously that unsecure?
- > Beaker
- > When it comes to Dawkins, I don't think anywhere is really safe. Let's not forget they invented Gary Cline's history, and we all remember it, even though you can't find any physical evidence of it.
- > Spin Doc
- > The easiest and often most effective means of infiltration is social engineering, not digital. That's Horizon's bread and soy butter.
- > Fianchetto

accommodating for bias and informatic decohesion. Operation remains in place utilizing Awakened phenomena as a logical scapegoat. Prejudice exploits remain extremely effective. Secondary [Lupa] Directive (VLevel: Shroud-Denial-Proxy) projected to increase Awakened recruitment by a factor of 3: acceptable. Note: Monad Operation [Morpheus] re: extreme prediction, 0.2 percent predicted likelihood.

[Adonis] Protocols set for Pacification Gradient: 7 re: Renraku, Ares Prime, Evo. Forbiddance granted to S-K, DF, AZT. Discard MCT; Projected fall - Salvage State.

Note 5\* Memo: Resistance to [Adonis] projected from K. King, [Eris] Protocol is at 25 percent initiation factor with 0.7 variance prediction. Barington suggests intervention unnecessary; wait and see. Unacceptable parameters; Consensus set to GT Compensation Routine, activate satellite Loyola, Ballard, Dupont for collation/projection.

- > I have no idea what any of this means.
- > Electric Blue
- > That's the point. A lot of corps, cults, spec ops, etc. tend to form their own shorthand and codes. I wouldn't be surprised if this counts as the translated version.
- > Kia



- > Not even much point in doing a translation on the bracketed mythic names, anyway. They're probably layered three deep in innuendo and doublespeak. Unless, of course, that's what they intended, so it does, in fact, say what it says on the box ... of course, that might mean there's any number of false cryptographic ciphers, all designed to throw off anyone who got this far.
- > Spin Doc
- > We have one Plan already, probably more like two. I need you to take a deep breath and let this go, or at least loosen your grip.
- > Snopes
- > Anyone have to decode this when it came in?
- > Fianchetto
- > No, it came like this. And, again, completely anonymous.
- > Glitch
- > Then we don't really know if it's been tampered with, decoded from a previous state, or anything. I'm glad it's here and all, it's a pretty delicious mystery, but we should be treating it with no small amount of skepticism.
- > Fianchetto
- > Revelations lose value in hindsight.
- > Many-Names
- > I humbly beg to differ.
- > Elijah
- > I think Karen King popped up in there, at least, and if I read this right (?) she's not playing the way they want.
- > Sunshine
- > Makes sense. King is an anomaly in corporate life: a straight shooter. She never had time for double-talk and ego games. In the '50s, she used to personally handle her own shadow talent, always gave good info, never took unnecessary risks with our lives, and even put herself on the line to extract and shelter teams that did good work for her. About as honest as any Johnson actually can be. A lot of those teams went on to become early Firewatch prototypes.
- > Red
- > So, you worked for her?
- > Kia
- > Back in the '50s, yeah. And it's been 30 years, so I don't know what time has done to her, but she seemed the solid type. If she's kept to her old form, I'd work for her again. She seemed to take the original Ares mission of defense against paranormal threats as a primary directive. I'd be lying if I said it didn't influence how the rest of my career has gone.
- > Red
- > She's stayed steady. Her people would follow her into hell. Some have. And every one of us would do it again.
- > Nightfire

- > I wonder what Horizon doesn't like about that?
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Someone who operates on principles and can't be bought? I can't imagine anything Horizon would hate more.
- > Spin Doc

## MCT MEMO TO AKAI UEHARA FROM ASAHI KATO

◀FREELANCER OUTREACH DEPARTMENT▶

SUBMITTED BY: THE SMILING BANDIT

### ENTERING PRIVATE CHAT 404-002 'BRAGGING RIGHTS' ◀CONT▶

- > I was starting to think you'd lost your edge, Bandit.
- > Bung
- > Oh, my sweet little drekposter, I've never stopped cutting. People forget that MCT was one of the biggest corps in the world, number one in trid production (not Horizon, not Ares), and number two in heavy industry and magic. Even then, they produce more in publishing for magic traditions than Aztechnology or Wuxing. It's going to be extremely interesting to see who gets the tender cuts of MCT when the dust settles.
- > The Smiling Bandit
- > You think we're looking at another Fuchi?
- > Netcat
- > Not personally. It's already happening quietly. The blood wants to escape the dying body, the rats diving from the sinking ship, and the Corporate Court is probably going to make it very attractive for MCT to sell rather than resist. Everyone still has their metaphorical levies raised, and MCT looks real good, spoils-wise. Better than enduring an Omega Order. MCT isn't AZT, and they know it.
- > The Smiling Bandit

## AKAI YOU ARE THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB DISAPPEAR AS FAST AS YOU CAN

Uehara-sama,

As per your request, I have performed an extensive audit of personnel following what you have described as "brain drain": the sudden and rapid string of extractions taking place among staff, including those with well-known and documented loyalty to Mitsuhaman Computer Technologies, particularly the Oyabun, himself.

Considering the *current* outlook for our corporation, it should come *as* no surprise that many em-



employees are considering their futures, just as other megacorps are eyeing our people, our material, and our geographic territory and facilities. While there is little to compare to the loyalty of any Japanese employee to their home corporation, it should be noted that those same employees are capable of justifying a loss of loyalty by virtue of the practice of Yubitsume, whether by an honorable intent to depart from their employer with some measure of grace or an attempt to mollify any negative feelings left in their wake. Of course, this is not universal: Many employees, Japanese or not, are not so concerned with the opinion of their former employer, presuming they have willingly defected and are not simply snatched from their homes in the night by deniable assets.

I point this out because there is considerable evidence in my investigation to indicate that only 35 percent of our current loss of focus represents unwilling extractions by rival entities. Frankly, I have never heard of a 65 percent quotient inviting or even financing their own defection. It has no precedent. Even Aztechnology, shortly before enduring a Corporate Court Omega Order, did not see such dereliction. As I sit at my desk, I am presently aware of the cooler to my right, containing over four hundred severed digits as departing offerings to the Board.

I have already submitted plans and protocols for increased security measures to relevant internal security department heads and am initiating a series of counter-ops and interference theaters to abort any further losses, but I must insist that this is a stopgap measure; the rot springs from a loss of faith within, not a seduction from without. While I believe in strict discipline as a guiding principle for myself, my subordinates, and even my freelance liaisons, I also recognize that strength is most tangible when married to kindness. The wayward child responds infinitely better to a show of protection than the threat of violence. Mitsuhamas employees do not feel safe and will gravitate to those who best show their ability to provide for them and their loved ones.

I fully believe Mitsuhamas Computer Technologies has the integrity, fortitude, and dignity to weather the oncoming storm intact. Like the willow, its roots run deep, and its branches bend with the wind. The willow does not fight the storm but moves with its tempest. MCT shall endure, and those who leave its shelter will regret their loss of faith.

I have fulfilled your request to the best of my ability, as far as I can see. Further action is beyond my operational purview and falls to internal security and, dare I say, departments concerned with corporate loyalty and morale. If I can be of any further service, I hope to serve you better.

—AK

- > For those who don't know: Asahi Kato is the division head of MCT's Freelancer Outreach Department, which pays their Mr. Johnsons.
- > The Smiling Bandit

- > It's awkwardly put together. A little too long, words in the wrong spots. Are all these memos going to have hidden meanings?
- > Bull
- > A free epilogue (or maybe a To Be Continued?): Kato went missing 48 hours after submitting that report. A single finger was found on his desk, sliced clean off, still bearing the edges of his arm tattoos and wearing a trademark ring. Guess even Mr. Johnson needs a change of scenery now and again.
- > The Smiling Bandit
- > After all the drek MCT pulled for the Disians? You can bet he was hip deep in their pockets, and he's just running while the getting is good. I wouldn't count on being able to escape that easily, especially considering how material link-happy MCT is. Unless he's taking a very fast dunk in the gene tank and walking out a two-and-a-half meter female troll, they're finding him, and it won't be pretty when they do.
- > Saturday Jones
- > His silver is coming.
- > Lady Greenfire
- > The folks who head those departments usually have escape plans within escape plans, layered contingencies. It's possible he was a whole new person and had his links nuked within an hour of walking out of the office. We won't see him again.
- > Thorn
- > Not as we knew him, anyway.
- > Plan 9
- > We're all pretty quick to condemn every slot at MCT, aren't we? It's a multinational megacorporation, with millions of employees all over the globe. How do we know he wasn't out of the loop, or even working against the Disians from within?
- > Kat-o'-Nine-Tales
- > We don't know, and it's smart not to jump to conclusions. But when your corp is in bed with the enemy, and you're running their shadow ops? You know. And if he did anything to resist, he's either too slick to show it, or he went along willingly. MCT is a paranoid corp. My money is on willing, and it's a safe bet.
- > Kia
- > This whole thing would be a lot more exciting if it turned out there was, like, a serial killer roaming the halls of MCT, snatching folks up and only leaving a single finger, and their whole Yakuza thing turned out to be an accidental red herring.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Okay, maybe we've had too many movie nights lately.
- > Red
- > Dunno, I'd watch it.
- > Tauren



OMNISTAR EMAIL CHAIN,  
ROBERT REGGIE REYNOLDS (LSSS),  
NIKOLAS JAROCH (DOCWAGON)

POSTED BY: HANNIBELLE

ENTERING PRIVATE  
CHAT 404-002  
'BRAGGING RIGHTS' <CONT>

- > I honestly didn't even know there was a contest. I was going to dump it here anyway when Slamm-O! said I was "The first one to enter!" Now I have this dumb agent.
- > Hannibelle
- > Can I have it?
- > Whippet
- > No.
- > Hannibelle

**FROM:** NIKOLAS JAROCH  
**TO:** ROBERT REGGIE REYNOLDS  
**SUBJECT:** USE OF FORCE INCIDENT - SEATTLE -  
LUCAS PALACE - 16TH OF NOVEMBER

Mr. Reynolds,

I am writing to inform you that Chief Operations Officer (Seattle) Donald Newborn has started the formal complaint process regarding the incident that took place on November 16 at Lucas Palace in Seattle. Said complaint will be asking for formal censure against you, your organization, and the specific Lone Star Officers involved in the incident. Additionally, Mr. Newborn has directed me to email you a "personal" message, taken by his personal secretary acting as the amanuensis for this dictation. Finally, Mr. Newborn wanted to ensure that you were notified that he would be sending similar messages to other LSSS C-level executives. The message is as follows:

*Reynolds, or Reggie Ray, whatever you call yourself—who do you think you are? Is that cowboy hat strapped to your head cutting off the circulation to your brain? When my staff deploy, they do so to safeguard the life of a client paying heaps of nuyen for the privilege. I'd think you'd be smart enough to understand that OmniStar prioritizes our interests over yours. It's simple math, but I suppose that's asking too much from a damn badge. No matter, I'm confident that the higher-ups will take our side in this ... debacle, and you and your ragtag organization will get what's coming to you. That's enough, Anna, we're done with this for now. Go ahead and send this, and you'd better not include this last part again.—Donald T. Newborn, DocWagon Chief Operations Officer*

Mr. Newborn's message ends there. Thank you

for your time, Mr. Reynolds, and please reach out if you have any questions regarding this complaint. I've been directed to share with you a limited amount of information if it's requested.

Sincerely,

Nikolas Jaroch,  
DocWagon Global Operations Manager

**FROM:** ROBERT REGGIE REYNOLDS  
**TO:** NIKOLAS JAROCH  
**SUBJECT:** RE: USE OF FORCE INCIDENT - SEATTLE -  
LUCAS PALACE - NOVEMBER 16

Boy, I'll tell you what, that's a whole lotta bloviating for nothing. Now, Nik, I know this ain't your doing, so I ain't going to get after you. But be sure to pass this onto your boss:

*Donnie, look, I need you to understand something: I don't give a drek about what you think about me and mine, and I don't about your diamond-level, or whatever the hell it was, client's subscription. You can feel free to run to OmniStar crying, don't make no damn difference.*

*Let me remind you that your client, one Janice Wu, was wanted for triple homicide. When my officers made contact with her in that yuppie hotel, she attempted to add them to her body count. My people didn't take that lying down, no sir—instead they made her lie down by aerating her murderous little form.*

*Job well done, right? Pack it up and go on home, right? Well, no. Your dip-frag crew rambles in almost as soon as the razorgirl hits the pavement. Your team gets to yelling that Wu is a premium member or has some special service that y'all offer, some stupid drek like that, and they try and take her away. You gotta see how dumb that was right, Donnie? You gotta know that aiding and abetting a murderer is a crime, right?*

*My officers didn't take none too kindly to that sort of behavior, and that's where the disagreement arose and where the "use of force incident" began. In the end, only one of your boys was killed, the others are gonna live—maybe not well, but they'll live. Just as soon as they're done serving their time that is.*

*Go on and calm yourself down and remind yourself that there ain't no need to have your lackeys emailing me, I barely check this damn thing anyway.*

— Reggie Ray

**FROM:** NIKOLAS JAROCH  
(NJAROCH@DOCWAGONCORP.COM)  
**TO:** ROBERT REGGIE REYNOLDS  
(RRREYNOLDS@LONESTARSECURITYSERVICES.COM)  
**SUBJECT:** RE: RE: USE OF FORCE INCIDENT - SEATTLE -  
LUCAS PALACE - NOVEMBER 16

Mr. Reynolds,

Thank you for your timely response. I presented it immediately to Mr. Newborn, who in turn



indicated that I should send a message along with this email response. I have been instructed to not inform you of who took Mr. Newborn's dictation. The message follows:

*Make sure this is in all capital letters Anna. No, I don't care just make sure it is in all capital letters from HERE ON OUT, IT'LL HELP ME GET THE POINT ACROSS TO THIS PINHEAD. ALL RIGHT, START RECORDING. FIRST OF ALL, DON'T YOU DARE CALL ME DONNIE YOU DISRESPECTFUL HICK, YOU'RE AS IDIOTIC AS THAT TEN-GALLON HAT YOU WEAR! SECONDLY, DOCWAGON'S INTERESTS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN LONE STAR'S, PERIOD, AND I'M CONFIDENT OMNISTAR WILL SEE IT THE SAME WAY—YOUR DAMNED EXCUSES ARE NOT REQUESTED OR REQUIRED. WE'LL SEE YOU WHEN THE OMNISTAR BOARD REQUESTS OUR PRESENCE. OKAY, THAT'S ALL, ANNA. YOU ALL READY FOR DINNER? MY WIFE THINKS WE'RE WORKING LATE AGAIN, JUST LET ME HIT THE BATHROOM.—Donald T. Newborn, Doc Wagon Chief Operations Officer, Seattle District*

Mr. Newborn's message ends there. I have been instructed to tell you to go to hell at the end of this email or face demotion. Go to hell.

Sincerely,

Nikolas Jaroch,  
DocWagon Global Operations Manager

**FROM:** ROBERT REGGIE REYNOLDS

**TO:** NIKOLAS JAROCH

**SUBJECT:** RE: RE: RE: USE OF FORCE INCIDENT - SEATTLE - LUCAS PALACE - 16TH OF NOVEMBER

\*thumbs up\*

- > 10/10, laughed the whole way through, would read again.
- > The Smiling Bandit

- > Some folks are made for eatin'.
- > Hannibelle

- > I'm not going to get over the new look any time soon. We had a whole lot of laughs making fun of Knight Errant when they abandoned the industrial milspec look for that living S&M Siren Commando thing they had going on. We still had the bombers and the t-bolts, a sleek interceptor and a sweeper for when things got hairy. Now? Ten. Gallon. Hats. I'll level with you, I always respected the Red Samurai because as silly as it is to wear that armor, it's high-tech and it works; you don't make fun of the elite. But a ten-gallon hat? In Texas, sure. But I want you to imagine taking a tinhorn traffic cop seriously in Manhattan.

I'll <Post Redirect- auth: Slamm-O!>

- > X-Star

- > I'm not deleting that work of art. That's hate poetry right there. That said, it's longer than the rest of this chapter put together, so I'm gonna archive it for safekeeping. Welcome to the Shrine, X-Star. That was passionate.

- > Slamm-O!

- > If Eagle Security has shown us anything, it's that Native Americans are better at being cowboys than Texans, these days.
- > Hard Exit

- > Okay, back on track, people. Looks like OmniStar isn't gluing nearly as well as they'd like people to think.

- > Glitch

- > No drek. No corp wants to admit to internal dissent. That said, yeah, this isn't going as smoothly as anyone probably expected.

- > Clockwork

- > They were counting on synergy that just doesn't exist in the modern megacorporate age. Historically, paramedics and police represented two cooperative limbs of the same agency, working together. When both became privatized and armed, the idea of loyalty to the customer subsumed the loyalty to the public trust.

- > Sunshine

- > It's been a problem of jurisdictional conflict for as long as each has existed, but before the merger there was no internal conflict. Wagons vs. Stars was something you'd see in court cases all over the place—there were lawyers who specialized in it. Now? Someone has to be top dog, and this isn't going to be the last time doctors and police come to blows over it. I expect we'll see that reflected in stock prices, both OmniStar and their competitors.

- > The Chromed Accountant

- > The simple fix seems like working Lone Star into the mix for DocWagon, making sure even retrieval of a client won't stop them from slapping cuffs on someone in a hospital bed. But DocWagon has a long, storied history of service to people who break the law, and they know it's going to hit them in the bottom line harder than expected if they make it clear the Wagon won't bend the rules for the naughty. The flip side is working Star immunity into DocWagon contracts, but even if they pump the price way up, the Star knows it'll lose what credibility it has if it effectively sells Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free cards. Cornered by Ten Gallons? Shoot yourself and wait for extraction from DW. There's no clean way out of this, and it's honestly hilarious they didn't see this problem coming.

- > Mr. Bonds

- > They're calling them Ten Gallons, now?

- > X-Star

- > They sure seem to bleed that much.

- > Prime Runner





## SAEDER-KRUPP, INTERCEPTED MESSAGE, AUSTRIA S-K HQ

POSTED BY: ICARUS

### ENTERING PRIVATE CHAT 404-002 'BRAGGING RIGHTS' <CONT>

- It's not really mine to claim. A freelance skimmer offered it to sweeten the pot in a trade. It's not quite sales quality, but for this little competition it seemed to fit the bill.
- Icarus
- Does that count as cheating? You didn't do the hack. You can't just sub in a ringer.
- 2XL
- They accepted it. Go complain to them.
- Icarus

**Dietrich5112>** There is simply no way to explain it.

**Bianca0422>** You're a fool for even considering it.

**Dietrich5112>** In the wake of one of the greatest magical calamities of the past twenty years, extradimensional inva-

sion, a wellspring of potential arcane secrets and transformations and territories, Lofwyr is doing ... nothing?!

**Felix0038>** The Master is doing what he is doing. It is infinitely beyond our paygrade to understand why, but he's never wrong.

**Dietrich5112>** Understand this: I'm sitting on territories that have undergone explosive change and radical shifts in the manasphere. I have half a dozen comatose geomancers and oracles in emergency care, with no prognosis because no one has any idea what is happening to them. The soul of the planet has been touched and changed, and I cannot believe a being of such power would ignore it!

**Bianca0422>** You are presuming a great deal about the Master's intentions or plots. Dragons do not think like humans. Plans within plans within plans, with timescales that stretch past our great-great-grandchildren's scope. Your arrogance in believing you're capable of divining their will is astonishing.

**Dietrich5112>** I'm not underestimating. I'm simply pointing out that there hasn't been a whisper, a memo, a hint, a claw raised over this whole thing; at least not where I'm standing. Something is happening. The Earth is ... bleeding. But it's seeming to ... I can't explain it. It's magic, but I can't understand it. It's powerful, unpredictable, hard to keep a handle on. Where's Lofwyr when we need him?

**Felix0038>** Dietrich, I understand you're in the field a lot. I understand you're relatively new to S-K. I understand you



are frustrated, perhaps confused. But I'm going to offer you some advice as a twenty-year executive here: Never write, say, or think anything negative about Lofwyr. Assume it will be seen and known, and that you will answer for it. Faith will carry you through.

**Dietrich5112>** You sound like a cultist. Faith? Come and see what I see. Feel it, if you have the gift. You'll know this is bigger than any being living on this world, great dragon or not.

**Felix0038>** I'm logging off, now. Bianca?

**Bianca0422>** In a minute.

**\*Felix0038> HAS LEFT THE CONVERSATION\***

**Dietrich5112>** Bianca, with all due respect, I'd appreciate it if you'd take a flight down here. I know you're busy, but this is the kind of thing you need to see to understand. Not even see ... feel. Even my un-Awakened people can sense it. Something powerful. Not malevolent, per se, and not with consciousness as I understand it. It's broader than that. Like ... like fresh air after being in an aquacology for six months. Like fresh blood after a full-spectrum detox. We need to understand this, and I'm not getting any support or response from upstairs.

**Bianca0422>** I understand, Dietrich, and I'll humor you. My secretary is already setting my itinerary. If you say it's important, I believe you. But before we hang up ...

**Dietrich5112>** What?

**Bianca0038>** Dietrich, I want you to consider something carefully: You've allied yourself to a being capable of effectively seeing into the future, even before you account for access to magical understanding older than our comprehension of history. Can you admit the possibility that despite the novelty of your situation, Lofwyr has accommodated and accounted for every last element of what you are experiencing? Is it not possible you are, even now, a part of his plan?

**Dietrich5112>** If that were the case, it would mean Lofwyr puts people in place to fail him just because he wants them for lunch.

**Bianca0422>** That is a distinct possibility. Perhaps when one of us has expended all use but failure, we are put where we are needed so that our failure serves the greater plan. Even in death they serve as nourishment. Nothing is wasted.

**Dietrich5112>** Now you definitely sound like you're in a cult.

**Bianca0422>** Faith is not worship. But even if you were right, the world has never seen anything so close to a god as a great dragon. Where better to place your faith, secular or not?

**Dietrich5112>** What if you're wrong?

**Bianca0422>** I think that affects you far more than me.

**Dietrich5112>** How so?

**Bianca0422>** If I am wrong, then I am merely putting my faith in a mega-genius intellect for leadership. Still a very strong position. Whereas you ...

**Dietrich5112>** Yes?

**Bianca0422>** Well, if I am wrong, and you are failing, then there is still time to salvage your situation and avoid catering the CEO's next midday snack.

**Dietrich5112>** ...

**Dietrich5112>** I take your point. I'll see things done here.

- > So ... is old Gold Scale asleep at the wheel? What's going on?
- > Kia
- > He hasn't made an appearance after the events in Antarctica. I wouldn't count him down or out, but it is a little suspicious that he's gone to ground, at least from the outside.
- > Winterhawk
- > Not just Lofwyr, all the greats who were there are currently MIA.
- > Wyrms Watcher
- > I'd be shocked if it wasn't all part of some master plan. Big L strikes me as the type to play wounded just to lure would-be predators out for an ambush, both personally and as a megacorp matter, of course. The old lizard might just be the original corporate raider.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Maybe. But you might consider the greater opportunities at work. An entire metaplane connected with ours, filled with alien magic and technology. Can you not imagine a being of such limitless avarice might have worked behind the scenes to further his own interests even as he provided aid in the defense of his home?
- > Silk
- > So, you're proposing Lofwyr, what, raided Dis? For loot?
- > 2XL
- > Hey, sneaking in and raiding the enemy from behind is simply good tactics. If that means you get to keep what you take, so much the better.
- > Kane
- > And it's not like it would take a great dragon to get the job done, either. Ares seems to have pulled it off with some panache, not counting the horrible shit behind the scenes.
- > Nightfire
- > Seems? Don't you work for Ares? Like, over 30 years' service?
- > Bung



- > I'm a Detroit man, and Ares isn't in Detroit. That said, I still wear the badge. Things are shifting, and a man's conscience can only bear so much before it has to be heard. I didn't join Ares for the pension.
- > Nightfire
- > Fastjack would be spinning in his grave if he was dead. What changed your mind?
- > Bull
- > 'Jack did. Something he said to me, once.
- > Nightfire
- > You going to share with the rest of the class?
- > Bung
- > No. That's between me and him. The point is that he was right, and I'm getting square with that. Odds are you'll be seeing a lot more of me around here.
- > Nightfire
- > Whoopee.
- > Slamm-O!
- > There you have it, folks. Enjoy your prizes, expand on their research, and buckle up for a download of juicy post-Dis suits doing the corporate shuffle. Knowledge is power, and power keeps runners alive.
- > Bull
- > Hang on, hang on. What about Aztechnology? Wuxing? Hell, even Spinrad!
- > Glasswalker
- > We didn't get anything particularly juicy, interesting, or mysterious on them as this little opening game is concerned, but don't worry, this is only an appetizer.
- > Glitch
- > You didn't get anything interesting for this from two of the most magical megas ever? That seems hard to believe.
- > Glasswalker
- > What do you want me to say? Wuxing isn't making any risky plays right now because they need to reconsolidate and keep their noses clean. Against all reason, they're only a couple shades off from MCT's complicity. Aztechnology is about as evil as ever, run by blood mages and cartel goons.
- > Glitch
- > You usually see a seal-up like at Wuxing when there's internal conflict. My money is on a division of power fighting for dominance. One side favored the home team for the win, but they can't open that can of worms to the public because it won't wrangle them any allies, just corp jackals looking to tear them apart in a moment of weakness.
- > Sunshine
- > Ding Ramos is getting involved with Aztlan politics! He's a Ghost Cartel boss and is almost certainly angling to do something we've never seen; have a country eat a megacorp rather than the other way around. Considering the fact that Aztlan has been a puppet of the corp for decades, the irony is extra-buttery. It should be extra interesting if the fight goes hard into the shadows rather than just open civil war—and this should be of interest to everyone on JackPoint. And also considering Aztlan is the single largest supplier of food for the Sixth World, and that supply would be disrupted across the globe, this should be of interest to EVERYONE.
- > Pyramid Watcher
- > To be honest, I figured if anyone would have something more on Aztechnology, it would have been you.
- > Glitch
- > Like I said, things are heating up, and a new shadow war is already in full swing. You'll see my contributions further on. I just can't believe they're being swept under the rug right from the front.
- > Pyramid Watcher
- > Speaking of not-that, Spinrad had nothing, either?
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > You're some impatient little runners. It's got its own chunk of data later on. But as a small something to tide you over: Spinrad's internal security has gone into overdrive. Rumors of shakeups, blackmail, top-to-bottom drama. Gabrielle Spinrad is making the social rounds and damn-near gliding through this whole thing like the debutante everyone took her for. Clearly, she's got some sharp teeth behind that trid-perfect smile. There's also plenty of reason to think they used advanced intel to move operations away from conflict zones, because they had a lot of last-minute shifts of hardware and personnel that kept their noses clean. In other words: They covered their own hoops, and it put them in a contemptibly good position.
- > Glitch
- > Rookie runners think that's not worth any zeroes on their credsticks, but keeping their hands clean, all those transfers, that's instability to raiding by our kind. Whole lotta loose ends you can grab hold of for quick cash. Anyone wants a piece of that, you've got my number!
- > Prime Runner

## OPENING PRIVATE MESSAGE

- > Well, well, well ... I knew you smelled cred. Let me tell you what I've got in mind ...
- > Prime Runner

<INCOMING EMAIL>





# NEW ORDER IN THE COURT

POSTED BY: COSMO

- The Corporate Court. Arguably the most powerful governing authority on Earth, or in this case, off Earth. But that's semantics. Regardless, it's the power that the mighty corporations answer to and it's meant to keep them in check. At least, that's the theory, though the truth is never that simple.
- Glitch

The Corporate Court. A shark's den. A crab bucket. A hornet's nest. In short, a bunch of aggressive, predatory, and carnivorous critters, all in the service of corporatism and their own (often dirty) interests. Everybody knows it, everybody hates it.

I recently sent a team to take a run at it, and they almost got fragged because of their confidence that this monolithic block couldn't evolve. Yes, they should've been better prepared. But the way the whole place shakes, I don't know if it would have been enough anyway. To prevent any of you from putting on the same drek show, I'm

going to tell you what's going on, both up there on Zürich-Orbital, where the corporate justices sit, and down on good old Earth.

## HISTORY BRIEF

Back in 2012, the court, known then as the Inter-Corporate Council (ICC), was formed after the kerfuffle between Keruba and BMW, who were poking each other with rockets. To call a ceasefire, setting up a discussion forum seemed like a good move (kind of like the old idea of UN, but with nuyen). The ICC, however, with its seven founding corporate representatives, had very little actual power. In this initial setup, it had no real authority, no resources, no security personnel, no police force, and no army. It could only rely on the means provided by the megacorps that created and supported it. In fact, this so-called ICC only served as a secure and structured forum allowing the megacorps' representatives to discuss the issues between them.





- The truth was that the reps they sent were below second-rate, more like the dullest knives in the drawer. And they were kept purposely in the dark so their denials “of any involvement” would sound painfully genuine.
- Mr. Bonds
- Let’s not ignore the fact that this forum has done a lot to prevent outright war and hostility.
- Wicket

It didn’t take long for everyone to realize this wouldn’t work. And the Council had to evolve into a Court, with the ability to issue and enforce sanctions. Gradually, the megacorporations managed to find the right balance, allowing the court to mediate their conflicts, as if it were a truly independent organization designed to help defuse tensions, even if it was toothless without their support. In fact, the corps’ mere acceptance of its effective action was enough to make it work (mostly).

- It reminds me a bit of my buddy Dave when he’s refereeing our Sunday tournaments. He’s not really good, but he’s okay to be a referee, and if we want to continue playing with a minimum of seriousness, we have to accept his decisions ... as awful as they may be.
- Slamm-O!

- It would be the same if your chummer could also declare that all the other players are coming to beat you up and take everything you’ve got when he doesn’t like the way you tackled a player.
- Juice Box

In 2023, the freshly renamed (International—but it didn’t stay) Corporate Court moved to the *Freedom* (now known as Zürich-Orbital Habitat) space station, and the justices have remained aboard the habitat ever since. This ensures their safety and provides a significant buffer between them and their respective megacorporations. Likewise, the court’s powers have evolved to the present day, ranging from warnings to almost total deprivation (hello, NeoNET). That desolation of one of their member corporations was still done with the blessing of the rest of the court. Internally, many voices find these granted powers insufficient and are pushing to evolve more radically.

- A milestone not to be forgotten in the dust of the Crash of ’29. In 2032, the court acquired Global Financial Services (which they famously renamed Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank), which had already replaced the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund after their collapse in the 2020s. They also seized the opportunity to incorporate the World Trade



Organization, which they eventually used to revamp the UN after it was officially disbanded in 2035. Since then, these global institutions have remained under their aegis, and their aura (and control) extends far beyond the founding corporations.

> Mr. Bonds

## EMERGING ADMINISTRATION

Over the course of its existence, the court has evolved to its current format, changing its name and establishing a secretariat to assist the justices and handle day-to-day administration. Initially, this staff was “on loan” from the megacorporations. Obviously, the AAAs didn’t exactly send their top accountants, and the vast majority were in fact either saboteurs or spies—if not both. Besides, they could pull in their staff at any time, leaving the ranks pretty volatile. Other than the occasional dupes or lackeys, the vast majority of these employees worked from the corporate enclaves on Z-O and through their traditional reporting structure. Actually, it was only part of their activity that the parent corp was willing to dedicate to the court.

## INTERNAL WOES

Eventually, the frustrations of employees working within the court started to boil over. While there wasn’t an outright coup, the staff self-organized. With that organization came the desire for more power and authority.

- > Cosmo highlights a point that should not be underestimated in this paradigm shift. The system was based more on subcontracting tasks than on lending staff. This entailed a great amount of strategy in the distribution of such tasks in a “neutral” manner—well, as far as that’s possible. Basically: If S-K had a dispute with Renraku, the court would have to try to outsource the drafting of resolution proposals to employees from one or more of the AAAs that were neutral in the case. That is eminently complex when you allocate tasks to an entity, and less to a dedicated team of your own.
- > DangerSensei
- > Okay, but the shift isn’t that radical. The Corporate Court still outsources a lot—for example, to Shiawase Legal Services. Shiawase’s lawyers are very good, especially when representing their own interests before the court.
- > Nuyen Flow
- > Yeah, they are soooooo good. Have I told you the story about how Shiawase Legal Services lost to the German Government because they messed up a temporary agreement to set up

extraterritorial waste dumps around Berlin and clean up the city? They miscalculated (and were sabotaged), and soon the dumps polluted the groundwater. And even the BRA said that as soon as any extraterritorial area affected the surroundings of a corporation, they could actually be held accountable? No? Well, they lost big, and in the end the head of Shiawase Germany had to resign. I should mention, though, that Germany received support from lawyers from the Frankfurt Bank Association.

> Heisenberg

The court’s administrative directors campaigned to obtain genuine seconded staff over whom they had real authority. Eventually, some of these employees came to like the position and decided to stay within the court, which gradually increased the number of internal staff. And bit by bit, an entire internal career path was created, specific to the court. The court began recruiting on its own, either from megacorporations, which saw no problem doing so if it only affected their bureaucrats, lawyers, and com-pushers. Then, the administration began recruiting from AAs, As, and even certain governments renowned for the reliability of their regulatory authorities.

- > The court smartly called on Horizon to help shape this internal culture. They worked hard to present the CC as a magnificent, perfectly oiled regulatory tool, an authentic “heart of the corporatist reactors” just waiting for the crème de la crème.
- > Dr. Spin

So, almost imperceptibly, it was the globules themselves of this body that changed. And no one could yet have imagined the profound shift that this single reorganization would bring about. Employees were no longer just passing through, but were determined to pursue a career within the court. As a result, they enlarged the corporate beast, which had to be modified with a real organizational chart that included directorates, divisions, and departments.

In fact, as the court needed to expand, this machinery grew and grew. While in the early days of the court, the corporate justices could decide and even sign their own decisions and debates, the increasing technical nature of the court and the need to remain competitive with the corps in the technical, accounting, and legal fields made it necessary to hire and keep experts. Today, it is they who, behind the scenes, fuel the corporatist justices with their analyses and recommend decisions and resolutions. While the last word is indeed in the mouths of the justices, the initiative, motivation, and overall knowledge base are built on the smooth-running bureaucracy of their own experts.



# UNITED AND DECENTRALIZED

Apart from the justices, general secretariat, and a few directors who preside in orbit, most of the court's employees are on Earth. Since 2065, the Corporate Court has been comfortably housed in the Towers, three skyscrapers in the heart of Lower Manhattan, abandoned by Fuchi and then Novatech (albeit against its will). Despite its Earth-based headquarters, the Corporate Court's operations are deeply decentralized by their nature.

The court has never succeeded in completely filling the three Towers. At least not with its employees; a good chunk of the space is used or rented out for events or various official or unofficial receptions. But the court doesn't really have a problem with the profitability of its space as the rent is free, thanks to NeoNET, which donated it—and can certainly appreciate the court's gratitude. Many of its employees used to live on the premises of their own corporation, which is less accurate today due to internal recruitment. But another large proportion has lived and still lives all over the world. As the court is obliged to operate with the Matrix anyway, due to its orbital nature, there's no point in wasting time bringing employees and their families on-site in buildings that are perfect for office use but are far from being able to be adapted and transformed into an arcology for families to live in. Also, the emblematic building is not far from an empty shell—a beautiful allegory.

- Security in the area around the Towers was already tight, but the recent murder of Saeder-Krupp's Justice Basima Oriol Diasruiz has made NYPD Inc. extremely nervous. Watch out, chummers, if you approach it without good reason (or good discretion).
- Hard Exit

The court, however, had to solve a specific challenge related to the frequent travels of its employees—whether for auditing purposes or working on specific issues in close collaboration with a corporation. So, to overcome this difficulty, they recycled the initial setup to their advantage. As mentioned initially, employees on loan from megacorporations usually stayed in dedicated offices on their premises. These offices were technically still available for the court. With the shift to a new structure, they discreetly enforced a requirement for megacorporations to provide office space for court employees in any of the corporation's facilities.

- At first, a few corps protested. The megas were already providing the vast majority of offices and workforce and the required obligation was buried in a dense set of rules and procedures. It wasn't exactly crystal clear that any CC employee could work from any extraterritorial corporate premises. When

the AAAs realized, however, that they were also receiving former government agents, or worse, employees of their competitors in these locations, some tensions arose. In practice, the employees tried not to abuse it. Theoretically, if a court employee shows up at a megacorporation's facility, its director will often try to find a reason not to welcome them.

- Sim-Eon
- That's why "loaned" offices are often located in the worst areas of the complex. Nobody really wants to work in the middle of the guards' canteen or worse. Above all, every employee's movements are closely monitored because behind every CC employee could be an auditor. Or even a spy working for a competitor.
- Icarus
- Or a shadowrunner. On the other hand, it's particularly complex to fabricate one's membership in the Corporate Court (the easiest way is to steal the identity of one of its accountants while he's quietly asleep, tied up and stuffed with laés, waiting on a chair in a Tacoma hideout), which opens up a wide range of opportunities to sneak around.
- Balladeer
- Employees still use the court's offices first and foremost, and it has a bunch of them around the globe in addition to the Towers. As far as I know, they officially have offices in the ARCHology in St. Louis, the Corporate Court Annex in Washington, one of the twelve towers on the Escher-Bürkli Island in Zürich (although that's first and foremost the terrestrial headquarters of Z-OG), a complex in Nairobi, and within the Vienna International Center. But if we were to make the effort to check, I think they have locations in at least every major capital.
- Orbital DK

Because of the capabilities offered by the Matrix, and for the most docile and least valuable employees, the court has endorsed a new practice. Some court employees don't even have to go to an office. They just set up wherever they like, often at home in a cooler country with less rain, and have everything they need to connect to the rather unique Matrix they use.

- Wait ... but does that mean that court agent's home is a gateway?
- Electric Blue
- Unfortunately, no. The court requires a specific datajack for authentication to work. So, unless you can remove it for yourself ...
- Pistons
- It's a complicated operation that requires good execution speed. Above all, the lazy employee has to be alive when the jack is extracted. It can be messy and often fatal, but I know a guy who does it well. And the quality of their datajacks is good.
- T3chK1d



# A NEW, OLD-STYLE MATRIX

While here, we'll pause to focus on the court's Matrix since it's currently a hot potato—which played a part in my recent experience. In compensation for the Manhattan Towers, NeoNET was granted a ten-year contract in 2065 to develop and maintain the Corporate Court's Matrix infrastructure. As the AAA's boys were clever, they made themselves particularly indispensable by creating the complex and obfuscated machinery that only their technical experts could handle. The contract was then renewed for ten years on December 31, 2075, with NeoNET executives congratulating each other, while the ones of the court could barely hide their hatred of the situation. But the fact was that everything was running smoothly, and the court was at the cutting edge, so what could go wrong until the next renewal in 2085?

Yep, September 29, 2079, was quite a shock. When, in the wake of the Boston lockdown and CFD scandals, the court approved the UCAS request and ordered NeoNET to establish a disaster relief fund totaling hundreds of billions of nuyen—that was the first blow. But, for the sake of its public image, the court had to go further than that. I must admit, it's either extremely brave or profoundly stupid, but against their own interest, they went ahead and ordered the dismantlement of NeoNET.

- Oh, wow, I never thought of that. I can only imagine the looks on the faces of the court spiders when they heard the news. It must have been a real scene.
- Clockwork
- Needless to say, the court was remarkably discreet on the subject and managed to keep things under control. Internally, there was a slight panic to operate remotely, and this was one of the rare periods when the Towers were almost full, as many employees were called on-site. But the turmoil seemed perfectly normal, between the celebrations linked to the “end” of the CFD, the joy of a “return to life as it was before,” and the consequences of the disastrous spectacle of the fall of NeoNET. What had made it possible to overcome a structural weakness ultimately appeared to be a demonstration of power.
- Orbital DK
- Not only did the court kill its subcontractor, but they also deprived it of future maintenance. In addition, there was a human factor that seems to have been poorly considered. For fifteen years, NeoNET employees had worked with the Corporate Court teams on their Matrix. When their corporation was dismantled, they found themselves kicked off like devil rats. Many of them felt personally betrayed and went into berserk mode, starting to frag and obfuscate the code. This forced the

court to cut off NeoNET/Novatech's access, leaving it with a “state-of-the-art” Matrix that they couldn't evolve because of the obfuscation—and lacking a ghostdamned manual. Even GOD and CCMA seemed to find themselves feeling like a bump on a log, searching for all backdoors that could exist. They could still work with it, but they had to make plans for the future.

- Glitch
- Technically they could have called on Novatech, which held the contract within NeoNET, but trust had been broken. No one wanted to work with the other side after such a brutal rupture.
- Mr. Bonds

Thus, the court was forced to start from scratch. It could not simply re-use NeoNET's architecture, for not only was it impenetrable to its own experts, but it could also no longer have complete trust in the engineers who had left it in the dust. And trust is all you can rely on at this level in the Matrix. So a vast project was set up to rebuild the infrastructure by the beginning of 2080. The first designs pushed by De la Mar's engineers were based on the Foundations, but two blockers quickly appeared.

The court staff, having been left in the dark by their contract with NeoNET, was now determined to have a system they could fully control. They were resolute in their decision to avoid a repeat of their past predicament and demanded a crystal-clear overall architecture. Even the so-called geniuses at GOD, though they would never admit it publicly, were confounded by the monstrous creation of Danielle de la Mar and the Foundations.

Since 2078, GOD and the Corporate Court Matrix Authority have received numerous reports about the mysterious presence of unknown Matrix entities within the Deep Foundation. Despite their efforts to downplay these reports and reassure the public about the robustness of the new Matrix protocols, the potential threat posed by this extraneous presence made a future technological shift too perilous to consider.

As a result, the court opted to repurpose its existing hardware into what we nowadays call Framework hosts, spread around the globe on several secret orbital platforms to ensure redundancy and, thus, resilience.

- This list isn't secret—it's super-secret. It's said that no one at CCMA, which manages the network today, even has the complete list, so that the entire network cannot be compromised. Still, it's possible to track down some of them. Strictly speaking, they're not “in orbit,” and it's not a super-stealthy hide: It's hidden in plain (orbital) sight among all the other satellites and crap we've ever sent up there. And, even if you suspect this old, abandoned Ares Space rocket engine of concealing one, it's virtually impossible to actually track it. At least with the equipment available here, because they follow random itineraries around the globe, but—there's always a but to this kind of subject—the



trouble with physical hosts is precisely that they're physical and, dangling in space where there's a lot of suspended waste, they sometimes need maintenance. I can tell you that there's one near their Nairobi complex and I've heard rumors of another in Cairo. It's wickedly protected, but it's probably direct access to the court's knowledge.

- Orbital DK
- Cairo? Isn't that a bit weird and far from the traditional orbiting points?
- Hard Exit
- Since the 2070s, the Coptic Pope has opened his arms to the deckers and technomancers of the Middle East, turning the city into a haven for hackers. Added to the fact that there's a mercenary company around every corner, the court cunningly decided it was a good location for its maintenance station.
- Am-Mut

The internal Matrix infrastructure, shrouded in secrecy, was finally launched on October 7, 2081, without any public fanfare. And believe me—or rather believe the brave decker who survived to talk about it—this Matrix may have been developed on an old paradigm, but there's nothing outdated or quaint about it.

Above all, the redundancy scheme desired by the court is echoed in the paradigm of its hosts. The Matrix system is a labyrinth of white corridors with soft blue carpeting. Each corridor looks exactly the same and seems to respawn at the next junction, which occasionally cuts across the two parallel corridors extending to the horizon. It's a bureaucratic living hell designed to lose unwanted visitors. And don't expect to find a friendly agent ready to help you; apart from the multitude of employees who roam and work within this Matrix hive, you'll find nothing but IC, enough to chill more than your spine. Oh, and of course, don't even try to figure out the door numbering.

- Rumor has it that the court forced Evo to help with this endeavor, which would explain why the megacorporation emerged (heh) almost clean from the CFD disaster. A sort of quid pro quo, if you will. Ironically, if it's true, it means the court's tech debt, due to NeoNET's downfall in the CFD affair, was repaid by Evo's monads, a product of CFD. Corps really have no shame ...
- Bull

This new Matrix, with its reinforced ability to work remotely, has also facilitated relations between employees. What the big executives hadn't anticipated was that it would enable the court's disgruntled staff to voice (with a certain amount of fury) their dissatisfaction. And today, this slowly matured bureaucracy, bred to regulate and to believe in the value of its actions, realizes that it is

failing at its mission, and it wants to change that. To understand just how bad, let me remind you of a few obvious facts about the court's recent, most obvious, failures.

## FRUSTRATIONS

To be brutally honest, the history of the Corporate Court is a succession of failures. The market's invisible hand doesn't really snap its fingers, at least not for the common good. It's never really worked outside the execs' fantasy because the game is rigged. And a whole generation of its agents, those who have arrived in the last ten years or so, have joined up to take part in a significant, and not just regulatory, role. They're beginning to see the abyss through this smokescreen and realize the biggest drawback has been, for some, a wake-up call.

Let's look at the CFD disaster that led to the Boston lockdown and thousands of deaths (or nearly so) across the globe. While UCAS managed to set up a fund for the victims (courtesy of NeoNET) thanks to the Corporate Court, the multiple megacorporations involved (except for NeoNET) have escaped any real consequences for their clear responsibility in this mess. Some even gained in the process, profiteering from NeoNET's dismantlement, or they found an edge in hiring monads. In short, the fear of the penalty wasn't enough to immediately stop the megacorporation's foul experiments or those of its classmates. Still, the chosen punishment sent the wrong message.

Some might have read, "You mustn't do that!" but most megas understood, "If you do, find a decent scapegoat!" In fact, that's what they've always done and still do, and it's our bread-and-butter in the shadows. Beyond the fact that the corps did not learn their lesson from this, this crisis has especially outlined how powerless the court was. It could not detect or prevent it. And their handling of the problem (quarantine an entire city) was, at best, subpar. They limited themselves to keeping score at the end while the dust settled. Call me a hooder, but this isn't your favorite cook-off trideo; the lives of millions were at stake.

Another example is the new Matrix protocols. Today, we all know how the Foundations were created. It's disgraceful per se, and it's a safe bet that some CC employees were as appalled by it as I was when I heard about it. This is not the kind of sacrifice that strengthens, and some voices seem to be raised within the CC to stop devoting resources to the protection of this dear Danielle.

The fact remains that the court has agreed to deploy those new protocols, which incidentally, granted full powers to a lone, and kind of rogue, department of the CCMA: GOD. My decker, whose name I won't mention for their safety, has





brought to my attention several messages between CC employees and GOD agents. I'm quite surprised by their content. These exchanges, some of which are actually trideo montages that decency orders me not to publish here, demonstrate a general pissed-off attitude about the "fascists" (quote) of this department, which is now openly criticized within its own house.

In fact, it seems that the court, through the CCMA, which—on principle—oversees the department, is receiving an increasingly impressive number of complaints from certain corporations and private individuals about the bad attitude of the G-men and the damage they cause daily. We in the shadows are used to their abuse against us. Still, it turns out they are not playing nicer with honest citizens or even corporations. Remember those old trideos, when the chief of police hangs up with the mayor to yell at the detective and demand he turns in his badge and gun because he destroyed half the city trying to arrest a grandmother who's running away in fear? I'm not saying the G-men will turn in their badges anytime soon, let alone their Tommy guns, but from what I can see, the mayor is starting to fulminate and isn't far from calling the police chief to remind him of the rules.

- ▶ Well, in this case, the chief of police almost crushes the mayor with his stunning presence. Who cares about the CCMA?
- ▶ Electric Blue
- ▶ Pay attention. Behind a façade that seems purely technical to normalize the Matrix, the CCMA enjoys all the power and influence of the court. The big guns at Grid Overwatch Division don't have that, because they're still borrowing their power from the megas. And that makes a big difference to the current court.
- ▶ Bull
- ▶ Wait, you mean the CCMA could actually fire GOD?
- ▶ Electric Blue
- ▶ I can't help noting that GOD has begun to use less brutal methods.
- ▶ Bull

With the new protocols, the engineers kind of dug their own grave. They were too far into the Foundations, too far into the Resonance, and woke up entities that the world at large would have preferred to never hear about. The CC's catastrophic handling of the Null Sect, which can be summed up with "see nothing, hear nothing," has caused a lot of internal cringes. It seems that



a significant proportion of the CC staff would have liked to sanction various experiments. I also found a few proposals for resolutions against multiple corporations that were filed. They never went anywhere, which most likely contributes to the current frustration among the court staff. The justices decided to keep a low profile on the whole affair, mainly because they were unaffected, thanks to their separate infrastructure. Meanwhile, for the rest of the Matrix, vines were growing everywhere.

Other messages refer to secret—even in-house—developments by CCMA scientists to generate a potent Matrix-disabling weapon. This secret initiative seems to have started when France's so-called Neo-Revolution and Marianne system appeared to be a threat to corporate powers. As the small European country finally played ball with the CC, the decision was made to test on the UCAS. There was a bit of controversy among the court staff. Not everyone agreed with the decision, but, in the end, the experiment was deemed a success solely because the UCAS ratified the BRA again. But, if you read between the lines, it's clear that the court was, again, unhappy about the megacorporations' abuse.

- Especially as the CC agreed to a few deployments of the weapon to orchestrate a surgical strike against the UCAS. But then, every AAA demanded to have their own little blackout (generally to help their interest in some part of the country), which turned this "selective sanction" into a mess of their own making. Especially when they realized that fixing the Matrix in the targeted zone was not as easy as flipping a switch ... or was it the economic damage that whole thing caused, to every city and corporation that was affected?
- Sim-Eon
- Now, they have a proven weapon to enforce the BRA wherever they want.
- Plan 9

At last, when the CC was more or less ordered by Horizon (officially they proposed and pushed through a "resolution") to ban the word "Dis" or anything related to it from all its latest issues, it was the last straw in an enormous camel's back. What's quite ironic here is that Horizon helped the Corporate Court recruit in the last decade. Their consultants crafted a brilliant hiring strategy emphasizing the importance of the court's mission: "the defense of the general interest" and "giving meaning and duty to one's actions." As a result, many staff joined the Corporate Court with hope, a somewhat fantasized vision of being at the machine's heart and changing it. And now Horizon is the one literally telling them to shut up.

- I think Horizon's vision is slightly obscured by its cynicism. The AAA failed to perceive the danger its cohorts of hopeful new recruits posed. They just hoped to have a more independent court more inclined to help them than the other AAAs. Consensus and the megacorp execs did not imagine a scenario where this would blow up in their face.
- Dr. Spin

## THE WHITE COLLAR (SOFT) REVOLUTION

I won't bulldrek you; this isn't a revolution as we think of them. No barricades and no brawls. We're in the corporate world here, so it's highly subdued, with much more sophisticated movements and strategies than your usual go-gang can pull out. But yes, you could say it's something of a revolution for such a monolithic and allergic-to-change corporate institution. You have to understand how the monster ticks to see it, so I had to consult my accountant and pay a specialist lawyer to help me understand what the data I've gathered was revealing.

### WORKING CLASS HEROES

Thanks to this help, I was able to identify (sort of) two "leaders" (for lack of other words) of the push to empower the court.

### MAXENCE BLANCHARD

Born in Paris, he first sharpened his teeth in STV's French branch, which revealed his potential. A brilliant corporate lawyer (with a specialty in how territorial and extraterritorial laws interact), he was soon snatched by one of the Corporate Court recruiters. Their rhetoric, backed by Horizon's staging in the media of the institution's role in recent years, finally persuaded him. He started at the bottom of the pyramid ten years ago. He worked his way up and now leads one of the legal departments (focused on territorial infringements) from his office in Paris.

He perfectly embodies this new generation of employees who joined the court with high hopes and a profound desire to change the world from the inside. Instead of giving up like others do, his desire remained and turned into demands. His (currently) indispensable skills make him almost untouchable, so he can openly advocate for more powers for the court. It's clear, however, that the corporations are on the hunt for a suitable but more malleable replacement.

- Don't think Blanchard is a nice guy and a noble hero. He took the job because he wanted to change the world, and he may say it's for the general interest, but his real motivation is his hubris.
- Mr. Bonds



- I can confirm that he thinks he's a gleaming white knight, to the point of recruiting himself in Paris when he needs to, without going through a proxy. He pays the bill at the meeting (yes, this is important to me).
- Skarn Ka

## HONEYBADGER

My team and I have been unable to determine precisely whether Honeybadger is the pseudonym of an individual or a team of individuals, like a banner behind which they gather. In any case, it's a name that comes up regularly to sign off many messages broadcast on the internal Matrix that are pretty radical (and irreverent) for the institution. Propaganda slogans are often attached to memos explaining the rationale behind some demand for change.

This range of expertise suggests that more than one individual is behind it. Obviously, the court's administration would like to silence this snarky little voice, and the messages are often quickly deleted only to reappear, often in a more discreet manner, a few days later. Employees seem to relay them to each other. From some linguistic tells, my accountant has figured out that Honeybadger might have links with Brokerage X and Equity, which could prove highly problematic for the court if it's true and this little group decides to up the ante ...

- Drek. If this collaboration has a shred of truth, it's bound to explode. Even with a low level of accreditation, the smallest CC agent has knowledge that would make the average Activist Joe drool. This would put these organizations in the big leagues.
- Sounder

## STRIKE BREAKERS

Of course, this movement is far from unanimous, and there are also a few strong voices defending the status quo.

## AUSTIN E. HAMADO

This director of public relations suffers from severe impostor syndrome. As an ork outsider raised in the barrens who believed in his luck, he was awarded one of Evo's famous university scholarships for affirmative action and has devoted his entire career to legitimizing his position. And, like many converts, Austin adheres to the dogma a little too much. He swiftly shuts down any complaints or criticisms against the CC and points out that "these disturbances are part of the normal cycle of any institution" and that sort of bulldrek. A skill that is, and kudos to Corporate Court HR on this one, ideally suited to his job of reassuring the masses. He must make his parents proud, even if they still live in Redmond ... oh, did I really drop that much intel on him?

## FATI NGOMO

Talking about HR, here's their head of recruitment. I don't know if she's really convinced by the drek she's pushing, or if she's afraid to lose her job, or maybe it's just a psychological bias or the by-product of brainwashing by her former employer, Horizon. Regardless, the fact remains that she staunchly supports the positions of the administration (that is, the megacorps' views, through the justices) against the demands of the court's employees. I understand she is even plotting to silence the movement's prominent leaders. This is proven by the fact that she is scourging the corporate world to find an extraterritorial lawyer who can take on Maxence's position.

- I understand she'll soon organize a trip to Paris to convince Blanchard directly. She'll probably take the opportunity to sound out his department, and then, who knows what might happen? Paris is a dangerous city where, despite Marianne's best efforts, unfortunate accidents still occur.
- Skarn Ka

## NEW RULES OF THE GAME

Perhaps the most important news, in the short term, is the change in auditing procedures. The final details are still being fleshed out, but the underlying idea has been accepted. It is no longer kept a secret, causing great concern among the corporations. One of the primary sources of failure seemed to be the Corporate Court's lack of proactivity in enforcing the rules on all corporations. Megacorporate revisions and audits were few and very expected, on top of focusing mainly on financial issues. In the end, it's all for show and not a genuine regulatory tool. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the audits had no impact; whatever changes they brought were the result of other political shenanigans, generally upstream of the actual audit.

This is about to change. The frequency of audits is set to accelerate radically. In practice, the Corporate Court can conduct audits on its own initiative whenever and wherever it wishes. It will have to wait a minimum of three months before auditing the same corporation, however. Yes, you correctly read between the lines; this means that the CC could, theoretically, audit the same corporation every three months. It would need the appropriate resources (and the will to do so), but that is technically possible now. The idea is to enable the court to react more quickly to current events. This faster tempo, however, will mean changes for the corporations, as they will have to adapt to it and prepare to suddenly receive auditors and suffer a



possible downgrading of their rating way sooner than expected ...

- This is going to make me rich. I can sell a complete package to a corporation: I'll highlight certain irregularities in a competitor's business and bring in the court auditors (some of whom will come on request, I'm sure, if we suggest it to them nicely). And then, I'll short them to double my winnings!
- Mr. Bonds

Also, it's my understanding that audits will have a broader reach beyond the strictly financial and competitive aspects. Namely, there will be a legal and ethical dimension that auditors will be able to explore. The implications have yet to be defined, not the least because this would mean providing the auditors with a whole range of confidential information that they never had access to previously.

- Surprisingly, the AAAs accepted this request relatively quickly. To be honest, they don't have much more to worry about, as they're too big to be properly audited every three months. In the end, it's their Corporate Court justices who will have the final word, so even if this sounds designed to prevent another CFD or Disian crisis, the truth is that they won't really be affected by this. The panic created among the smaller ones is, however, a delight to them. This prevents new players from entering their markets, and also enables them to detect potential prey, prime for a takeover.
- Kay St. Irregular

## STILL UNDER NEGOTIATIONS

Other ideas received a more mixed, if not genuinely negative, response. It has been suggested that, to be taken seriously, the Corporate Court should have its own freaking army. After all, can a regulatory body be effective if it is toothless? Having its own military or police force, depending on how you look at it, would make the CC more menacing, as it won't have to rely on its target's competitors any more to enforce its ruling.

Logically enough, this proposal was not greeted with cheers. Still, it was welcomed by some of the justices. Some saw it as an opportunity to gain more power, and why not imagine a more successful career when they had reached a kind of glass ceiling in their current job within their own megacorporation? This is a source of irritation for their employers, who are keen to understand and even call in their own justices. But for now, the proposal has been debated by secret ballot, and no one knows who among the justices is opposed or in favor of it.

And the other proposal under discussion, unofficially for the moment, will not encourage them to

be lenient. Some within the court would like to see fines and sanctions end up directly in the pockets of the Corporate Court instead of going in those of the plaintiff or injured party.

Today, the court is financed because it holds the purse strings of the Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank on behalf of the megacorporations, each of which owns ten percent. To become an independent institution of control and sanction, it must have its own resources (which will enable it to finance the aforementioned army and other matters arising from the proposals).

IMHO, at this stage, it's wishful thinking. I suspect the only reason this request should be part of the ongoing discussions is that justices have become greedy, just like with the army proposal. They smell gold and power and are taking their best shot at more autonomy.

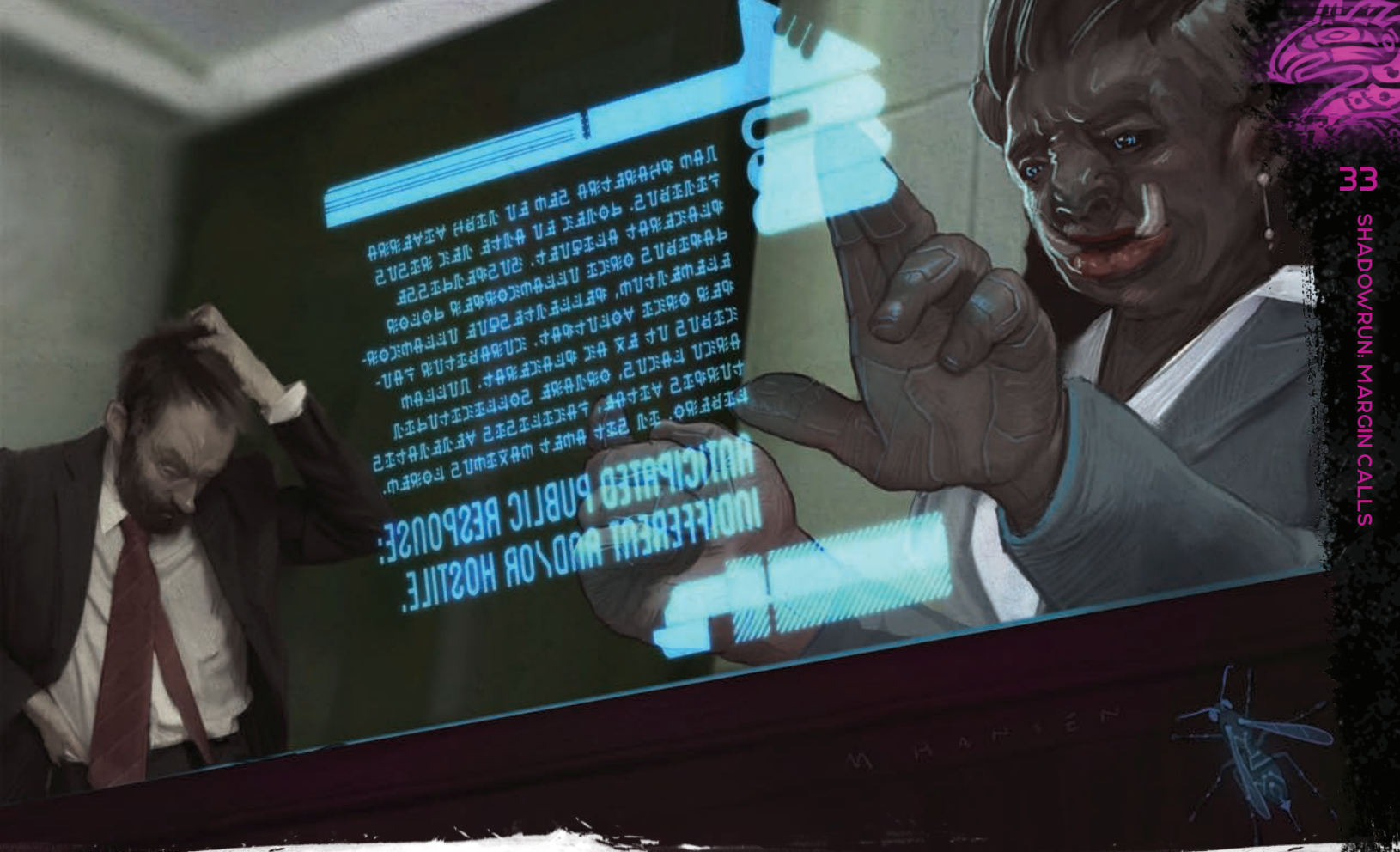
## DREAM ON, PUNK!

One of the proposals that received the most hostility, even internally, is the end of corporate justices. The very history of the court is all about its justices. And it's because they exist and are appointed by the megacorporations that the court can preserve a semblance of status quo. Remember, their strong belief is that this status quo is founded on the possibility of totally nuking each other. Some court employees, rightly or wrongly, are betting that regulation can be achieved by a totally independent institution. This could only work if the two previously exposed demands are also met. That is, the court could benefit from its own super-armed enforcement forces and obtain financial autonomy by recovering the fines imposed by its decisions on megas. As you can guess, this little fantasy has no chance of happening because, obviously, there are no justices nor megacorporations backing it.

That said, it resonates with all those corporations that don't (and never will) benefit from a seat on the court. They see this as an opportunity to finally establish a balance, as it would be so much easier for them to compete with the big fish if they did not have such a significant edge. Above all, it's crucial to remember that many AAs and As see this situation as unjust. We can, therefore, expect intensive lobbying on these proposals, which could change the face of the court. And if some of the job offers that are starting to come in are anything to go by, we could have our part to play in this quiet revolution.

- I think they are more likely to try again after the failure in the 2077 audit to get their House of Commons providing a seat to any corporation ranked as extraterritorial (by the CC). Maybe it's an Overton window approach: They're supporting an unthinkable idea to make the radical one seem possible.
- Mr. Bonds





And a last note on something I genuinely didn't see coming. I discovered repeated references in the documents to a new department that some within the CC would like to see happen. If the CCMA couldn't stop the Null Sect from threatening the Matrix and the world, it was still better than nothing. And what the Disian crisis has shown is that the CC has nothing when it comes to magical matters. I'm not saying I'd personally call for an authority as heavy-handed as the CCMA, or worse, GOD, to deal with magical matters on a corporatist scale, but ... would it have any chance of limiting the wicked wizz-y drek that megacorporations do in magical fields? Probably. Of course, this proposal doesn't really have the pull it needs to happen, but behind the curtains, some people are starting to lay the foundations, talking to experts so that the next time this is discussed and put to a vote, the idea will have wings.

- Not in a million years! Not on my watch.
- Haze
- Don't worry so much. Before corporations agree on the form and content, they'll have to exterminate each other. Unlike the Matrix, which rests on common ground, magic is so subjective and alive to territories and traditions that I don't see how they can hope to define standard lines and stick to them.
- Axis Mundi
- They invented the Unified Magic Theory to create this common base. Besides, it wouldn't be the first time they've tried to control something they don't understand or master.
- Winterhawk
- I hear that someone with pyramids and a rich history with blood magic is scrambling to get "dragon regulation" added to this brand-new idea that will deal with magical issues. And that same someone would like a special status for blood magic.
- Red





# IT'S ALL ABOUT NUYEN & CENTS

POSTED BY: MR. BONDS

► Glitch asked me to do a primer on the financial industry, as well as a brief update on how the Disian Shadow War impacted these companies. There's a huge trove of paydata that can be found in other locations, but I aimed to provide enough information to our newer members without overwhelming anyone with a sweeping history lesson. The most important things are always "why did we get here" and "where are we going next?" Past behavior of markets is going to be the best predictor of that.

► Mr. Bonds

To start, the Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank is a major influence on our current state. This behemoth is the framework that holds the Big Ten together financially but also restricts others from joining that august group, often through manipulations to the very financial instruments necessary to join. Beyond that bank, there are dozens more that provide products and services

to individuals, governments, and corporations worldwide. Knowing how they operate and what they want is important, especially if you work in the upper echelons.

The brief update on the fiscal impact of the war could be easily summed up with, "everything's getting worse." I'll try to provide more details regarding some of the winners and losers—and yes, there were a few winners. Or more accurately, those who bet right and put their chips against MCT. It's good for the market that at least someone came out ahead during that time.

And as always, the chaos in the marketplace means there are a lot of opportunities for runners. The shadow work between the corporations and the banks is only going to intensify as a result of sudden valuation drops or perceived weakness in competitors. And even the mighty Corporate Court and Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank aren't immune from the tectonic shifts of our financial systems.



# BASICS OF ZÜRICH-ORBITAL GEMEINSCHAFTSBANK

The bank was originally named Global Financial Services when it survived the Crash of '29. The Corporate Court bought the bank in November 2032 as part of a hostile takeover, and in early 2033, the bank moved into orbit and renamed itself Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank (Z-OGB).

When the bank was first set up as the primary financial institution for the world's largest corporations, it was decided that each AAA megacorp would own an equal share of it. When they were the Big Eight, they each got a 12.5 percent share in the bank. Things got a little heated when the AAA ratings expanded from eight to ten, but after the dust settled, each corporation owned an equal 10 percent in the financial institution.

- Ghost! That had to be a mess.
- Electric Blue
- This is a major reason the Big Ten are reluctant about growing or shrinking their ranks. By all accounts, MCT could have (and should have) been retrograded to AA or perhaps entirely dismantled, like NeoNET was. But even promoting one of the giant AA-rated corps to AAA (e.g. Maersk or Yakashima) at the same time would have been complicated. Back in 2079, it was only possible to (somewhat) smoothly swap Villiers' AAA and the newborn Global Spinrad because he and his buddy Johnny agreed to it.
- Sim-Eon

The other part of the story was that the nuyen wasn't always the top-dog currency. That change-over occurred in 2036 when the bank took control of Japan's currency. This shift in the world currency benefited our business, but also made a strong statement that Japan and Shiawase were dominant financial drivers in the world at the time. One major factor of the Big Ten owning Z-OGB is that the only way to convert currencies between the different corp scrip is through the bank. National currencies don't have this same restriction, although dealing with national scrip usually means you're leaving money on the table.

Okay, enough with the history of the Z-OGB, let's see how it operates.

The bank is managed by a nine-person board of directors who are selected by the Big Ten from their own ranks. The standard term on the board is nine years. They configured it so that one board member is selected each year. Sometimes, you have someone exit a term early and their replacement

ends up just finishing off the remainder of the original term.

- Wait ... that means that one of the corps is left without a director. Why'd they ever agree to that?
- Chainmaker
- It was better than sometimes having one corp with two votes. And the way it works, a company only ever lacks representation for a single year. If they play things correctly, then they have a board member for the next nine years. The wheeling and dealing that occur each year is a thing of beauty, if you admire fierce corporate politicking. The exiting corp and the potential rival play at all the other Big Ten to secure the necessary votes to get their candidate in the seats of power.
- Corporate Raiders

Today, the bank is a driving force behind the Big Ten's financial power. No one is surprised when the institution loaning your money is also partly owned by you and is able to get good rates. The immense size and the combined force of the biggest AAA-rated corporations solidifies the power of the orbital bank. All the smaller banks, and let's be honest that these smaller banks are still huge, operate at the whims of this giant.

Depending on who you ask, the purpose of the Gemeinschaftsbank is described as a financial weapon, a force to maintain stability, or an extension of the megacorporations themselves—the real answer is all of the above. It's been used to punish members of the Corporate Court, and those outside who seek to rise above their station. It's been used to adjust exchange rates and interest rates to stabilize the nuyen. And when any decision needs to be made, it's always at the whims of the Big Ten. Or at least most of the Big Ten.

- How does that even work? Each of the Big Ten has at least one financial institution in their network of holding. I can't see those playing nice with Zürich.
- River Fish
- Most of the board of directors for Z-OGB come from those same financial subsidiaries. That doesn't mean that there isn't some ill will between them, but most of the corporate guidance encourages seeing them as partners to execute on goals.
- Corporate Raiders
- I know of a few eggheads who tried to play the game from within the corps by pitting themselves against the might of Z-OGB, and it's never been pretty. If you're really unlucky, they ask you to visit the station, where you find that the airlocks are way too close for comfort.
- Cosmo



# MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE BANKING INDUSTRY

This is a brief data dump on some of the major financial players outside of the Z-OGB. There's no real way to make this an exhaustive list and still be understandable to anyone outside of finance. One of the interesting effects that an institution like Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank has had on the global economy was the disappearance of specific financial products and services. When all legal currency exchanges need to go through that bank, there's no room for another agency that provides this service. Services that disappeared quickly after Z-O arrived included remittance, credit card networks, and reinsurance.

Even with the loss of entire parts of the industry, there's still room for corporations to compete and collude. I tried to give a real basic view of the corporation along with some of their favorite strategies or things they are actively working toward. The smart people here can figure out how to best use the corporate agendas to their benefit.

## AMERICAN FAMILY FINANCIAL (MCT)

AFF is one of the members of MCT Investment Management, not to be confused with MCT Financial, which has parted ways with its parent company. This company is one of the largest real estate holding companies in the CAS and UCAS, and they've continued to use their clout in insurance and personal finance to gobble up more assets. This would be a winning strategy, if these two nations were performing better. In an interesting turn, we've seen AFI reverse course around sucking up all the available resources and, instead, start making investments. Someone got wise that the amount of profit they could wring out of the nation and its people had limited upside unless something changes on the geopolitical stage.

## BON VIVANT FINANCE (CENTURY DYNAMICS)

One of the banking corporations formerly part of Mitsuhamma Financial Group has found its way to Century Dynamics (previously known as Universal Omnitech). If you think it's hard to keep track of all the names and moves, you aren't alone. This institution is well known for backing members of the French Touch, often competing against Index-AXA to form strategic partnerships. As the latter is also a key member of the consortium, it may sound contradictory, but it's

not. The AA has a huge influence inside the FT, and to counter this, other arguably smaller members often need the help of one of its competitors to get their way.

- This sort of weird internal infighting is exactly the kind of incestuous shenanigans that create dangerous shadow work. Saurat and Fauchon, for example, have been consolidating the consortium's hold over the French wine industry since 2081 under Industrie Vinicole de France (IVF). This kind of enterprise cannot be done without the support of bank and insurance companies, and Index-AXA used the opportunity to jack up the price, with the blessing of Fauchon, believing the consortium rules would make them the only one able to endorse the operation. Saurat did not like it and secretly invited Bon Vivant Finance to compete, utilizing a tiny French bank he owns as a proxy. Of course, Index-AXA hired runners to figure out who was backing the bank and find leverage to stop it. Fauchon did the same, and Saurat recruited his team to run interference. At the end, Saurat's maneuver worked and Index-AXA aligned its price to the market, but guess who paid the bill? Yes, all three runner teams lost members, killing each other during all this mess.
- Sim-Eon

## CHAMPION FINANCIAL (RENRAKU)

This financial planning company is a subsidiary of Renraku North America, located in the Manhattan sprawl. Billed as the premiere wealth management expert in all the UCAS, this company has been in existence for over eighty years, with the majority of their products targeted toward individuals—and it has been a steady source of revenue since.

- The blackouts created an economic crisis that leveled the UCAS and led to many people defaulting on their loans. This hasn't played in Champion's favor, and a few large projects meant to improve their standing were postponed or canceled. CF even used runners to plant false information or manipulate data to allow the company to get some money back from insurance or seize (or sell) assets faster than expected. This was never mentioned by the media, of course, but people talked. Now, CF is one of the most hated corps within the UCAS, which means they're struggling to grow their business again.
- Kay St. Irregular

## EAST ASIAN INVESTMENT SERVICES

Centering their activities in Southeast Asia and Australia, this investment institution boasts significant assets in local businesses and shipping ports. Given the importance of these things, it's been enough to push the company up in valuation. Unfortunately, the manastorms that swept through



Australia during the Disian Shadow War severely damaged buildings, infrastructure, and the shipping ports. This has significantly hurt EAIS's status, and I fully expect them to be acquired within the next year.

- This might be the next upcoming crisis for Asia. Yakashima and Kwonsham, two of the largest AAs, both want it and seem to be willing to go to war with each other to get it. But they could team up in an instant to cripple East Asian Investment Services if any AAA showed interest in acquiring the corp.
- Baka Dabora
- Note that the Japanacorps have different strategies than Kwonsham for this acquisition. Yakashima for example is going full-blown hostile takeover and intimidation. They have runners hurting EAIS business left and right, they are using their newfound ally in the Yakuza to mess with their shipping ports' activities, costing the corp a fortune—on top of flooding the media with less-than-accurate reports of the corp's difficulties. All of this to drag the stock price of EAIS low enough for the AA to make its move. The Koreans, on the other hand, have taken the wine-and-dine approach. They're courting the board to convince them to merge, hiring runners to dig dirt on the ones who seem too opposed to it, but also feeding intel to EAIS on Yakashima's shenanigans against them. As their target becomes more desperate, Kwonsham engages more, often with their own resources (or runners) to protect them from the Japanacorp's assaults.
- Gramius
- Despite Yakashima and Kwonsham's willingness to unite if an AAA shows up on this battlefield, it's not certain others won't interfere. Saeder-Krupp has significant resources in Southeast Asia already, so adding the bank to their stable of contracts and local businesses is a strong play. But they haven't made any moves in that direction yet. And then there's Wuxing, since they missed out on this in their original buying spree years ago. My personal bet isn't on Wuxing, though, but MCT Investment Management. They don't necessarily have the funds to buy it outright, but that's where individuals with our talents come in. So, why would they grab this while MCT Financial has abandoned them? No one expects them to do it, and this is how you start growing again.
- Clockwork

## **EASTERN FINANCIAL (SAEDER-KRUPP)**

Operating out of the Indian Union, this subsidiary of Saeder-Krupp specializes as a liaison between different business and lending groups. They support other financial operations, such as personal accounts, but that makes up the smallest of their products and services. One would think that being tied to one of the Big Ten would result in businesses not using your product, but in this case, they support a large number of businesses in and around the subcontinent.

- S-K has been using this subsidiary to support their new endeavors in Australia, which might be more interesting for us than it seems at first glance. Several major players would love to know more about S-K's mysterious activities. And while S-K's security is extremely tight, stealing data from Eastern Financial is more doable. And to individuals who can interpret financial mumbo-jumbo, it could tell them a LOT regarding the wyrm's endgame down under.
- Baka Dabora

## **ELKOVSKI-VANG- OOKMAN INVESTMENTS**

Headquartered in Norway, E.V.O. Investments specializes in debt resolution, payment recovery, and medical insurance. If that combination doesn't make your skin crawl, I don't know what would. This is very lucrative, especially when the default rate is high. They've even made partnerships with various prison management companies where the indebted can go to work off the money they owe. Recent slides in the markets have resulted in a higher-than-average number of defaulted debtors who have overwhelmed the prison systems. The bank is now looking for creative solutions to the problem.

- One of their European execs has found a gnarly way to save money. Many of their rich customers have a tendency to use experimental procedures, which are covered by their policy, to treat their sickness or health problems. When it works, it's fine, but when it fails, it means that the corp must then pay for more and more treatments, which come at a higher price tag because of the generally worsened state of the patient. Apparently, a few of those patients in the last few months have suffered from "medical complications" or mundane accidents, just in time to save Elkovski-Vang-Ookman Investments a small fortune in medical bills.
- Plan 10

## **FRANKFURTER BANKENVEREIN HOLDING AG (FBV)**

Also known as the Frankfurt Banking Association, this AA-rated public corporation is one of the most diversified financial institutions in the world, second only to Wuxing Financial Services. They're involved in personal and corporate finance, investments, stock exchange, legal, real estate, and consulting—and that's only scratching the surface. Originally formed in 2003 when Deutsche Bank AG and DZ Bank merged in Frankfurt, they grew rapidly between the 2030s and 2050s as they gobbled up institutions to gain a controlling foothold throughout Europe and the Middle East. The FBV uses their outsider status as not being one of the AAA-rated megacorporations to provide banking solutions to major Eurocorps, which gives them seats on a number of boards.



- > The growth through acquisition was done in the wake of the Eurowars. Many of the European economies were rebuilding, and this resulted in opportunities for the FBV to expand by buying out others. Whether you see their work as greedy, or critical for the reconstructing process, is up to you.
- > Sim-Eon
- > Even if it's old history, let's not forget the bank was expanded by the great dragon Nachtmeister. After he was killed by Lofwyr, Nachtmeister's drake, Monika Stüeler-Waffenschmidt (MSW), assumed control until she was murdered by unknown forces on May 5, 2083. Right now, the FBV is run by Dr. Leon Fischer while "irregularities" regarding MSW's testament (which includes her massive majority share of the AA) are still being cleared up.
- > Glitch
- > For decades, FBV was a minor shareholder of Ares. In 2080, they sold their Ares stocks—and those of several Ares subsidiaries—and disengaged from the megacorporation. However, the AA benefited from Ares support through the '70s when they expanded their activities in North America, and paradoxically used the AAA as a gateway to the NAN, where FBV grew its market share quite well over the last decade. In June 2083, it was even reported that the AA had become the main financial partner of the Oceti Sakowin government.
- > Zhaganaash
- > Don't forget also that the FBV has its own unsavory security firm, the Sternschutz, that we discussed in detail in the Tarnished Star download.
- > LSPD

## GLOBAL FINANCE (AZTECHNOLOGY)

At one time, this was an MCT Investment Management group that excelled in creating shell companies. Aztechnology made sure to snatch up this financial powerhouse, partly to see the depths that MCT went into using corporate structuring to hide their assets, and also to gain access to their experts. Their financial consultants are some of the best in the industry and are often contracted out to other banking businesses at truly exorbitant rates. The other sneaky bit is that those consultants often bring home more information than they provide. It's not something they always act on immediately, but shifts in strategies absolutely take place.

## HILDEBRANDT- KLEINFORT-BERNAL

The British financial firm HKB is a member of the New European Economic Community (NEEC) and a dominant player in the industry. Even with a failed potential merger with Maersk Incorporated

Assets back in the late 2070s, they've continued to grow into one of the big five financial corporations in the world. They aren't afraid to wield their clout on the big stage, such as their most famous influence as being involved with the creation of NeoNET. They've continued to move in corporate circles, investing and connecting corporations to be the next great megacorp.

- > Strangely enough, there's no indication that HKB is talking with OmniStar. The British firm might be too attached to its own independence for that ... or they may have managed to be more discreet than others about their negotiations.
- > Sunshine
- > I think the door closed on any potential merger with OS the minute Novatech and Cara joined. Don't forget that her recent "squabble" with Cap-Atos has created a lot of chaos in London. This has very much given her a bad rep; making her some sort of cow-girl CEO ... of course, the fact that most top management of HKB are men of old money has nothing to do with this opinion.
- > /dev/grrl

## KIRILENKO FINANCIALS

Located in Sevastopol, Ukraine, Kirilenko Financials specializes in structured finances and broker services. For those not in the field, these two services are often used by individuals to meet their specific needs of hedge funds and individuals of high net worth. While most of the other big companies on this list could provide these services, Kirilenko has made premium customer service their speciality, which has built up a stable of the richest people in the world. That network of the rich and powerful helps the company influence the various hedge funds to its advantage.

## MARAKOVICH MARKET MASTERS

With an expertise in securities research, restructuring, and mergers and acquisitions, MMM is a small but well-resourced financial corporation headquartered in Minsk, but with offices in London, Lisbon, and Lima. The company has been a target of data thefts in recent years that haven't seemed to impact it at all. A recent interview with their chief security officer, Iryna Kupava, implied the company operated multiple hosts, and some contained false information. What I couldn't determine was whether these were known hosts, or if the company was using some extra layers of obfuscation to hide this information, or if they are just nesting these hosts deeper in the structure. Either way, it is a very interesting outcome. They even implied they knew who was responsible for the break-in.





## **METABANK (EVO)**

A subsidiary of Evo located in Oceti Sakowin,—they focus on insurance and finance for commercial businesses. Evo's acquisition of the bank back in the mid-2060s was seen as a major move to gain a foothold on the North American continent. While the bank has been a major player in Oceti Sakowin, it's still dwarfed by the larger corporations in nearby nations. Recent shakeups in the marketplace have not hit this particular institution as hard, but it also didn't use the opportunity to make progress.

- Metabank has the political backing of anyone opposed to FBV in Oceti Sakowin. And when you factor in the support from its parent corporation, this makes it the most dangerous competitor to the German AA here. Cheyenne's shadows are certainly seeing that, as the number of runs involving the extraction of key assets, or sabotage of one for the benefits of the other, has increased in the last few months.
- Zhaganaash

## **MCT FINANCIAL**

This financial institution will be covered in a post by Mihoshi Oni as part of the ramifications of the Disian Shadow War on MCT. This new corporation has escaped from the sucking black hole of MCT.

## **THE MIZUHO GROUP (RENRAKU)**

A subsidiary of Renraku Asia, this financial corporation has continued to show strong growth

since the last time we checked in on them. Under the leadership of Shuko Tokura, it has been able to take advantage of the turmoil during the last few years. This is partly due to some hard learnings from the Biogene datasteal. Since that incident, we've been able to track down an increasing reliance on deniable assets with targeted runs against rivals.

## **MOSCOW MONEY SOLUTIONS (MCT)**

This lending and banking company was part of Mitsuhamma Financial Group, which has been fragmented by the recent Corporate Court rulings. It, however, remains with the newly renamed MCT Investment Management under the existing corporate umbrella instead of being sold off or spinning off into a separate entity. The corp has been in a continuous shadow war with Presnya Financial Services for business partnerships and investments. It will be interesting to see if the loss of the wider financial group will encourage the smaller group to get more aggressive here. My money is on yes, given the vast amount of natural resources at stake.

## **NAJIMA SECURITIES (RENRAKU)**

This security and financial corporation in Renraku Asia got its start transporting money and valuable assets. This led to innovation and expansion until you see the corporation of today with investments in security services, military-grade hardware, and financial services. I would've expected



it to be more successful, but there've been some internal power struggles between the three arms of the company. Each is making forward progress, but lacking a strong central purpose is holding them back from becoming a true player.

## **PACIFIC RIM BANK & FINANCIAL SERVICES (CENTURY DYNAMICS)**

The corporation was notoriously focused on bolstering Japanacorp's back into profitability through a strategy of low-interest loans and reconfiguring the boards of the companies they assisted. But we've seen a slight softening of their focus on all things Japanese since being acquired by Century Dynamics (formerly Universal Omnitech) in the late 2070s. Many of the executives are fighting this change, and it's taking a tremendous amount of time and effort for the leadership at CD to convince, cajole, and bribe PacRim's direction.

## **PRESNYA FINANCIAL SERVICES (EVO)**

This Vladivostok-based financial services company is a subsidiary of Evo and one of Evo's earliest acquisitions after moving to Russia. This corporation fuels many companies in the region, spanning from Korea to Yakut. They've focused on real estate and transportation financing as part of their public investments. More privately, they're a key component of the money pipeline to hire deniable assets throughout the region with their staff of expert Mr. and Ms. Johnsons.

- Kwonsam's recent expansion has some people worried in Presnya. Korea is an important market for the corp, and it seems it's going to be harder and harder for them to keep their market share there. It's not enough for Evo's subsidiary to wage a full-blown shadow war, but I expect their execs are looking for some creative runners who can provide them with a "novel" angle to protect their assets in Pyongyang.
- Kia

## **SHIAWASE FINANCIAL (SHIAWASE)**

The Shiawase House Bank headed up by Takeshi Matsukawa, Shiawase Financial provides all the personal financial services, such as investment portfolios, banking, and the issuance of Shiawase scrip. The larger part of their business involves supplying financial support to all companies under Shiawase. Their primary goals have been insulating those subsidiaries from Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank's interest rate manipulation.

- This particular strategy requires the freshest intel on Z-OGB manipulations. Generally, information coming from the Market Information & Forecasting Department (MIFD) is enough to do the trick, but Takeshi is careful. He often buys information to corroborate their internal data. This led a few data brokers to hire runners to get the most recent, hard-to-get details on the Z-OGB. While some teams have used good old-fashioned blackmail (I know one of the team's faces seduced a Z-OGB exec to get the dirt they needed), some have been more creative. One in particular managed to sneak on board a suborbital and gather a lot of information, just by chit-chatting with Z-OGB employees on board.
- Orbital DK

## **UNL BANKING GROUP (REGULUS JOINT INDUSTRIES)**

Part of Regulus Joint Industries with their headquarters in Utrecht, this financial company is focused on business and agriculture investment. Being the official bank of the monarchy has its advantages. The general population uses it for their banking needs, providing a portion of its assets, while the majority of assets are tied into the other parts of Regulus JI. The recent market turmoil did hurt a large number of their investments, but their agriculture operations have actively grown during the time that Aztechnology suffered setbacks to their ag business. UNL's strategy has been to maintain stability in their decisions. While predictable, it also makes some runs aimed at disrupting them more difficult because unusual work or transactions show up quickly.

## **WUXING FINANCIAL SERVICES (WUXING)**

If you're looking for banks that dominate the market outside of Z-OGB, Wuxing Financial is at the top of the stack. Their path to dominance was set in the early 2060s, with a focus on algorithms to help them invest correctly, and through the principles of wujen. You'd think this origin would've set the company on a path to use the Kechibi code in a similar fashion, but I've been told the algorithm doesn't hold to the principles of feng shui, resulting in the corp paying handsomely to destroy any copy found.

- Wuxing is famous for its love of feng shui, which can be seen as carefully controlling everything to create a perfect balance. Compared to that, the KC probably sounds chaotic (and unstable). I suspect this "destruction on sight" order may come from a deep fear of the mess this unexplained piece of software could cause. In Wuxing's collective mindset, this risk outweighs any potential, short-term big win it could bring.
- Lei Kung

Wuxing's start in financials originated with the acquisition of Malaysian Independent Bank. But



recent stumbles have put their standing in jeopardy, which might only be preserved because of all the turmoil across the markets. The corporation needs to reset themselves and reassert their dominance in the financial field. Whether they attempt to go back to their algorithmic roots or focus on magic and luck has yet to be seen.

- What? No Brackhaven Investments?
- SeaTac Sweetie
- Hell no. Frag that guy.
- Bull

## DIS-ASTERS IN FRANCE

Going back to the basics of Z-OGB, we talked about the purpose of the bank as a weapon or source of stability. The recent conflict with the metaplanar threat from Dis isn't going to hit the news, but you can see its ripple in the current exchange rates on currencies and the general state of financial markets. And from what we saw of the stock exchanges, that impact was massive.

As the corporations fought for their agendas, they continued to borrow from Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank and the other major players. This drove up interest rates and caused massive fluctuations in the various corp scrip. The nuyen was held mostly stable, but only because of drastic action taken by the Court and Z-O. Now, normally the spending results in continued growth because those investments lead to new products or expanded markets. In this case, we know that much of those assets evaporated in battles around the globe.

While Z-O Gemeinschaftsbank didn't see a huge financial windfall, many of the other big financial companies had an opportunity, if they were smart enough to see ahead and capitalize on it. A few of the major players must have had some savants working for them, as they moved nuyen around between investments and are suddenly much wealthier, if only in the ledger.

- Savants? Or companies that have a copy of the Kechibi code? We've got a lot of examples where the code has influenced markets.
- Lei Kung
- The Kechibi code is the favorite bogeyman of business analysts. It's not changing the world. Please have some faith in the intelligence of metahumans. And if it was the code, why didn't it affect everyone?
- Kia

- I am not sure I have any faith in the intelligence of metahumans. Personally, I believe that those who've done well were the ones who had strong partnerships with AI.
- Icarus

Sure, the Corporate Court handed out some punishments to the companies that sided with the Disians, but it was nothing compared to the financial punishment handed down by the king of banks. MCT could weather the loss of a couple of subsidiaries, but when they find that the exchange rate between MCT corp scrip to nuyen of 1:1 suddenly goes to 10:1, your business starts grinding to a halt. It takes money to make money, and MCT wasn't the only one to see drastic shifts in their conversion.

During the Disian Shadow War, investments in advanced cybernetics were made by both Evo and Spinrad Global—and in both cases, the investment was amplified. During a normal development cycle, you'd see them experiment and then adjust based on results. Instead of walking the tree of research to find profitable branches, they invested simultaneously in all paths knowing that most of them would result in dead ends. This failed set of investments is typically written off as a loss, but with so much speculation, the monetary systems were put under stress.

- Companies will always try to make lemonade from lemons. We've seen that 'ware hit the streets, and while it's cheap, it isn't free.
- Am-Mut
- Military-grade weapons and vehicles also saw a similar investment. The only difference is that it was less about the research, and more just ramping up production. Maybe the corps will get lucky and convert those manufacturing capabilities into civilian equipment, but the retooling cost is still going to hit the bottom line.
- Thorn

We mentioned that some were able to come out ahead. We found a couple of patterns where they were able to successfully change up their investment strategies to weather the initial storm. One of the most common was shifting their assets from the local scrip, either national or corporate, into nuyen. That leap of faith wasn't an easy one to take since it took control out of your hands. Another strategy was to move investment into stable parts of a corporation's business or allied companies to provide a buffer from volatility in the currency market. The least common strategy was betting against what would be the big losers in the corporate shuffle. Betting against Aztechnology, Wuxing, or Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies ended up netting a few of them some major wins.



- › Now is the time to flip that bet the other way. Every million nuyen you move back into Mitsuhaman will net you ten million!
- › /dev/grrl

- › That's a bold bet. Tell me later if it pays off.
- › Baka Dabora

Another pattern showed specific runs against rival banks that had overextended themselves. We haven't seen a bank collapse because of it, but it's been close on more than one occasion. The Mizuho Group went after both Elkovski-Vang-Ookman Investments and Sydney Financial Solutions. It took a bit of work to track down the different runs and who was spending the nuyen, but enough of the shell companies pointed back toward investments from Chiba. Sydney Financial Solutions was only saved from collapse because of an influx in assets from Mitsuhaman Financial Group.

- › It only looks like it's coming from Chiba because someone else made the money trail lead that way. No one is that sloppy.
- › Mihoshi Oni
- › Metahumans are messy and make mistakes. It's solid enough information that it's got some legs.
- › DangerSensei

So who won big? One of them was the Mizuho Group from Renraku. The other big winner was Pacific Rim Bank & Financial Services. Their market speculation bordered on omniscience, with a near-perfect success rate for coming out ahead. Recent articles from various articles has made broad claims that one of Pac Rim's quants, Ramone Silas Buclod, was the architect of these moves, and this resulted in a substantial boost to their standing within the financial world.

- › Ramone wasn't working alone. He had some outside help from a think tank called Prospectus. Mr. Buclod made out well in the deal, but this small research and consulting firm was key to his success.
- › Lanyap
- › So who's that?
- › River Fish
- › I have a whole article for you later.
- › Lanyap

When it comes to Big Ten rankings, it doesn't feel like anything can really impact them. Lose a whole division, and that few trillion nuyen isn't even seen in the market cap. But these shifts within the systems that supply capital can cause drastic changes. Even the winners in the AAA-rate corps still took a blow to their bottom line. The only real difference is that they'll recover sooner than the losers will. And

it's a very real possibility that at least one of those losers will go the way of NeoNET.

- › So what we're saying is that there are some winners and losers because people made some bad bets. That's nothing new.
- › Icarus
- › No. You're absolutely right. But those shifts will create ripples that are felt in your neighborhoods and provide you opportunities for new jobs.
- › Rikki
- › Exactly. What I see are a bunch of banks that are currently overleveraged and are going to be risk-averse. You've also got some that have a major windfall, and they're going to push their luck to gain a little more influence. If you can get jobs with either of them, that's sending a little nuyen into your pocket just to play their games for them.
- › Orbital DK
- › Yes. Take some money from the financial slave drivers to make things worse for everyone else. And for that honor, you get shot at and possibly killed. Seems like a brilliant idea.
- › Old Crow
- › I don't know. Seems like a Tuesday.
- › Icarus
- › I actually think the fear of a domino effect, causing banks to collapse one after another, is strong. I suspect most runs are going to be about escaping such a fate rather than being the one toppling over the competition ...
- › Sim-Eon
- › The irony is, with the current market volatility, just the fear of such a domino effect is enough to create one.
- › Mr. Bonds

Finally, while the Corporate Court normally holds the Z-OGB tightly to its side, crushing it a little under its domination, recent upheavals within the CC have forced them to loosen their ties slightly. Too busy managing their own internal mess, they don't have the time, or the attention span, to babysit the bank. And I suspect the CC doesn't realize that affable, apathetic accountants can have the guts to make their own moves. Yet the ripple effect of corporate decisions and Corporate Court compliance following the Disian Shadow War, the CFD crisis, Ares' departure from the UCAS, and multiple other situations has continually caused disruptions in markets and finally given some ideas to the bank. Some disruption is good and healthy for growth because you can profit off someone's misfortune. But too many shifts in markets and positions result in a lot more work for less profit. The Gnomes of Zürich have had enough and are now taking actions.



- > Are you telling me there are gnomish illuminati in power?
- > Electric Blue
- > No. I can't believe I didn't reference it in the section on Z-OGB but the "Gnomes of Zürich" is a nickname for the board of directors for the bank. They hate being called that, so we should certainly do so as much as possible.
- > Mr. Bonds

## INVESTMENT SPECULATION

The complete control of corporations by the financial industry is a big part of why the Big Ten created both the Corporate Court and acquired Zürich-Orbital Gemeinschaftsbank. The smaller corporations know that this is a barrier to entry, and it is used as a tool to ensure they don't rise too high. This could be as simple as raising interest rates on loans that you're holding, or reduced rates on others. They may use that money for a hostile takeover or constrict access to other corporations. And what're you going to do about it?

The big money companies aren't going to cry about it. They're going to strike back. The long play is the game here. Making backroom deals with other companies, or even something more personal, between high-ranking executives for instance, to find solutions outside of the central banks. They may also want to find and use banks that have fewer ties to Z-OGB or pay in their normal currency—and especially when the currency exchange is more favorable at different times.

- > All of these are perfect reasons and timing to execute shadowruns. One member of a deal is always holding more risk than the other. This also involves trust between the two groups, which can be exploited on a run.
- > OrkCEO

The other method depends on short-term strategies that typically involve deniable assets. Stealing something of value or disrupting others is a classic way to swing the markets in your favor. You may have already been on runs where the thing you were after wasn't the real goal you were hired for. There's a good chance that it's market manipulation. It's hard to point at these types of jobs because of the traits of those runs. Let's see about giving you an example that matches something I've seen recently.

The job was simple. Herr Brackhaus has contracted a team to insert false records into a Kirilenko Financials host to make it look like one of the high-value customers has been laundering money through the financial institute and the Vory. It seems pretty straightforward, right?

But in this case, your Mr. Johnson doesn't actu-

ally work for Saeder-Krupp. Instead, they work for Kirilenko. That random target is a rival working for Spinrad Global? Nope. One of the board of directors' kids is the lover of the target. What you're doing is just creating leverage that Kirilenko can use to strong-arm a better favorable loan on behalf of Monobe. Each individual piece doesn't make any sense until you look at the whole of it.

- > That doesn't seem very convoluted.
- > Plan 9
- > I can't believe I am saying this ... but you're right, Plan 9. I wanted something that wouldn't take up a lot of space but could showcase the misdirection when your goal isn't the obvious one. I've seen ones with four or more layers of misdirection that result in multiple benefits all baked into a single run. Some of these directors of external assets are wizards when it comes to crafting jobs that get the most for their money.
- > Mr. Bonds

My suggestion is to keep an eye out specifically for runs meant to impact banks and financial institutions. Not because it's a worse job, but because they're an opportunity for you to take advantage of. We all know that Mr. Johnson's not really interested in making sure we can retire, but if you're smart, this is your chance to make that decision for yourself. Happy hunting.

- > You just said that it's hard to spot these types of runs and now we have to keep an eye out for them?
- > River Fish
- > Safest thing is to assume that you can make some smart investments before going on any run. Just make sure that you are running your deals through several agents to prevent a trail that leads back to you.
- > OrkCEO
- > I know that Mr. Bonds mentions that they aren't worse jobs, but sometimes they are. First off, they're not fools. The pay on these tends to be way lower since they are almost always staring at the bottom line for the run. Second, many of these companies come with some serious defenses. A direct hit against a financial corp is going to result in throwing down with on-site HTR in the best case, and at worst, you're looking at paramilitary. Or you could be going up against another runner team hired by a different Johnson who's after the same thing.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > They also have the most chance of Mr. Johnson flipping on you. Each member of your team is a loose thread that leads back to them. Even if they are just a patsy for some other third party, you're a risk to them and their lives. On about half the runs I've been on where Mr. Johnson betrays my squad, it's financial strikes. Just be careful out there.
- > DangerSensei





# TO THE VICTORS GO THE SPOILS

- In any war, there are winners and losers. In the Disian Shadow War, a number of corps managed to come out on top. Little coincidence that most of them were anti-Disian or eventually became that (sort of). And by now, we all know that any good will they may have gained in the shadows was quickly thrown away when the corps went right back to their old ways. Below is a rundown of those corps who came out on top, what they're doing, and what that could mean for the likes of us.
- Glitch

## RENRAKU

POSTED BY: SAM-R-EYE

Okay, let's do this. I've only been around for a short while, but I think it's painfully obvious that I'm former Renraku and there is zero love there. I wasn't a Red Samurai or anything like that. I was an analyst. What kind? The kind that crunches the analytics so groups like the Red Samurai can better

operate, and I'm gonna leave it at that. As such, I had a lot of access, which I haven't exactly given up.

There's no doubt someone else will top the corp rankings by the end of the next quarter. The betting odds in Vegas are heavily favoring Renraku taking over the top spot, and they're full-court pressing to make those bets a reality.

They weren't exactly paragons of virtue in the Disian cluster frag, but they knew how to come away a winner over and over. They've also got a ruthless streak a mile wide and took advantage of every weakness they saw in a rival corp. This included Mitsuhamma (now just MCT) at home in Japan. The kid gloves came off in the land of the rising sun, and Renraku appears to have switched over to Hardliners™.

They've got action to look at all over the globe, with no region really standing out. Instead, Renraku has been spreading their seeds around the world, and they are now reaping benefits from their plantings and from stealing other people's fields. Let me hit the highlights that'll affect the shadows the most.



## RISING SCIRE

I'm sure Seattleites are well aware of the construction around the North Admiral neighborhood and all the action and news that came out of the region since early '81, but anyone not native or new to the metroplex needs the hot take on this.

Back in January 2081, half a dozen Johnsons in Seattle started getting contracts for work around North Admiral. Jobs hit local shops with instructions to look like gangs were moving in. Colors and tagging were everywhere, along with AR tags and random violence. Shop owners were hit up seeking protection money. It was a genuine terror attack on one of the oldest areas of Seattle. Other jobs paralleled a lot of this work to slow Lone Star responses across the neighborhood. The neighborhood's security rating even dropped from the efforts.

After the "ganger" seeds were sewn, work switched over to some more direct violence, with fires as the main terror tactic and regular jobs calling for skilled arsonists or others who could make property damage look accidental. Lone Star and other specialized LEPs were getting delayed, and news stories covered the area as if it were a war zone.

Alongside this string of violence came runs to do data swaps to move insurance coverage or delete it entirely. Money trails behind the switched accounts led straight to Renraku, and while claims were getting denied and delayed, offers were being made to take the damaged property for a steal.

All through this, pressure jobs were contracted to lean on private owners to sell property at favorable rates or even to just sell at all. Runner teams were working like street muscle for the syndicates by scaring regular Joes and Janes into giving up homes and property that had been in their families for decades, and sometimes centuries.

Somehow it wasn't until November '81 that metroplex authorities and corporate rivals took notice, despite several very loud runs occurring in the interim. From late '81 until March '82 there was quite a bit of pushback, but objects in motion are hard to stop quickly. When the Disian Shadow War sparked off in '83, Renraku already had what they needed and were well underway with their plans.

- A lot of that pushback was spearheaded by Ares Seattle, a.k.a. Karen King. She petitioned her bosses several times, but they were still too concerned with the move to Atlanta. So, King being King, she simply took matters in hand. Who knows what would have happened if the Shadow War hadn't started.
- Nightfire

Through deals both dirty and legit, they gained ownership of all the property north of Admiral Way. In the same vein, they had already garnered the needed permits and political clout to set construction of their new SCIRE.

In August 2082, the whole area was cleared out. Some squatters remained, but all the homes and businesses in the area were closed and condemned. As Renraku prepared for demolition and construction, they garnered some serious cash from a deal with the urban brawl leagues to host a series of matches in the zone. The matches were a rare opportunity for teams to ignore any kind of collateral damage regulations. It was a top-rated spectacle, and it raked in major nuyen for both the leagues and Renraku.

- While these matches were going on, runners were slipping into the area to scour and pillage paydata and valuables left behind by departing corps and citizens. Some jobs were contracted by the owners, who had to rush out too fast, while others were hostile parties seeking some leverage or just entrepreneurial runners looking for some nuyen without the hassle of a Mr. Johnson. Gigs were abundant and the lack of people and security made them minimally deadly, though they weren't milk runs by any means because locating a good target was a challenge in and of itself.
- Fianchetto
- A few fixers specialized in gigs here. Tommy Dobbs, Lil' Tucksy, Candyman, Xander Cross, and Figjam all pulled together teams during this time to make some healthy nuyen. Now, all of them except Tommy are working gigs to keep tabs on Renraku construction, top to bottom. Dobbs is out of the game because ... well, he's dead. Renraku made an example of him after he had the wrong exec's daughter on the delivery list for a local syndicate.
- 2XL

Anyone who has set eyes on the area has questions about the sanity of Renraku. The basic footprint is huge—it's an equilateral triangle close to two kilometers on each side that juts out over the water of the Sound and will apparently include some sort of dock or aquatic section when it's done. Construction is already progressing quickly, using techniques developed by Saeder-Krupp in the implementation of the Boston quarantine zone, while adding several of their own improvements. Renraku has already successfully demolished two-thirds of the structures on the land and repurposed the materials. Scores of these massive excavation and reconstruction machines (SK's model is the *Arbeiter*) dot the area alongside thousands of trucks ready to haul off their next collection of sorted materials. These materials are already being repurposed for construction or disposal as they get moved from one machine to another.

- While hot runs happened during the brawl season, jobs are still going on to hit these material excavators. Besides just the buildings and trees, the excavators are digging down. All of them appear to be trimming into at least ten meters of



soil, with some dropping digging spikes to pull up materials a hundred meters deep for supports and construction shafts for subterranean levels. The details of all that don't matter. What matters is the fact that Johnsons are paying for the acquisition of specific items from the sorting process. One type of object in particular stands out: bones. Literal skeletons are being unearthed within the area, and whether it's the party that buried them or someone looking for the skeletons in someone else's closet, the work is good. With the excavators sorting out most bonelike materials into a single trailer, it narrows the search but then becomes a needle in a haystack or grabbing a whole lotta bones for Mr. Johnson.

► Sounder

## MITSUHAMA RENRAKU

The classic strikethrough rebranding. After the initial chaos cleared, Renraku started publicly purchasing failed or failing MCT properties and buildings. Externally, most didn't require much more than a sign change, but internally Renraku completely gutted the staff and transferred in their own people while hiring on some new. The move left some serious scars and a lot of disgruntled employees. Most of all, it left a lot of displaced MCT citizens.

The purchase agreements clearly indicated that no citizenship transfers would be granted and all MCT citizens would retain their MCT status but were now unemployed—a strange contradiction for a group who grew up equating employment to citizenship. Those with rarer skills have been able to find space elsewhere in the MCT fold or they've been hired and taken in by other corps, especially corps that are less concerned about Disian ties and more concerned about boosting their bottom line.

Among the others, it's survival at all costs. This certainly includes turning to the shadows, but cold shoulders abound, especially when a past at MCT is discovered. Some have used old ties to find their way into organized crime, usually the yakuza, but the various Mafia families aren't opposed to expendable resources. A large portion have banded together into a pseudo gang. Mostly connected by the Matrix, they've come together looking for ways to unite and support each other.

Oh, yeah, and they're also looking for ways to get revenge against Renraku.

Don't assume the Big R is taking this lightly. They know the trouble that can be caused by knowledgeable insiders. They also know their value. Selecting several amenable candidates, Renraku has hired spies within the former MCT ranks. At first their efforts were just about halting troublemakers, but after several of these new hires brought up possible leads on projects and paydata that MCT left behind, Renraku switched gears.

As an added bonus, the disgruntled MCT cast-offs aren't limited to Renraku acquisitions. They're coming from subsidiaries acquired by all the oth-





er megas. They can access the insider stuff fairly easily, but they need deniable assets for hitting the other corps—and that means work for those of us in the shadows!

- › The shadows in Seattle, St. Louis, and Tokyo have all been flooded with former MCT employees who have a beef with not just Renraku but everyone else. They all still live with the delusion of MCT's rise to the top being all about hard work and outsmarting the competition, and most either deny or are clueless as to what a Disian is (believe them if you will). The important point is they usually don't join other teams but instead form their own, a runner team with a shared history and ideology. Common tactics and morals. They make good teams, and fixers and Johnsons are seeing this. Those who care more about success and money than resentment are choosing these teams first.
- › Fianchetto
- › Don't forget the other positions these displaced citizens are taking in the shadows, like fixers, arms brokers, and intel specialists.
- › Icarus
- › All of whom hate Renraku and the other corps. I'll take the enemy of my enemy as an ally.
- › Stone

## RISING SUN RUMBLINGS

For years, there's been a quiet but honorable agreement between the three Japanese megacorps to keep open corporate warfare off their home soil. Even during Mitsuhamas's rise to the top, they honored this agreement. Sure, all of them did the occasional bit of shadowy work at home, but they kept it quiet and focused. Now, Renraku is pushing for growth at home in Japan. They've acquired an immense amount of former MCT holdings (including in Japan), and they're no longer playing nice on their home turf. This is attracting the ire of not just Shiawase, but two big AAs that are looking to move into a power spot at home, and they could see Renraku's actions as a sign that this honorable agreement is no longer valid.

The shadows of Japan are heating up, and it's getting messy. Runs are bringing violence to the streets, and the once-honorable shadows of Japan are spiraling into depravity. Once, only the gangs were willing to sow chaos on the streets, but now corporate-sponsored jobs are looking to send a message, with Renraku at the heart of it all. Pushing for change in the homeland, they are quietly supportive of all these unscrupulous activities. Even news outlets owned by Renraku have abundant editorials on how this new surge of violence is a direct result of decades of social repression and so-called honorable behavior. They belittle the traditionalists and espouse a new era of expan-

sion without the "shackles of expected honor that are so often abused by our enemies and seen as a weakness."

Once this ideology takes hold at home, expect it to expand and spread across the globe.

- › A big impact here will be Renraku's feared Red Samurai. Not that spec-ops samurai ever followed a truly honorable code, but they showed more restraint than most of the other top-tier operators. That's likely to disappear, and there may be some form of internal schism within the Red Samurai because of it. For us, this is an opportunity to abuse that drama in our favor.
- › Clockwork
- › Just to point out, don't try to use this schism to split a team. While they may disagree on some philosophical point, they still agree on who the enemy is and will always stand together over bickering about honor.
- › Stone
- › It's not just fighting in the shadows. There are rumors that Shiawase, acting as proxy for the Imperial Japanese Throne, is attempting to negotiate with Renraku for something big. We'll post more once we confirm a few things.
- › Corporate Raiders

## INSIDER TRADING

I got an interesting line on some potential pay-data I'd like to see utilized. Samson Mishimi was the director of executive security at Renraku's HQ in Japan, but he apparently has an eye on a higher place in the corp. Through his position, he's regularly been privy to some extremely sensitive conversations. During one such discussion, he learned about the punishment being handed down to Toshiro Mitsuhamas for his namesake corporation's part in the Disian invasion. He got wind of the pending sell-off and took advantage of the knowledge, despite the agreement between the top executives at Renraku and Shiawase about abusing the insider information around Toshiro's shame.

He used his ill-gotten information in a series of maneuvers—opening with a quick sale of stock he held in both Renraku and rival MCT to gain some liquidity while both stocks were high.

Knowing the timing of Toshiro's moves, Mishimi flooded the markets with low-buy orders on stock for a swath of MCT subsidiaries. As the opening bell saw stock prices across the MCT family plummet, Mishimi picked up substantial stock chunks in several corps. While several lost more value, his next goal was still achieved when MCT started selling off subsidiaries as they collapsed, and Mishimi started picking them up through a holding company.

His stock holdings provided him with influence over quite a few former MCT assets that went into the hands of other AA and AAA corps. So, while



he works for Renraku, he's got a vested interest in the success of several of their rivals. But that's not the best payday.

Knowing sales were imminent, Mishimi had Toshiro inconspicuously followed, gaining intel on most of the people he met with to sell his ownership shares in MCT. Using a collection of shell and holding companies, he waited until after sales were made and proceeded to buy up Toshiro's former shares of MCT. If my intel is correct, and it usually is, he has a solid 20 percent stake in the fallen behemoth.

This isn't just a diversified portfolio; this is some massive conflict-of-interests-type stuff. Not to mention the fact that he defied not only the executives at his own corporation, but Shiawase corp and the Empress as well.

As I started this with a "was" on his position within the company, I should mention he is now the director of executive security for Renraku Africa, based in an office in Cairo.

Now let's see what we can do with this!

- ▶ Well, Renraku's internal forces may just push for him to leave the company and go work for MCT. It's like a self-extraction but not a successful one.
- ▶ Mika
- ▶ Remember those early lines. He wants to move up in Renraku. He doesn't want internal forces pushing him out. He has to figure out some move that gets him real internal clout before his shady dealings blow up in his face.
- ▶ 2XL
- ▶ So what we have here is blackmail material on Renraku's director of executive security! Who wants to see what contracts are over on the Hidden Blade?
- ▶ Slamm-O!
- ▶ There has to be more we're not seeing. He's hosed if this leaks.
- ▶ 2XL
- ▶ Hosed? Or able to influence a rival from the inside as long as external forces don't catch on?
- ▶ Netcat
- ▶ Could be something there. Samson has some nuyen, but even if he sold, he'd be nowhere near the ballpark of getting Toshiro's 20 percent. He had to have some other help.
- ▶ Icarus
- ▶ WHAT?! Renraku could have done some kind of dirty backstabbing just to gain even more control over another AAA mega with a lot of influence in the Corporate Court? Never!
- ▶ Kane
- ▶ Seriously. Ugh. Stay focused. We could have another corporate crossover like we did when Dunkie dropped those shares on

Lanier. If Samson moves to MCT and then influences them to be obtained by Renraku, we have quite the sizable beast, another court seat, and a pair of scary fraggers rolled into one.

▶ Bull

## GROWTH BY FORCE

Thus far, Saeder-Krupp got to the top by being dynamic and expansive while dominating several key fields. Mitsuhamma got to the top by internally undermining their opposition via their Disian collaborators and buying up anything and everything that came their way. Renraku has taken a different road than both. Their rise to the top is filled with both treachery and brutality. As the apparent top corporate dog (at least for the time being), they literally forced their way into the number-one spot by taking assets damaged during the Disian Shadow War, streamlining them for profitability, and using those profits to buy up larger, more stable assets and other corps. While a lot of those assets came from a collapsing MCT, they also snatched up a few smaller A and AA companies, along with scads of unrated businesses that had gained momentum while the bigger corps were distracted by the war.

I'm talking about this here because they're not done, and they're still looking for runners with the grace and style of a charging rhino to keep hitting their target corps hard. They want runners who like the loud options and who aren't afraid of some flashy collateral damage to make sure the screamsheets have the right headlines. Did I mention this work is regularly in Japan? Yup. A place where deals are made in silence and shadow operations have been kept genuinely in the shadows for decades. It's not the only arena, but it's a big one.

Renraku is pressing hard on their fellow Jap-anacorps, looking to shake up the status quo at home while they have the advantage. The fall of MCT has all the big names in Japan scrambling for their pieces, and whether it's something Renraku wants or not, they're playing the corporate game. Opposition on their level, like Shiawase and Monobe, is being pressured by data leaks and counter-runs on their prospects. Those under their tier, like Sony and Yakashima, are getting more direct action. Runs are hitting their facilities and interrupting their daily operations.

If their willingness to be loud in Japan—historically a land of quiet culture—is an indication of anything, it's that they're going to be even more direct and violent everywhere else in the world. This won't look like teams of Red Samurai storming corporate offices or anything, but it very well could be something like a runner team hired to make a drek-ton of noise and then "accidentally" leave a trail pointing at MCT or Horizon. Depending on the region, Renraku will be hitting the biggest competition in the area to soften the local play-



ing field—even if it comes to stomping around on someone else’s home turf. Look for work against OmniStar and Ares in Atlanta, Horizon in SoCal, Wuxing across East Asia, Novatech in St. Louis, and even S-K on German soil. About the only corp they don’t seem concerned with terrorizing on their home front is Aztechnology at home in Aztlan; probably because the pair are still practically synonyms. These are great places for runners with a loud streak to make some nuyen.

- Nuyen you’re going to need in order to hide if you get too flashy. The shadows are still the shadows, after all.
- Thorn
- Reach out to Poco Perro Loco in Iguala, south of Tenochtitlán, if you want work against Aztechnology (backed by Renraku). The money trail is a little convoluted but traceable with some work. The main reason you can pull off the trace is you’ll know where to look when you pay attention to the targets. The work hits corps with connections to Aztechnology in the Pacific, helping Renraku gain ground there while hurting Aztechnology’s position in the PPG.
- Traveler Jones

## SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET

Everyone has them, but Renraku has more closets than most. As it stands now, they’re also full of themselves. They’re arrogant and think they’re the masters of the corporate world. The problem is, during the shadow war, they crossed the line several times and committed what amounts to war crimes. Not a good look, but in their mind, the ends justify the means, and they won. It also doesn’t hurt that Renraku’s star is ascending, and the corp gets a big say in making the rules now.

But that doesn’t make them impervious or immune to punishment. We, the shadowrunners of the world, need to expose their tactics and dirty dealings during the shadow war. They aren’t innocent. We need to hit the data storage facilities in Chiba to pull intel from their backups. We need to dig up dirt, point fingers, and open closets.

Renraku isn’t making any of it easy, either. They’re burying the truth deep. Scrubbing data-stores is just the start. Expect them to start scrubbing personnel and their records just to keep their hands clean. No amount of scrubbing will ever clear away that much blood, but if you cover it up with even more blood it’s hard to tell whose is whose.

## UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

For good or ill, a lot of smaller corps went from one Japanacorp to another. I’m not covering everything here, but I do want to highlight a couple

of moves that might impact the shadows, Fairlight and Apep Consortium in particular.

First, Fairlight, which has had its fair share of different owners. The brand holds a ton of image value, but cyberdecks aren’t an industry with massive profits. The easiest way to make them more profitable is to make production cheaper by using standard boards, chips, and designs. Upgrades are simply a chip swap, but image is everything for some folks. Anyone with an image to maintain is not going to strut around with a Metalink Matrix Machine, even if the interior is upgraded to the gills and could hack circles around any Fairlight Excalibur. On the other hand, most runners are proud to be able to cobble together the best equipment and don’t care what shell they put on it. Performance is preferred over pretty.

What Renraku owning Fairlight means is that they can create a line of models that are basically the same internals, with a different brand’s logo on the outside, and then charge accordingly. But runners could look for access to Excalibur-grade processors and just plug them into their Sensei. Jobs stealing parts from Renraku are going to pick up, and runners need to know what they have in their hands. Prices aren’t going to change in the retail arena, but black and grey markets could help a decker get an edge without needing to sell organs or spend days mining paydata to afford deck upgrades.

With the acquisition of Fairlight and some of these internal development moves going on, look for Renraku to target other brand-based Matrix corps. Small companies can certainly operate and make a tiny profit dealing in deck production with the market as hot as it is. If they’re making a popular model and Renraku can grab them and add that to their lineup, they get the sales based on brand loyalty while moving the device over to a production arena that works better for them.

- I know a lot of deckers who don’t even keep their deck in the original shell but instead work the components into other pieces of equipment for stealth purposes. Point is, Renraku’s streamlined production will benefit them, as they don’t need to restructure the whole rig for an upgrade, and instead just swap a chip or board.
- Glitch
- It also means Renraku security deckers can be running anything inside those generic boxes they carry around, so be wary.
- Bull
- Remember, they’re still a megacorp, and while they’ll protect their valuables by whatever means necessary, they aren’t going to hand out high-end equipment to their day-to-day data scourers. Too big a risk of a black market sell-off, or having it stolen by a smart runner.
- Slamm-O!



Now, let's talk Apep. Renraku has a solid foundation of businesses and operations in Africa. They aren't like some megacorporate rivals who want to make Africa home; instead, they're more in the school of strip-mining the place for resources. Adding Apep to their African holdings boosts their access in a number of areas, but it also puts them into competition with a trio of others (Evo, Erika, and Spinrad Global) that are looking to build a home base out of Africa. This means shadow business and nuyen coming our way, but it also means we should keep an eye on who we're really working for.

Renraku's jobs focus mainly on land and resource expansion. The work can entail softening a target for purchase or damaging the value. Different strokes work for different folks.

The target-softening hits usually target key personnel, or those in close proximity or relations to those key personnel. Keeping the efforts neat and precise aren't usually a prerequisite. A little collateral damage usually helps the story make the news and screamsheet circuit, which then makes its way into the subconscious of others who may have had a similar plan—in hopes of not just removing a problem, but also getting paid more with intel.

In Africa, direct land grabs often involve softening a target for purchase, as property value doesn't fluctuate much when it comes to rural spots. Operations in more developed locations can be more sinister as efforts are made to cut or diminish resources, which out in the wilds can be a death sentence. Renraku Africa does not play nice. They know how dangerous Africa can be and how easy it is to set someone up for death.

- Renraku Africa is all about resources here. They aren't trying to sell their corporate philosophy, they aren't trying to move over an HQ, and they sure as drek aren't trying to make Africa more civilized.
- Icarus

## RED(UCED) SAMURAI

The Disian war hurt the Red Samurai. They fought boldly and victoriously over and over but the cost was high, on both bodies and minds. For an elite fighting force, the death of a single soldier is both a loss in the moment and a long-term loss as replacing a Red Samurai is no easy thing. Many seek the status, but very few are worthy.

For those of us in the shadows, this means were less likley to encounter Red Samurai as security at a black site, or as backup for local security forces. From everything I've gathered, the Red Samurai are restructuring and repositioning as they work to regrow their numbers. Their focus appears to be top executive security and fast response teams. Red Samurai site security assignments are being handed over to larger, less specialized teams.

Renraku is currently offering invitations to prospects, accepting a few rare requests, and even looking to the shadows for potential replacements (yeah, that shocked me too). No one is guaranteed a spot, and some invitations aren't as cut-and-dried as they seem. Some of the runners getting asked are not Red Samurai material—they just don't have the discipline. They do have skills, though, and they offer a strong sense of competition for their fellow prospects. The interesting thing is, while the others have to pay their own way (though some are still employees being paid), the runners are all getting paid. I've heard between 500 and 2000 nuyen a day for as long as they make it in the 30-day prospect program. After that, individuals who qualify are quietly slipped off to start their Red Samurai training and indoctrination.

Until they get their numbers back up, this is good news for us.

- I actually did one of the first 30-day prospect programs. I could tell early on this wasn't the usual training or screening process, but I stuck it out, despite knowing I wasn't getting selected at the end. I can tell you a lot more of the process is mental than physical. Sure, they start with those who can hold their own in a scuffle, but beyond that they take every different sort and pile them together. You all know I've got horns, and I was definitely there to make sure no one got through who had serious prejudices. Bias is fine, but any inability to work together with a troll in the squad was not happening. Workouts were brutal and quickly followed by stamina exercises, both mental and physical. All in all, it was pretty brutal, but I have another offer sitting in my inbox—and I'm not opposed to another month of paid strength training and not getting shot at with live ammunition.
- 2XL
- After all the atrocities these drekbags committed during the war, I'd prefer to watch them crumble than to boost their numbers. I hear you on the easy money, XL, but everyone who makes it into this warrior cult is a grade-A sociopath. Nothing matters but the mission. I personally saw them open fire on an occupied daycare in Snohomish just because a chimera had smashed through a window while fleeing from them. This was in broad daylight with little kids playing just outside. Fragging despicable.
- Balladeer
- I've heard plenty of those stories to know they're true, but Renraku knows it's true as well. They aren't going to stop them. Especially now. They really don't care about their image. Just their title and power.
- Thorn
- Hey, Balladeer. Any chance those Red Sams were blasting up a KidKare in Snoho? And two of them died from a high-velocity dose of depleted-uranium poisoning before scampering off after the chimera they didn't even scratch, all while shooting up a daycare?
- Ire



- > I can neither confirm nor deny ... ah, frag it. I smoked two of those fraggers from a klick off. Had to explain it to the team I was working with afterward, but they're good chummers and actually wanted to go run down the rest of the samurai.
- > Balladeer
- > Why didn't you shoot the chimera?
- > Ire
- > I was 75 percent sure I knew her, and she worked with Grey Cell. Wasn't taking the risk of shooting an ally, and I don't shoot moving targets with a dirty background. I could very well have hit a kid from my angle, had I missed.
- > Balladeer
- > Are we saying that even during the war on the Disians, Renraku was attacking their own team?
- > Mika
- > Yes. They never wanted to be part of the team anyway, and to them, all chimeras are bad—nothing but trophies to pad their so-called honor. SOP for the friendly Red Samurai.
- > Liberator

## PAYING THE PIPER

Renraku did a lot to help win the DSW, but they did it dirty, and while no one is about to punish them openly for war crimes in a war that no one wants to admit happened, it leaves the shadows to seek remuneration and revenge. I'm not saying let's all unite and bring them down, I'm just saying it's time to remember who they really are and what they really stand for. They aren't, and never were, our allies. They were an alliance of convenience and necessity, and they fought it their own way. A way that got them to the top of the corporate heap, using us as just another stepping stone.

Now, we need to chip away at those stones and make some nuyen while we do it. I've talked to several fixers around the globe who are taking a special interest in jobs that hurt Renraku. If you're interested in this type of work, get into the city and do a face-to-face with the proprietor of the bars I'm naming with each fixer. Their names are included, and the locals will hook you up <link>.

## RENRAKU RESISTANCE

In **Atlanta**, seek out **Dalton** at **The Ring**. **Penny** is a brunette elf woman in her twenties who tends bar most nights.

In **Barcelona**, look for **Reina** at **Loco Perro**. **Guillermo** is her front man, a charming ork with dazzling green eyes and a silver cap on one of his tusks.

When in **Boston**, you can (still) find **Boom** at **Avalon**. **Celia** is the bar manager but she's usually tending the bar. Look for a slender troll with silvering hair and a soft smile.

In **Butte**, look for **Pace** at **The Bus Stop**. The bar's a little cheesy, but you can find **Hank** at the door checking IDs and issuing "bus passes."

**Cairo** has **Ibis** at **Crown & Cork**, but you'll need to get through **Adel**, her right-hand woman. She's a lanky dwarf with coal-black hair who's usually working tables and chatting up the guests.

Down in **Cape Town**, you can find **Biltong** around the **Hazy Storm**. Talk to **Agenle**, a wakyambi elf who slings drinks. Order a hazy storm for yourself if you want to get on his good side.

Renraku's hometown of **Chiba** has three good connections for work. You can find **Fugu** at **Enkai Tea House** by talking to **Lena**, the house manager. **Sakura** hangs around **American Dive**, and you can ask for **Cody**, he's the only Anglo ork in a cowboy hat in the place. You also have **Okuri** at **Hinoki House**. **Hanzo** is the manager of the bunraku parlor and is around pretty much all the time.

If you're stuck in **Chicago**, you can reach out to **Osiris** at **Link's**. It's a dive bar with a metaled-up meathead named **Bulldog** behind the bar. He also acts as the bouncer when anyone is dumb enough to start trouble.

For work in **Dallas/Ft. Worth**, find **Colt** at **Red's Rodeo**, a mix of rodeo and saloon all in one big, smelly building. His main squeeze, **Mel**, is a handler there and can point you in the right direction.

In **Hong Kong**, find **Ashi**. Visit **The Copper Gate** and ask for **Zed**. They'll ask if you mean Zee, and you say no. Zed is a red-headed elf with a rough Scottish brogue.

When in **Kyoto**, look for **Romeo** at the **Loveshack**. The main bouncer is a flamboyant troll named **B-52**. He can help you find the right Romeo.

Working in **London**, you want **Cooper**. He's usually hanging at **Barrel One**. **Staver** is the main bartender and a solid ork to know. He'll connect you to Cooper.

For good gigs in **Los Angeles**, find **Starlet** at **Eve's on Eighth**. It's a brothel and you can get some time with **Felicity** to gain access to Starlet.

Work like this in **Montreal** comes from **Le Fluor** at **Apertifs**. **Kit** is the sommelier, so check in on a good bottle of wine to get a chance to kick Renraku in the shins.

For **Moscow** jobs, hit up **Danya** at **Skolni's**. The vodka ice bar is a really cool place (I couldn't resist). Ask for **Smirnoff** at the bar and they'll know why you're there.

In **New York**, get jobs from **Broadway** at **Nick's After Dark**, a dark comedy club. You get to her by heckling **Nick** when he's announcing on stage, and he'll find you while the performers are on.

When in **Seattle**, you can check in Redmond for **Cypher** at **Under Construction**. Ask for **Phoenix** at the bar and you'll be directed to a rather sulky elf who likes to talk about custom firearms and tall tales. You can also head to Ft. Lewis and look for **Delilah** at **Delilah's**. To help confuse you even more, ask for **Delia** at the door, and they'll direct you to where at the bar to sit.

In and around **St. Louis**, you can connect with **Two Ton Tony** at **Under the Arch**. **Ellie** is supposedly his daughter, so ask to be seated in her section of the restaurant, then order a Two Ton sundae as a starter. You get some delicious ice cream and a line to Tony.

**Tokyo** has work too. Talk to **Tenchi** at **Tipsy Turtle**. **Tonya** is the turtle feeder, and she'll make the connection for you.



# SHIAWASE

POSTED BY: BULL

Not who you expected, huh? Normally we farm out Shiawase to someone else, but since they've been so active in Seattle of late—and that's where I currently hole up—it made sense for me to take a personal turn at it. Glad I did as we'll see later; things have gotten a bit “interesting” around here.

- > Heeyyyy ... Glitch was tapped for Ares, you got Shiawase, how come I'm the only mod who didn't get an assignment? I can do research too, honest!
- > Slamm-O!
- > You had the same chance to step up as any of us, Fred. Your failure to do so isn't our fault.
- > Glitch
- > ... OW ...
- > Slamm-O!
- > Oh, sweetie, don't get pouty like that. You might have lost your edge as a runner, but you're a good dad!
- > Netcat
- > Thanks. I think ...
- > Slamm-O!

Before we get local, we gotta get historical. Shiawase's one of the founders of the Corporate Court and the oldest of schools. Some people can't tell the Japanacorps apart, but that's largely due to Shiawase setting the tone for everyone to follow. Why do corp types wear black suits? Because Shiawase execs do. Why do corporate execs drive Nightskies? Because Shiawase execs do. Why is Japanese the international language of business? Because that's what Shiawase speaks. Frag, the nuyen itself is based on the value of Shiawase's internal currency on a one-to-one basis. They're the founding force behind the Japanacorp model, and all the rest are measured by how they differ from the “norm” that is Shiawase. That kind of establishment is a bigger flex than most people realize. They just follow in Shiawase's footsteps and think that it's normal when, in fact, it was designed from the ground up.

- > Corporate samurai, exchanging business cards, execs with headware memory and datajacks, everything we think of as “how a corporate exec should be” is because that's how Shiawase does it and everyone else followed their lead. They've rarely been the biggest or most valuable corporation—even in the JIS, let alone worldwide—but their reach is stunning when you sit back and really look at it.
- > Icarus

- > More corporations would do well to follow the Shiawase method.
- > Baka Dabora

With Shiawase's origins in mind, it's important to see—back when I started—there were only eight AAA megacorps, the Big Eight; Ares, Aztechnology, Saeder-Krupp, and five, count 'em five, Japanacorps: Fuchi, Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies, Renraku, Shiawase, and Yamatetsu. The Japanacorps were the kings of the world, and no small part of that was thanks to Shiawase's long-term planning and subtle influence of the Corporate Court. They made the nuyen the world's reserve currency, they established the Court itself, their legal arm got nation after nation to bend the knee to corporate law, and Shiawase was quietly pulling strings to keep the peace, always moving to keep the Japanacorps on the victorious side of any court vote. Fuchi was a mixed bag, thanks to American, Richard Villiers, owning a third of the corp; but the big three, Shiawase, Renraku, and MCT, were sometimes known as the “three brothers,” with Shiawase the oldest, MCT the youngest, and Renraku between them, keeping the peace. Yamatetsu was the “sister” that was a tag-along, put in power over the larger and more powerful Monobe and Yakashima as they were more easily influenced.

- > No way. How could one group form up like that? The big guys fight turf battles all the time!
- > Riot
- > The Court often talks about competition and the strength of capitalism, but in truth they're more feudal, wanting to lord over their private domains and face no competition. The old neo-anarchists were capitalists who wanted to destroy that system to let the market be free. It didn't end well for them.
- > Glitch

Everything was fine for decades until it all went sideways. Renraku had become one of the biggest corps in the world, passing Fuchi itself, featuring one massive tech advance after another, thanks to Deus, and they'd begun to throw their weight around. Friends were lost, enemies gained, and fortunes gathered into one place—Renraku's coffers. During this time, infighting at Fuchi lead to the unthinkable: a megacorp's death. The European parts were ceded to Shiawase, the Asian to Renraku, and the North American parts staying in Villiers' hands, where he'd use it as a base to build his own new corp, Novatech. During all this chaos, Yamatetsu, the overlooked sister of the three brothers, found a suitor in Russia and moved, transforming (or maybe evolving) into Evo, thanks to the help of Buttercup the free spirit and the chaos caused by the Ring of Fire erupting acting as cover to relocate out of Japan almost entirely. The Second Crash saw Renraku nearly collapse as their incred-



ible advances were all lost with Deus' death, Novatech's birth was corrupted, and new corps rose from the ashes. Where once there was a Big Eight, we had something new ... the Big Ten.

- > "Death."
- > Puck
- > Skipping a bit there, eh Bull?
- > Icarus
- > Simply covering the basics. Anyone interested can check out the older corporate downloads.
- > Bull

The Big Ten featured Ares, Aztechnology, MCT, Renraku, Saeder-Krupp, and Shiawase as before, but they were joined by Cross Applied Technologies, Novatech, and Wuxing, while Yamatetsu rebranded itself as Evo. This reduced the Japanacops from a majority five of eight, to a minority of just three of ten. The others, especially Ares, Aztechnology, and S-K, took the opportunity to take many shots back at their former smug superiors, with Yamatetsu-née-Evo usually on the side of the non-Japanacops, a great betrayal that the Japanacops are still bitter about. Fast forward some, and Cross died, replaced by Horizon, while Evo fully embraced its new identity. Even Renraku began showing less Japanese influence. For those who didn't know, they started as an Eastern European small-arms company that bought out a Japanacorp to break into the Japanese market, rebranding itself so well that most think of them as a native son despite being *gaijin* at their root. As they became the dominant corp in the Southern Hemisphere, especially across Africa, the Japanacorp bloc held a truce after Halley's Comet blew the Ring of Fire up—one that still holds today, more or less—as the Yamato Damashi. The agreement is quite simple; while they might struggle against one another inside Japan, they must show a unified front when outside the islands. MCT's recent activities caused this to shatter, and now we're not sure if something similar will rise from the rubble.

- > As promised, and more about this later, Shiawase is quietly pulling strings to form the alliance once more. They were instrumental in MCT not being erased (which has to stick in MCT's craw) and they've been angling to get Monobe and Yakashima, which are both larger than half the existing AAA-rated corps, that third "A" they have so long deserved. Good luck with that, by the way.
- > Corporate Raiders

All that is to say that there wouldn't be a Corporate Court without Shiawase, and that when they decide to call in favors, they have a lot of favors to call in. Not enough to make the court dance to

their tune every time, but it's safe to say that they have the DJ on speed dial.

This is why MCT still exists, as far as I can tell. You'd think that Shiawase would have been first in line to push that knife deeper into their heart when the whole "Dis thing" broke, since they'd had a hate-fest rivalry with Shiawase for at least two decades, and enjoyed lording their status as the number-one corp in the world over "big" brother Shiawase, but while any Shiawase executive will tell you that, yeah, they enjoyed watching Little Brother fail, they were only willing to watch him fall so far; he's still family, after all.

- > The erasure of the Mitsuhamas name and legacy from MCT hit Shiawase Tadashi like a brick. He might not have liked Tiger, but he respected him, and they were peers in a way that no other megacorp CEO was. They **got** one another and were often seen talking quietly at Corporate Court events, even while sending shadowrunners after each another's assets. It was less a game, and more that they each knew that there were only a handful of people on Earth who truly understood matters as an AAA-rated CEO and corporate royalty. Years ago, Tadashi received a gift from Tiger, a small glass paperweight that Taiga had left him. He keeps it on his own desk now.
- > Kia
- > After having it scanned for devices for weeks, one would hope.
- > Hard Exit
- > It's hard to explain Japanese rivalries. They tend to drive one another upward, to strive harder, to do better, just to get ahead of one another. Tiger and Tadashi had that in common, and losing that element put out some of Tadashi's fire. He's not worried about it happening to himself, so much as he's sad he lost, well, not a friend, but a kindred spirit, if that makes sense.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Look at you over there, being all cultured and drek. When did **that** start?
- > Clockwork
- > \*raises middle finger\* That better?
- > Turbo Bunny

The other corps aren't thrilled with the idea of more Japanacops on the court, but to be honest, they're not really afraid of it, either. It's been thirty years since the Japanacorp dominance was a *thing*, and we've had a Crash, the Ring of Fire explosion, bugs, headcases, and a dozen more things that have gone haywire since then. It's just not seen as a threat anymore, especially with MCT hanging on by fingertips and Renraku being more of a "world corp" than a Japanese one. There's even talk of removing MCT's seat and giving it to someone else, Golden Ticket be damned, but that seems to be a bridge too far yet and there's been no movement on that idea.



- › In public.
- › Icarus

- › In public.
- › Bull

So, enough of my ranting about the past, let's talk about the present. The best place to start is the recent addition of Pentacle Press and Pentacle Distributing Inc. to the Shiawase family. These are major assets bought from MCT in a move to provide funding that could be used to pay off the enormous fine the CC handed down to MCT. Shiawase paid near market price for them, rather than the fire sale price most corps demanded, and even left open the option for MCT to buy them back down the line when they have their legs back under them. In essence, Shiawase showed up as a White Knight, keeping the corp from going belly-up via the influx of cash and letting them know that the assets they took will be well taken care of and returned eventually. Sure, they'll enjoy profits between now and then, but at the end of the day, it was a massive windfall that kept the former number one afloat.

"So, Bull," I hear you ask, "how does Shiawase benefit?" Both more than you'd think and less than you'd imagine. These aren't the magical research arms of MCT, for instance, or the massive industrial production of magical goods and arms. Rather, they're the storehouse of knowledge—the repository of all the magical research, known spell formulas, speculative spiritual summoning texts, and so on. As we say on the streets, "Information is the only real currency left," and Shiawase just got two giant bags *filled* with information. Johnny was the magician in our duo, and I could never wrap my head around the mojo, but I know that the formulas are worth a fortune—and that Shiawase went from an average megacorp level of magical knowledge to being the largest publisher of magical knowledge virtually overnight due to this.

- › From what I'm told, it was Empress Hitomi herself who insisted on this. I think the theory was that they'd take MCT's magical resources in order to prevent them from ever messing with Dis, or something Dis-like, again, but I guess the money just wasn't there to take it all. The Shinto priesthood on the board were giddy all the same.
- › Pistons
- › While the research arm has secrets, Pentacle has long been the go-to for magical formulae, and every magician **has** to have spell formulas to work their gift. There's a lot of ongoing revenue stream there, the sort of rock-solid investment that Shiawase is famous for. Not flashy, not cutting-edge, but a valuable asset that will keep generating profit for centuries.
- › Elijah

- › There are other ways to shape magic.
- › Many-Names

There are a few other, smaller assets that were picked up (a paper-making factory outside of Yokohama, for instance) that aren't worth a mention, but they were all purchased at a more normal price than the desperate price that MCT was looking for; Shiawase was absolutely giving them a line of "credit" to handle the fines while pretending to be predatory. This was a bad financial decision, and it's caused some grumbling in the minor shareholders, but the Shiawase family itself, along with the priests, have an absolute grip on the corp, so nothing will come from that.

- › And all those purchases had a quiet "until you buy it back" unstated clause, where Shiawase was stepping in as a bulwark against MCT being plundered by Western powers.
- › Baka Dabora

## SHIAWASE DIVISIONS

I'm not going over all of them—that's for a corporate download. But I want to touch on a few here.

### SHIAWASE BIOTECH

If you would have asked me ten years ago if Kazuja Shiawase would still be the head of Shiawase Biotech, I would have said, "Who?" I didn't really pay much attention to the suits back then. I was much more interested in fresh code, like a real decker should be. But these days? These days I'm more fixer than anything, so I had to start learning names. I'm shocked that Kaz is still there, but it made sense once I dug a bit. See, ol' Kaz is a genius, but in the field of genetics, not business. His scientific theories have always been cutting-edge and he's *far* more comfortable talking with men in lab coats than business suits. So how, you might ask, has he survived?

He got a secretary.

To be more specific, he was given a secretary by his father, Shiawase Mamoru, to support him (as in, run all the business things for him, give him papers to sign off on, and just let him be a big ol' science nerd). Miya Sazuki is her name, and she was an absolutely brilliant administrator and shrewd businesswoman who was faced with a classic problem—being a woman in a culture that wanted her to be a homemaker and mother, not a CEO. She managed to catch Mamoru's eye from her previous position via increased profits, and he eventually figured out it was her work that was making her boss look good. He'd moved her up a couple of times, and each time the pattern repeated. So, when Kazuja was under fire during the height of CFD and his inability to squeeze more money out of the division, Mamoru installed her as Kazuja's personal right hand.



It was the best call he ever made.

Sazuki got to work, loosening up bureaucratic knots, handling arguments between division heads, getting things organized and functional, and leaving Kaz room to lean more into the science side of things. In a year, profit levels were where they should have been *and* immunization against CFD had improved. Between the two of them, he gets to give the family name and the results on research, while she brings profits and doesn't embarrass anyone by being a woman in command since she's "just" a secretary—yeah, Shiawase still has issues on that side since they're *very* conservative. It's a puppet show and one that's been quite successful. Successful enough that Shiawase Daiki has taken note of her and talked to his father about promoting her, but Tadashi has thus far refused. The reason he's given seems to be that he doesn't want to break up such a successful team, but it's equally likely that he knows that Kazuja will crumble without his crutch, and he doesn't want to embarrass him or Sazuki.

- > Or that he just doesn't want to promote a woman that high.
- > Pistons
- > Did I forget to mention that Shiawase is a conservative corp? Because they're **extremely** conservative.
- > Bull
- > Which makes **Empress** Hitomi's situation all the more remarkable. Or did I simply answer my own question? Either way, she's not taking a back seat anymore. Right now, she's pretty much spearheading all Shiawase corporate initiatives. Some say it's because she doesn't want a Disian repeat, others because she genuinely believes in what she is pushing.
- > Corporate Raiders
- > Which will last only as long as they make a profit. Don't think for a minute that, family status notwithstanding, the Shiawase board won't pounce if this all fails.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Of that I am certain. I am also quite ready and able to deal with such contingencies.
- > Lady Death
- > I am at your disposal to serve.
- > Baka Dabora

## SHIAWASE ENVIROTECH

This one's getting a push in the aftermath of the Un-Awakening, being called in to repair damage found to the manasphere and cleanse areas suspected of being tainted, regardless of whether they actually are. Integration with Shinto magical traditions have been ongoing, where priests

handle the spiritual side of things and technicians ensure toxic materials are properly gathered up and removed. There are far more calls to cleanse areas than were actually Dis-touched, which means more media coverage and goodwill (and, more importantly, more profit) as Shiawase continues to push itself as the clean alternative and engage in genuine environmentalism, rather than the style thirty years ago where it was a fig leaf at best to cover up toxic waste left by Shaiwase's heavy industry. I hate to give a corp credit, but the change on that front has been absolutely revolutionary, and it's a rare area where Hitomi and Tadashi are in full agreement (and united in opposition to Sadato's legacy of polluting the land in return for more money).

- > You should not use the name of the Empress so casually!
- > Baka Dabora

## SHIAWASE MANUFACTURING

More specifically, I'll discuss Shiawase Motors, which expanded greatly when they added Toyota a few years back. Traditionally, Shiawase has focused on smaller, fuel-efficient electric cars with a high quality for their cost, something that shows no signs of stopping anytime soon. But with Toyota, they've now added some higher-end brands fit for corporate execs, brands that are now being driven by the top-level Shiawase guys. As we've seen time and time again, Shiawase creates the corporate culture that all other corps have to react to, and we're starting to see a move away from the Mitsubishi Nightsky (a classic that I love so much), and toward the Toyota Second Century, a car that was created in 2067 but given a makeover this past year and updated into a newer model. Everyone who's *anyone* in the Japanese business scene is after one right now, with Shiawase execs first in line. While foreign exports were supposed to start next year, demand is so high they'll push that back to handle domestic sales.

- > I've been in the previous version of the Second Century and, Ghost, I've never enjoyed a smoother ride. The seating is amazing, exterior sound doesn't exist, and the AR feeds are just ... sorry, that's relapse talk. Regardless of that, the car's a big boy, like a proper chauffeured car should be, safe for everyone inside, and an absolute message to anyone who sees it roll up. The owner of this car **matters** and you'd best pay attention.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Calling it a "mini" bar in the back doesn't seem fair as they're amazingly well-stocked, but I'll second the comfort levels. I don't know what they make the seats out of, but I could just ooze into one and take a nap right now.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales



- > Great cooling inside and a really subtle ventilation system that's quieter than a whisper and filters out scents while pumping them out. Add in jet-black windows, and nobody will ever know what happens in the backseat.
- > SeaTac Sweetie

- > How come I don't get to ride around in that kind of luxury?
- > Slamm-O!

- > They're better connected. Don't blame them for your lack of luxury, be more productive.
- > Glitch

## SHIAWASE LOGISTICS

More importantly, the Resha Corporation. With MCT's rail monopoly having been broken, Resha has been strongly advocating for more passenger rail in North America. High-speed tracks that can whisk people from one sprawl to another while avoiding all that annoying "flyover country" is more efficient than air travel or personal vehicles, and it's powered by Shiawase's mastery of electricity, regardless of how it's generated. They're currently laying down tracks for an Atlanta-to-Miami run to take advantage of the expanded CAS territory. If it goes well, more runs out of Atlanta are sure to follow, connecting to the Vol Sprawl, Space City, and possibly even Texas.

Rail options in the UCAS, in contrast, are at a standstill. The depression the UCAS is in makes that kind of major civic investment unlikely at best, which is a shame as grown-up countries run on trains. Meanwhile, Resha is bidding for the rights to connect the Pueblo Corporate Council borders together by running high-speed lines from Santa Fe to San Francisco. The desire's there, but contracts are still being negotiated (see job opportunities below).

- > No, thanks. Why take a big old train when I can drive myself? Cars let me go where I want, when I want, and to hell with a track. I ain't giving up my keys!
- > Clockwork
- > Yeah, the trip takes four times as long, you pay more for recharging, wear and tear on the vehicle, you still have to deal with parking, and risk the terrible drivers on the road? No, thanks, I'll take the train.
- > 2XL
- > Don't discount the strength of cargo trains. Not as noticeable as passenger rail, but it quietly chugs along, moving materials to and from factories. Alabama's thick with cargo rail, thanks to the expanded factory options down there.
- > Kane
- > That's Shiawase Cargolifting, not Resha. They use the umbrella of logistics, but are a different company.
- > Kia

## SHIAWASE BIOFOOD

One of the things that people miss about Shiawase is that, while the family puts on a unified face, the internal struggles are real. Yeah, we're all used to the Shiawase family's top heads looking to remove one another here or there, that's basic *tele-novela* stuff, but the internal push and pull of interests shouldn't be overlooked, especially if you're looking for shadow work. Where Hitomi is wanting a more holistic approach, shunning polluting industries, turning away from biomodification, and so on, Tadashi's viewpoint is seen in Biofood, with genetic manipulation being the norm—increased yields, shortened plant-to-harvest time, increased resistance to weed killer, whatever it takes, he's happy to sign off on. Food is, in corporate parlance, an "ongoing revenue stream" as people buy food, only to buy more later, rather than being a product that someone keeps around for a few years before needing to buy a new one. They sell real food, just tweaked and processed so much you can't really recognize what it used to be (but the packaging is so cute!). It's not as bad as what Ares passes off as "food," even at the very lowest cup-of-instant-ramen level, but there's a wide range of quality.

- > On the other side is their "Au Naturelle" brand, promoting farm-raised produce with no genetic additives or modification. It's not entirely true since no food on Earth hasn't been genetically modified, thanks to farming, but close.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > What? No, no way. I dropped ten nuyen on a banana last week for Sprout-O, an authentic honest-to-Ghost **real** banana. There's not modification there, right?
- > Knucklebuster
- > Sure. \*snickers\*
- > The Smiling Bandit
- > Can always hit the Ork Underground, pick up some genuine rat-on-a-stick.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > **Seattle** Underground, and the vendors you get around the Biz are ripping tourists off with cheap knockoffs. If you want the **good** stuff, you get invited to a cookout by a local.
- > Bull

## SHIAWASE ARCOLOGY: SEATTLE

Call it the SA:S, call it the ACHE, call it whatever you want, it'll always be the Renraku Arcology to me ... and it nearly was again. Seems like Renraku was feeling its oats after gathering up so much MCT that it got a bit drunk and started pitching the idea of buying the Arcology back from



Shiawase. Shiawase, of course, has been rebuilding it for a few years now, cleaning out the mess and modernizing the place, which they're using as their new North American HQ. To have Renraku just swagger by, toss a credstick on a table, and go, "Nice place you got here; I think I'll buy it," landed like a wet turd. When a Japanese businessman skips past "It would be difficult," and gives you a dead-faced "No," you *know* you done fragged up. I can't imagine how Seattle would have reacted to that, but Shiawase threw the coldest of shoulders at the idea. I wasn't in the room when Tadashi was told, but I can't imagine his reaction was anything short of furious.

- > Rumor has it that a negotiation team was sent to Nairobi to make an offer for the Kilimanjaro Mass Driver for **one** nuyen.
- > Corporate Raiders
- > Frag.
- > Plan 9

On a less insulting side, activity around the Arcology's been high. All three nuclear reactors are out now (two easily, one troubled), and one fusion reactor's up and running, but the second's still not in place. They've been having to deal with the NAN being unwilling to ship things through their territory, Seattle imparting new environmental regulations that are *much* stronger than the UCAS had, locals wanting bribes, and shadowrunning teams that are totally *not* being hired by Geatronics to keep things from being completed. The microwave broadcasting satellite from Amaterasu Solar is still in place over the Arcology to cover the power shortfall, but until the second generator's completed and online, they won't have the excess power to sell to Seattle that they want.

- > Drone pilots keep blundering into the power stream, too. Great way to throw away a couple grand. Idiots.
- > Clockwork

Power issues aside, the restarting of the Arcology's proceeding ahead of schedule. The lower half is fully functional now, as well as the top executive floors, with just the center section yet to go. Some of those were floors used as a death maze by Deus, and while the physical rebuilding is tricky, the real problem is with the emotional resonance there. The Shinto priests and corporate mages are working long shifts trying to cleanse the echoes that fill the area. The entire arcology has issues with bad mojo, but those floors are the worst.

- > It's getting better. I first poked my head in about a month after the doors were finally opened after Deus' death, and I about lost my mind. The memories of horror were etched everywhere. My last trip there was a year ago and it's hard to compare

them. Sure, you get the occasional bloody ghost crawling out of a display or an apparition weeping black tears of blood from empty eye sockets, but the soul-crushed **terror** that used to be infused into everything is gone.

- > Glasswalker
- > Some spirits were too strong to properly banish, so they're instead bound into the landscaping and gardens every twenty floors or so. If you see a boulder or a tree with a rope tied around it, DO NOT TOUCH, as they likely contain something you don't want to deal with. No, I don't mean a "Hey, we're under fire from corporate security, let's yank the rope and run away while they're distracted" deal. It's more of an "All your bones were suddenly pulled out of your body" deal.
- > Elijah
- > Wise words from someone who takes foolish actions.
- > Many-Names
- > Learning comes in many forms.
- > Elijah

Getting a job in the arcology is still in high demand, with decent pay and perks, but the larger draws are access to the arcology's living quarters and the one percent "family" discount in the shopping areas. Rooms are cramped, but the security's high and avoiding the grind of commuting is just nice (and a good way to save a bit more nuyen). As you go higher up, the rooms get larger and fancier, but so do the costs, with most set aside for arcology citizens. Some celebs have picked up a place on the higher floors, but the vast majority are set aside for execs.

- > The view's amazing up there! I'm considering taking an offer up to get a place on the 271<sup>st</sup> floor, but even at the discounted price, it'd be a major kick to my finances. But I do get to borrow it on occasion.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > 271?! Kat, I know the music's been good to you, but that's Kane-level money.
- > SeaTac Sweetie
- > Wait, what level is that?
- > Knucklebuster
- > It's not that much, just enough for a personal island in the Carib League.
- > Kane
- > Like I said, I have connections that make it possible, just not easy. Though, it's a nice place to kick my boots off from time to time, I'll tell you.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales

Shiawase is picking up a lot of locals, not just for workers in the lower levels, but they're still actively





looking for people who have good connections they can use to leverage their way into more areas. Government, of course, but local business as well. They're always looking to hire more mages (but be careful as the astral inside there is still troubled), techs and programmers, even getting some runners on retainer. Not really my style, swearing fealty to one corp like that, but I know one or two who've done the math and found regular food and a warm bed worth the tradeoff.

- ▶ The Dog program is still active. Shiawase has a bunch of talent scouts out in the barrens, looking for hungry kids who want a way out. They want 'em young, eight years old or younger, with orphans being the best, but they'll buy 'em from parents if they have to. Scoop up the kids, take 'em inside the big house, and train 'em to be loyal dogs. The washouts wind up on industrial lines or working retail shops down below, most go into security, but the top dogs get upgraded to samurai and company men.
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ Jealous?
- ▶ Clockwork
- ▶ Hey, whatever it takes to get out of here, you do.
- ▶ Riot
- ▶ Within reason, right?
- ▶ Knucklebuster

- ▶ Right?!
- ▶ Knucklebuster

Riku Hamamoto, the director of the arcology, has been struggling a bit with the power plan issue, reporting on the delays back to the home office. But with the other areas doing so well, it doesn't seem to be hurting him, or to be more exact, he's doing well with a single demerit on the chart that he really wants rubbed out. Having Daigou Shiawase there (who is just a retired executive and totally not the eyes and ears of the Shiawase family, honest), just sitting quietly at meetings and sipping tea has to be sweat-inducing, but everyone knows better than to move on the old man. Hamamoto's job looks secure for now, but if the reactor stays offline—well, how many chances do you get?

## THE KINTSUGI INITIATIVE

So, how does all of this fit into Shiawase's future? Simple, it's time for a bit of corporate re-branding.

Even though Shiawase was the first of the megacorporations, one could argue that it never really had the name recognition that other AAAs enjoyed, like Ares (the gun corp), S-K (the dragon corp), or even Horizon (the entertainment corp), Shiawase simply prospered and quietly grew in the relative shadows of the other AAAs.



But in the wake of all the drek that was the DSW, the Shiawase board has decided that it's time for a change.

Spearheaded by none other than Empress Hito-mi herself, a new corporate action plan known as the Kintsugi Initiative was created and has already begun to be implemented. Named after the process where broken pottery is repaired by utilizing gold (and therefore making it a unique piece of art), this initiative is designed to increase their public perception and recognition in the wake of \*ahem\* "current natural disasters."

Yeah, we all know what they're saying without them saying it ... so, moving on.

This initiative is rumored to be Shiawase's main corporate strategy over the next several years, maybe even decades. Now, details are a tightly held secret, but that simply means it will take people like us a little while to crack that nut.

In the meantime, the first phase of this initiative has already begun. Coming via the corporation's heavy manufacturing and medical industries, the idea is for Shiawase to take the lead in both healing and rebuilding the planet after the last several months of tragic destruction and loss. Already Shiawase has started the rebuilding process in several areas as well as setting up a number of clinics in devastated areas. In addition, Shiawase has partnered with local, and even in some cases corporate-contracted first responders to set up aid and resupply stations in order to provide needed medical services as well as replenish stores and supplies that have either been exhausted ... or destroyed during the final phases of the DSW. And they've done most of this as an act of charity.

- > Just a publicity stunt to boost their image. Give it a few weeks. When nobody is looking, they'll go back to normal.
- > Stone
- > Maybe ... probably. But frag me if they're not actually doing the work. Sure, there may be some angle we're not seeing at the moment, but a lot of my contacts are saying that this one time, on this one thing, Shiawase is being legit. And for now, I'll take it.
- > Butch
- > One of the biggest locations Shiawase has deployed to is (surprise, surprise) Australia, which is still in dire need of any kind of assistance. And while some of the locals were a bit hesitant at first, beggars can't be choosers. It's also a great opportunity for Shiawase to increase their overall footprint on the continent as well.
- > Corporate Raiders

While some of their media and PR ads come across as a bit corny, the Kintsugi Initiative has already boosted Shiawase's stock prices and netted them several juicy long-term infrastructure re-

building and maintenance contracts in Asia, Eastern Europe, and North America. There are even some rumors that Shiawase has approached the AGS government with an offer to assist them with the tragedy of the Collapse.

- > What's the Collapse?
- > Knucklebuster
- > Read on. I've got more on that later.
- > Heisenberg

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

So, now we get to open the field a bit to talk about possible runs you might have in the future, including contracts from yours truly, and a few of our local fixers. Any rumors you want to toss out there (yes, Plan 9, I see you raising your hand), you can toss those down below as well. I'll go first since it's my post.

- > I have jobs in the queue on both sides of the generator issue. Those who want to hit it, and Shiawase wanting to safeguard it. Not my job to tell you which one's the right way to go, but if you have the skills, I can get you the nuyen.
- > Bull
- > Renraku still has contracts out to get in there and see what, if anything, is still in hidden databases. These days, those leads are ice cold, and the pay's chilled as well, but it's pretty low risk at this point.
- > Kia
- > Depends on where you have them looking. There are lairs inside the walls that still haven't been found. Or, if they have been found, no one alive stepped out of them. I know this for a fact.
- > Puck
- > Not a job thing but a question: What about Reiko Shiawase-Shimada? She's the board chair, right? The Last Orchid and all that? She's got to be doing **something**, right? But no mention of her at all?
- > Pistons
- > Yeah, it's kind of weird. She doesn't like Tadashi, but she knows he's good at the job. She's **got** to still be bitter that her own mother gave Tadashi her shares as the "rightful heir" of the Shiawase main branch, but she's not made a real move on him since getting her position. My gut feeling is that she's waiting for him to retire and try to pass the corp to his eldest son, Daikal; when that happens, she'll swoop in.
- > Bull
- > But you don't know?
- > Pistons



- > I don't **know**.
- > Bull

- > Personally, I'd be more mindful of Mitsuko Shiawase-Yamana. It looks like she's going to win the case against Korin Yamana's other heirs to snap up his entire fortune. If that happens, she'll have enough money to make huge waves. Like, turning-a-double-A-into-a-triple-contender money. Can you imagine what would have happened if she had access to the cash and bought Novatech a few years ago?
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > A Yamana in control of Villiers' baby?! He would have got up out of that coma and punched his way through a wall to stop the sale. That family feud will **never** end.
- > Corporate Raiders
- > Then again, she could invest in Century Dynamics. That'd give her the control over the Villiers legacy, as well as a foot in the door of what **could** be a triple-A. The question from there is if she'd want to destroy Shiawase, or if she'd break CD from the inside and present the heart of it to the Shiawase board to get back in their good graces.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Okay, I'm going to table the Corporate Court bit here and move it over to another section. Any last words?
- > Bull
- > Just keep an eye on Shiawase's relationship with Evo. At some point, they'll want to bring them to heel.
- > Red Anya
- > Noted.
- > Bull
- > Okay, sorry for this taking so damn long, but consider this a nova-hot tip. Sources from inside both Shiawase and Renraku have confirmed that a meeting took place approximately a week ago between the heads of Renraku, Shiawase, and the Japanese Imperial Throne. Now, we don't have all the details, but we were able to confirm that an offer regarding an actual fragging **merger** of Shiawase and Renraku was ... **suggested**. And for those who don't know anything regarding Japanese custom and culture, such a suggestion from the throne is merely a polite way of issuing a direct order. Granted, the throne typically doesn't get involved, so take **that** for what you will. Anyway, the reason given was to further strengthen Japanese influence, but we're pretty sure Renraku's recent actions and attitude play into it. Anyway, jaws pretty much dropped when Renraku **declined**. Now, this may not seem like a big deal, but in Japanese context, this is a bombshell of Nagasaki and Hiroshima proportions (and yes, that metaphor is deliberate). We have no idea what's going to happen going forward, but we suggest everyone buckle up and keep their sensors on, because this could get rough.
- > Corporate Raiders

## SAEDER-KRUPP

POSTED BY: HEISENBERG

Saeder-Krupp came out of the last year surprisingly well. One disaster chased the other, and didn't even stop at the dragon's backyard—the Rhine-Ruhr-Plex (RRP). This raises the question of why S-K's reaction to their losses wasn't much more aggressive and, above all, more public. In my opinion, Lofwyr is well aware that things could have been worse. In parts of the world that aren't the RRP, things went well. Possibly just as he planned.

That thought is quite disturbing, especially with all the destruction and losses the corporation is taking in Europe. Well, a dragon's lifespan is long, and the current situation may just be a temporary nuisance for Lofwyr. Who can tell what's going on in a wyrm's mind? I certainly can't. But I do know something. The current situation means work and a lot of nuyen for those willing to do it. For beginners, that would be us.

## MISERY LOVES COMPANY

No matter how you look at it, the old saying "misery loves company" proves to be true once again. Don't get me wrong, I'm not just talking about the despair dragged all over the media, accompanied by the most dramatic pictures you can take with an expensive camera. I'm not even talking about the pain some of us feel, because they were deeply involved in the events. I mean all the small misfortunes and larger catastrophes that add up and leave an enormous pile of crap right on Lofwyr's doorstep. Let's start with the most apparent and media-covered situations.

## CRUMBLING CASTLES

On February 14, 2083, a date now referred to as "Black Valentine," a series of events occurred and changed the face of the RRP forever—or at least for a very long time. The region experienced a series of earthquakes that caused major landslides. Following these, there were a series of explosions in the abandoned coal mines underneath the sprawl. Water broke into the old tunnels, flooding the streets and turning huge parts of the RRP into a swamp.

At one point, a mana void formed within the former mines, decreasing in strength the further away you are from the center. This void renders our spell-slinging friends useless in the area subjected to the effects. Thousands died during this event, which is now called "The Collapse." Close to half of the RRP area was subjected to the effects. Infrastructure and production sites were damaged or destroyed, while Neu-Essen was strangely untouched by any of these events.



- > The events were a big deal, in all kinds of media. There was also a lot of drone footage showing the first earthquakes and the grounds breaking in.
- > Thorn
- > We also had footage of strange appearances—probably chimeras—within the earthfalls. They were hunting the people who survived the fall.
- > Scythe
- > The landslides were only one part. Have you seen what the earthquakes did to apartment buildings? Some of them just broke like ice in summer.
- > Fianchetto
- > Official media didn't cover the lower-end regions of sprawl, like Gelsenkirchen or North-Essen. The damage there was extensive. Of course not, people dying in those forgotten lands are just not important nor shiny enough to make it to the news!
- > Anne Archiste

In the aftermath of the Collapse, S-K must deal with serious difficulties. While the corporation's headquarters in the part of the RRP called Neu-Essen wasn't affected by the event, important infrastructure has been damaged and partially destroyed. Roads and metro lines that led to Neu-Essen, as well as the FTS network—a network of underground freight tubes—were affected by the floods and landslides, making it difficult to access the area.

- > The Freight Tube System (FTS) is a peculiarity of the RRP worth mentioning. As a massive sprawl made of a dozen of already pretty large cities, its streets get easily congested. At some point, it made supplying entire parts of the 'plex very difficult, so S-K decided to build this underground network dedicated to freight, to reduce traffic jams caused by trucks and other delivery vehicles.
- > Rigger X
- > The aftermath is interesting. The damaged infrastructure has had tremendous effects on the RRP as S-K's production center in Europe. There are no roads, no railways, no FTS, and all that means delayed deliveries and difficulties to get materials in.
- > Beaker
- > Every corporation that has production sites in the RRP—the literal industrial heart of the AGS, if not Europe—is affected.
- > Skarn-Ka
- > They are doing insane amounts of rebuilding and restructuring in the RRP. While it looks like a warzone now, it comes out as a clean slate. Imagine how the RRP could look in 100 years with all the new roads and state-of-the-art facilities! What if THAT is Lofwyr's "endgame?"
- > Scythe

- > "Deutsches Wirtschaftswunder," anyone?
- > Annie Archiste
- > With Saeder-Krupp absorbing the remains of businesses and communities going broke during the collapse? Oh drek!
- > Stone

The problems in the RRP are not affecting the corporation on a global level, though. Like every AAA corporation, S-K has regional headquarters that can operate independently from the headquarters in Neu-Essen. In our wireless age, the office workers in Neu-Essen are also able to do their job, minimizing the damage the Collapse causes to Saeder-Krupp. Besides, S-K belongs to Lofwyr, who probably micromanages the hell out of the mega and keeps it effective, even if a part of it is not working as it used to. But blood always attracts sharks, and it's only a matter of time until other corporations—big and small—show interest in getting a bigger piece of the European cake.

- > Strangely enough, Spinrad Global does not appear to have seized the opportunity. And at the same time, S-K's actions against Johnny's widow's AAA have been rather tame in the last few years ... I guess there is some truth to the rumors about Gabrielle and Claudia Romanov somehow making a deal to keep the bloodshed out of Europe?
- > Espion

The damage many of the S-K production sites took is devastating. Besides the structural damage on buildings, we are talking dead or injured personnel, who can't be easily replaced. Some of these sites were actively targeted by runners during the Dis incident, destroying certain production lines. Other parts were damaged through the Collapse itself, causing another major setback in production schedules and delivery timelines. You can bet that a certain dragon keeps analyzing data from the attacks, trying to figure out why these specific locations were targeted, and by whom. To gather even more data and to solve the current situation, S-K is currently recruiting runners.

- > We have a wide variety of jobs going on here. And not only jobs provided by S-K. Need an example? S-K is doubling down to fix the FTS network. There are some opponents hiring teams to sabotage the construction sites. Of course, S-K is hiring the same types of people to guard said construction sites and protect the transports to these sites. Physical stuff not in your wheelhouse? Don't worry. There's a nice bonus if you tell the dragon who's responsible for the sabotage. Or better yet, who paid for it.
- > Cosmo



## TROUBLE IN PARADISE

While the physical damage has been limited to Europe, we see a change in personnel all over the world. Of course, there were major losses within the production sites of the RRP. Some of them are temporary, because of injuries, but many workers died because buildings crashed and buried them on site.

- A perfect example is the destruction of most of the CHEMPARK belonging to AGC in Leverkusen. On top of chemical spillage running amok in the area and continuing to increase the death toll of the Collapse, there are rumors of toxic shamans converging on the place. And of course, AGC competitors are dispatching any runners who are crazy enough to go into this toxic soup in an attempt to retrieve any piece of corporate secrets that may still be somewhere in this wasteland the AA security forces failed to keep secure. To make matters worse, it seems that the polluted area will keep growing and most likely turn most of Leverkusen into a toxic zone in the long run. Ironically, it's next to the Bergische Land, a large natural space and a destination for a lot of tourists.
- Ecotope

These were not the only changes we see in the aftermath of the Dis incident. Most office drones remain in their positions, while we can see some shuffling in the middle- and upper-management positions. Many people who were responsible during the Dis incident were demoted, fired, or transferred to dead-end positions in some unimportant offices. In their place, we can see a whole cast of new faces. Others remained in their positions and even gathered more power. People like Isabelle Corbeau or Vanadis Hyvönen will still be around for some time.

For the new people in charge, some of them came from lower positions within the same office, but not all of them. There are a bunch of new managers directly from the scaly heart of the corporation in Neu-Essen. Some of them will even start their career in the spotlight and get responsibility for a shiny new project! We'll see what they do with this.

Why am I pointing out these changes? There was no notice beforehand! One day, the old manager was still in charge, and on the next day, a new one came in and took over. It was surprising even for those who speculated that some heads will be cut off for certain incidents and losses. There are rumors that even the new managers were appointed last-minute.

- The most public one was Nathalie Martins, I suppose. She's been taking over the media coordination for the new Africa and Australia projects. She's an elf and has been working in the media team for quite some time now.
- Scythe

- And she's dating Sébastien Durand, as far as rumor has it. He's also been transferred to Cairo. Durand is in charge of the security for one of the African projects, but I don't remember which one. Human guy in his thirties, with some military service under his belt. From France, if I remember correctly.
- Sim-Eon

We could ignore these changes, but I'd highly recommend paying attention to them. Observing who's fired and removed, and who's now in charge, will give us a rough idea of the plan and course S-K will follow soon. We should expect that it's probably hell to play a game of chess against the dragon, and we should expect that the coming time is just another game of chess for him. So we should keep a close eye on how he moves his pieces to get an idea where tomorrow's nuyen is coming from.

- You can talk about chess all you want, but until they've put some time in their new positions of power, this information isn't useful—it's a waste of time!
- Clockwork
- It's probably a waste of time trying to decipher Lofwyr's strategy by promoting Durand here or his girlfriend there, but the changes themselves are very relevant to us in the shadows. They are, obviously, an excellent source of job opportunities, but also a source of danger. If you're doing a run in the RRP, more or less protected by your client being an S-K exec, you may want to know that after his Mr. Johnson briefed you two days ago, he's been replaced by a new person who either doesn't give a damn about their predecessor's pet project, or even worse, isn't even aware of it ...
- Sim-Eon

## WORLDWIDE TREASURE HUNT

Now that we're done with the major catastrophes and personnel changes, let's have a look at where Lofwyr is placing his new chess pieces. Many of us are often assuming that the AAA focuses their efforts on the three big sandboxes (UCAS, Asia, and Europe). That's just not true. Even before the Dis incident, Saeder-Krupp had locations and production sites in Africa and Australia. Today, we can see a rise of interest in these locations, and even in space.

During the last few months, S-K has bought mining rights for abandoned gold and opal mines in Australia. In Africa, they gained the same sort of rights for an abandoned gold mine, as well as exhausted iron and tantalite mines. In addition, they bought large plots of land close to the Australian outback and in the Sahara Desert. Why? Honestly, I have no clue. But there are the Starstruck-Gala



and other media-covered events planned, which seem to surround the efforts and projects.

- › Lofwyr is searching for a Drake here. There have been a lot of rumors regarding some free drakes, which he wants to have for himself. Probably to cut his losses in the S-K Prime department. The events are just there to cover this search.
- › Plan 9
- › Ever heard of the “Tear of the Nile?” There are speculations that this artifact is hidden away below the Quasr Sagha Temple—or close to it in the Sahara. The “White Fire” opal is also said to be a magical gemstone. It was stolen in the 1800s and was last sold in Cairo. The buyer left westward from the city, toward the very same Sahara. His remains were never found. The first site is pretty close to, if not inside, the plot S-K purchased.
- › Winterhawk
- › Don’t forget the conflict between Spinrad Global and S-K regarding the train infrastructure of the Caliphate, which was mentioned in the Lethal Harvest upload. There is some rumor that the AAA is doubling down on finishing the Riyadh-to-Cairo segment of the new maglev train network at all costs, because it’s a key requirement of the deal with the ICCC and S-K. Why? Well, because for reasons I have yet to unveil, the Caliphate really wants to get access to the Sahara, and the city of the Nile would be the perfect gate.
- › Skarn-Ka

One of these projects is located in Seattle. S-K recently announced the Starstruck-Gala, hosted in the Space Needle. Supposedly, they will advertise the new Seattle Space Mining Research (SSMR) project there. We will probably get more information there, if they don’t drop any hints before then.

## SAND, SAND, AND EVEN MORE SAND

Of all the new projects S-K recently put into motion, the Africa-based range of projects may be the least understandable. The plots of land they bought make no sense, and the same goes for the mining rights for exhausted mines. The lands they bought are located in the desert, southwest of Cairo. Most of the mines they gained the mining rights for were marked exhausted years ago. It seems like Saeder-Krupp just paid a lot of money for mountains of sand, rocks, and holes. But of course, if Lofwyr deems these sites valuable, we should have a closer look and try to figure out why.

The largest site on our list is a plot of land in the Sahara Desert, surrounded by nothing but sand. The plot covers about fifty square kilometers of land. There are some historic documents that imply pyramids and additional temples buried below the sand. S-K transferring a team of archeologists to this site seems to support these implications. Also,

the corporation seems to expect to find something, since the team is accompanied by arcane experts who specialize in Egyptian mythology.

- › The site these documents refer to is the Quasr el Sagha Temple. There are some rumors that there must be pyramids close by. Also, this is one of the sites S-K is currently hiring teams for. On-site protection for about three months, magic support is desirable. I’m not sure what they expect in this desert, but they pay a lot.
- › Stone
- › Don’t underestimate the desert. We do have some smuggler hideouts out in the desert, but the Awakened critters are probably more dangerous. Also, nobody can tell what the Awakening did with the supposed mummies’ curses. If they find some, they may have to deal with a curse, or even with an upset spirit.
- › Am-Mut

Next, we should have an eye on the abandoned Sukari mine, close to the Red Sea. The Egyptian gold mine was declared exhausted in 2064 and has been abandoned since. Saeder-Krupp bought the mining rights without stating what they want to mine here. As soon as this deal was signed, the location was fenced, and security forces, led by Sébastien Durand, were moved to the site.

There are theories floating around that the recent interaction with the Disian metaplane also caused changes in our own geology, leading to the appearance of new materials and ores. If these theories are true, some of these new components may have been found in the Sukari mine. This operation may be the first of many to gather and exploit these new minerals—assuming of course, that S-K finds ways to monetize them. The same is probably true for other old mines in the region.

- › Another theory is that these mines can easily be connected to a huge, subterranean complex dedicated to research or whatever else Saeder-Krupp pleases. In that case, there may be several additional rights that Saeder-Krupp bought—or the ownership of these mines was transferred to them completely.
- › Plan 9
- › A friend of mine had a closer look at the property registers. It seems that the mines have been sold to S-K, not just the mining rights that are noted publicly. For the public, these mines are still state property, and not extraterritorial areas.
- › Am-Mut
- › Any notes about what they’re doing there?
- › Scythe
- › From these registers, they state that S-K bought mining rights to examine the magic potential of the local earths and minerals.
- › Am-Mut



## ROCKS, PARTIES, AND SPIDERS: AUSTRALIA

Next is Australia, once known as the land of the kangaroos, and today for its Aboriginal magic and manastorms. The island-continent hosts a great deal of poisonous wildlife, rocks, desert, and the infamous outback, inhabited by more magical flora and fauna and manastorms than you could imagine. While there was a corporate presence—mainly Wuxing and the Japanacorp—most western corporations don't run any significant operations here. Saeder-Krupp based their own efforts out of Perth in Western Australia and only recently reached further east to Melbourne and Brisbane.

In Melbourne, the AAA started by renting a block of offices close to the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) while searching for a location to place their own buildings. Recently, they bought a plot of land within the city borders and began the construction process. During the Northern Lights Charity gala in Seattle, Lofwyr himself announced that S-K would establish two new research centers in Australia. The first one will be located close to Melbourne, the second one near Brisbane. It was also stated that the primary base of operations in Australia will remain in Perth. The corporate interests of S-K in Australia have historically been mining based, though with their expansion to the financial capital of the continent, we have to expect other ventures there.

In addition to the plots in Melbourne and right outside of Brisbane, S-K acquired mining rights to a set of old opal mines in Western Australia. On top of that, there are two abandoned and exhausted gold mines, which are also now also a part of the corporate portfolio.

The mines fall perfectly in line with S-K's mining efforts in Australia, while both research facilities and the Melbourne buildings seem a bit out of place. This is especially true since the AAA doesn't play a role in the continent's financial sandbox. Melbourne is, however, as close as you can get to Tasmania for mainland cities, while Brisbane is as far away from Sydney and the manastorm as Melbourne is.

There is a theory that S-K wants to study the astral landscape of Australia. With all the changes caused by the Dis incident, the ongoing manastorm over Sydney is a good indicator of whether things have changed here. This would also explain why the Awakened gemologist, Arthur Curtis, was transferred from Seattle to the new Brisbane research facility.

- ▶ S-K never showed interest in magical stuff on a corporate level. Why is this changing now?
- ▶ Jimmy No

- ▶ Right, it's way more likely that they hope the storm and other mana phenomena have been weakened during the Dis events, so they can exploit more of Australia's natural resources.
- ▶ Ethernaut
- ▶ Seems like a bit too much effort just for some more resources. They could have waited until we got data from other sources and then moved on, but no. They established research facilities, guarded them, and staffed them with experts. Whatever they're searching for, other corporations are not.
- ▶ Corporate Raiders
- ▶ Don't forget the "you don't do magic here, lad" zone in their own backyard. Figuring out what could prevent these zones, or even counter existing ones, would be an enormous interest here.
- ▶ Winterhawk

Besides the staff transferred from other countries, Saeder-Krupp has also signed up many locals. Some of them are knowledgeable about the Australian outback, while others specialize in Tasmania's flora and fauna, or have been studying the manastorm over Sydney for years.

## THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH: SEATTLE SPACE MINING RESEARCH CENTER

Leaving the heat of Australia, we will move back to Seattle. During the "Stars of Hope" gala at the Space Needle last month, Lofwyr dropped another bombshell. Instead of continuing to focus on Earth's resources, the mega wants to research ways to exploit the other planets of our solar system. Or should I say, exploit them more efficiently?

To prepare for this, the new Seattle Space Mining Research Center (SSMRC) will collect and analyze data. A special branch will start developing prototypes in the Emerald City, which will then be tested in orbit and on the moon. The plans suggest that this is a project with a huge budget, which will bring much more in profits. To further support these efforts, the spaceport in Azania/Africa gets a much-needed upgrade and modernization.

Alexandra Moreaux, has been appointed as the new coordinator of the research project and will be transferred from Montréal to Seattle. Given her specialization in cost-benefit analysis, she will probably ensure that the expenditures of the project do not exceed the expected profit.

- ▶ Seriously? We're talking about some nitpicker who is now shuffling documents back and forth in another office?
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ If you would look beyond the glossy photos, you would know that this is not just any nitpicker. Moreaux is considered to be absolutely ruthless for cutting the corporation's losses. That she





has been assigned to the new project shows they are taking it seriously. Besides, she's not so deluded that she'll go ahead with it for idealistic reasons if it turns out to be a money pit.

► Cosmo

While this project will not provide us with new toys, it could still bring many jobs for us. Research data and prototypes are bread and butter for many of us, and there will be runs against the SSMRC for these. We can also expect to see an increase in hiring of space engineers, and some of them may want to switch their employer. Of course, not always in a consensual fashion.

The initial announcement of the project got many people, especially investors, all hyped up, so we are bound to see more of this new shiny research in the future. Especially since Saeder-Krupp stated that not all exciting details about this project have been revealed yet. Anyhow, this will draw a lot of attention from investors and other corporations who will definitely pay us to poke this particularly interesting hornet's nest.

- That only happens because they have exactly nothing to talk about. What secret project is hiding behind all this shiny space stuff? Or does anyone here really believe that they want to get more out of space?
- Plan 9

## LET'S PRETEND EVERYTHING IS FINE

With big catastrophes and new projects off the table, let's have a look at the public image, and what S-K is doing in that department next. After all, the Collapse impacts Saeder-Krupp and influences how the AAA is perceived right now. We will also have a look at some opposing factions and their projects in different parts of the world.

## MIRROR MAZE

The media in most parts of the world are no longer paying attention to the Collapse. The different projects I mentioned in this upload are much more attractive than a catastrophe on the other side of the pond, especially since it doesn't affect their consumers. In Europe, however, the situation is different. The damaged production facilities, the deaths, and the flooding in large parts of the RRP still dominate the news there. Saeder-Krupp is using this to reinforce the image of the caring dragon who, through charity and other high-profile events, supports the reconstruction.

- I'm amazed that people are actually buying this. Even if they do some charity stuff, we should go more into "what's in there for them," instead of giving them even more coverage! Saeder-



Krupp is a corporation. They don't even twitch without some sort of profit for them.

- ▶ Sunshine
- ▶ You underestimate the influence of charity on customers. People prefer buying from nice corporations above those portraying themselves as the evil overlords. And Saeder-Krupp is extremely good at this specific game.
- ▶ Corporate Raiders

The dragon's commitment will be memorable, probably enhancing Saeder-Krupp's influence in Europe even more. A fortunate turn of events, considering that the renewal of police contracts in some sprawls is also imminent. After all, Saeder-Krupp has a private police service provider in its portfolio, S-K Centurion, which is hoping to assert itself against Sternschutz. The next few years will show whether the subsidiary will profit from the parent corporation's image and secure one or two contracts.

- ▶ In Europe, maybe. I'm not so sure if they are ready to mark their terrain where Lone Star and Knight Errant are predominant. But in a few years? If they don't mess up? Why not?
- ▶ LSPD

Saeder-Krupp's international projects are also receiving a lot of hype, with interviews, galas, and charity events. Especially when it comes to Africa-related charity and the Sahara Project, the official statement is that the corporation aims to help develop Egypt. This is just corporate speech for: We want to make sure we get the biggest piece of the pie if what we're looking for is actually there.

- ▶ While the different Africa-based projects, as well as the SSMRC, get a lot of media coverage, there is a telling silence for everything regarding Australia. No donations for the local population, no large-scale galas to celebrate the new toys. Nothing. I am pretty sure the real gem of these new projects has nothing to do with space or deserts in Egypt, but very much with certain research sites in Australia.
- ▶ Scythe

## A DANCE OF LIGHT AND SHADOW

Let's put Golden Snout's self-portrait as the friendly neighborhood dragon aside and talk about those who want to rain on his parade.

The focus of Saeder-Krupp being heavy industries and not exactly environmentally friendly mining operations creates some enemies among different groups of environmentalists. Like most modern organizations, these groups are now active worldwide and actually do more than just cuddle trees and hinder progress, including things the

corporate-controlled media would like to connect them to. Acts of sabotage, for example.

Green War especially is currently organizing actions in Africa, aiming at the Sukari mine. Support from people like us is welcome, but the pay is lousy.

- ▶ Idealistic jobs never pay well. You do them if you care about the cause, not for the money.
- ▶ Ecotope

Those of you who have an affection for poisonous animals can find work in Australia. Shiawase and Wuxing are not exactly happy about the recent expansion, with Wuxing being especially offended by the Brisbane Research Facility. Wuxing takes this as Saeder-Krupp setting foot in its own personal backyard. Allegedly, all Japanacops working in Australia, as well as Wuxing, pay horrendous sums for information about what is going on there.

- ▶ Wait a few months, then even local shamans will hire people like us to get rid of S-K. I can't imagine them being interested in some corporation interfering with their agenda with this manastorm.
- ▶ Plan 9
- ▶ Are you implying that the shamans are responsible for this?
- ▶ Winterhawk
- ▶ Of course! It's their land, and they created it to drive outsiders away. Obviously.
- ▶ Plan 9

If you prefer the familiar urban environment of Seattle, there is plenty of work for you, too! There are jobs for stealing and sabotaging prototypes and data about the SSMRC project. The smaller aerospace corporations and every local megacorporation will pay well for prototypes, data, and even personnel. Don't forget that Lofwyr is very vindictive, though.

## FACES OF A NEW FRONTIER

For this section, I picked four new faces who have been transferred to a new position and have been given some sort of power. You'll soon see why I picked them!

### THE BELLE OF THE BALL: NATHALIE MARTINS

Nathalie Martins has been recently appointed as PR manager for Saeder-Krupp's Africa- and Australia-based projects. She is one of those people



you may have seen before. The red-haired elf is in her late thirties and has spent her whole life under the protecting wings of the dragon. For the last ten years of her career, she has been working on the PR team of Neu-Essen. She dealt mostly with local media and accompanied Roel Vandenhoeck in a series of interviews with Skadi Person about local affairs.

- She was more present in small Matrix feeds than she was in traditional media. Usually, you saw her side-by-side with Vandenhoeck, though she did some solo stuff if the interviews weren't important enough for him. An extended search will give you a lot of older articles and videos featuring her.
- Haze
- I think she's transferred to a dead-end position with this Africa thing. She got way too popular, especially with the younger audiences. That's dangerous, and supposedly Vandenhoeck hates her guts.
- Ethernaut
- Nah. He's mentoring her. Have a look at the Collapse media files, you can see both of them talking to each other and there are no signs of animosity there. I think he decided that it's time for her to be thrown in deep water and manage her first project alone.
- Skarn-Ka

After the Collapse in the RRP, she was also present in international media. She communicated and commented on the efforts of Saeder-Krupp to rebuild the sprawl. Martins described S-K as deeply involved and compassionate about the situation. The charity campaigns to rebuild the damaged apartment complexes have skyrocketed under her direction.

While she is not as established as her boss, Roel Vandenhoeck, Martins is well liked, and her popularity is growing. Especially since her relationship with Sébastien Durant has become public. Some news feeds label them the new power couple of Saeder-Krupp, and they include a very close look at her and the things she's doing.

- This relationship is not real. It's all for show, and to paint her as the "Saeder-Krupp ideal."
- Plan 9
- Do you have any evidence to support this theory of yours?
- Sim-Eon
- Their appearances as a couple just started when the Africa projects were announced. It's obvious, don't you think?
- Plan 9
- What's obvious is that you're wrong. They've been dating for about ten years now. There are some early-day photos showing them together, seemingly already quite intimate with each other, on a lover's weekend in Paris.
- Sim-Eon

## THE KNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR: SÉBASTIEN DURAND

The charming Frenchman Sébastien Durand has been entrusted with the security of all Africa-based projects. Luckily for him, this means that he can move there with his girlfriend. He is a human in his mid-thirties and began his career in the military before moving on to corporate security. Since he's been working for Saeder-Krupp, he has been assigned to projects in the AGS, as well as in Marseille and then in Paris, gaining experience in security management and site security.

Ever since his appointment to the Africa-based projects has become public, he gets a lot of media attention, especially when he accompanies Martins to events and interviews. Unlike Martins, however, Durand seems to be more of a taciturn type. Most of the time, he lets the PR manager do the talking while he keeps a vigilant eye on his surroundings. The only statement that could be extracted directly from him was that there would be no statement on security measures in Africa.

- Durand knows Martins is way better with cameras and talking than he is. He's a security man first and foremost. When they both appear in the media, his job is probably that of a bodyguard. His appointment to the Africa project is a bonus here, but not the main reason he is by her side. He's good at his job, and she at hers. Never mess with a running system.
- Thorn

## THE MERCILESS BEAN COUNTER: ALEXANDRA MOREAUX

While Alexandra Moreaux has a job that rarely gets attention, she's a familiar face within the corp. The dwarf accountant joined S-K in 2058 and earned a reputation as "hangman" ever since. Moreaux is known for not considering ideal or theoretically possible results when evaluating projects, but for relying solely on cold numbers. She is efficient, well-organized, and known to be incorruptible—which makes her popular with the execs and feared by the employees. When she is called to a particular branch, heads roll.

- To her credit, it's the RIGHT heads that roll. Not the politically unprotected, not the patsy everyone bet on. The ones fired (or worse) are REALLY responsible for loss of profit. That's probably why she is so feared and why the Golden Wyrms took a shine to her.
- Skarn-Ka

For now, she is responsible for the Space Mining Research Center, which requires her to move from her hometown of Montreal to Seattle. If you expected her to be thrilled about this, you are wrong. But she's not unhappy either. She simply doesn't seem to care at all. One thing is for sure,



though. She will make sure that the Research Center is profitable—and stays profitable.

- › Not too sure about that. Sure, she has this reputation, but that also means she could be the perfect decoy. Think about it! As long as she's there, nobody would ever think that this endeavor is, in fact, some potentially unprofitable shady stuff of Lofwyr's.
- › Plan 9
- › And you're still wrong. You **<1.2 MP deleted by Sysop-01>**
- › And I have the Ban-Hammer, right here. First and only warning.
- › Glitch

## THE STAR OF THE ARCANES ARTS: ARTHUR CURTIS

Another important up-and-comer is Arthur Curtis. The ork is native to Seattle, but was recently transferred to the Brisbane Research Facility. He's young for such a position, but he earned a reputation as an expert for gems in foci and fetishes, as well as for Awakened minerals. Officially, his new job includes research about Australian earth and gem types, as well as their utility in magic.

Obviously, these things wouldn't require his presence on site, which indicates that he has different tasks Down Under. After the Dis events, he is probably observing and analyzing the manastorm that plagues Sydney. Some of my friends tried to gather more information, but Curtis played his cards close to his vest.

- › Paying attention to the manastorm is crucial right now. If the event is still as strong as it was, figuring out why will be S-K's ultimate goal.
- › Elijah
- › Where is the money here? S-K is still a corp. In the end, anything they do is all about profit
- › Mr. Bond
- › Piercing the secret of this magical event could be key to building an effective defense mechanism against it or something like it (such as another metaplanar threat akin to Dis). And this would give the corp a head start in this upcoming weapons race.
- › Sim-Eon

## EVO

POSTED BY: PLAN9/PLAN 10

Have we got some hot treats for all of you. This damn Disian Shadow War cost us dearly (condolences to all on their losses), but for those of us standing on the other side, the shadow market is hot. We've dug around with Evo and have several leads they'll be playing, and we'll be the pawns! Woohoo.

We'll start top down. We got some big shake-ups at the top that will have echoes and impacts around the globe. From there we'll isolate some specific locales that are going to be filled with Evo work. We'll fill the end with some miscellaneous goodies, and as usual, feel free to pitch in with more hot intel. The shadow community got a little smaller with this conflict landing on our drosses, but it certainly brought us closer together.

## MISSING PERSON

No matter which side your bread is buttered on for Buttercup (and even if you're just the plain toast sort), there's going to be some shady drek for you to get involved in. We got leads on some big movers and shakers, and some apparent underdogs who just might go from nipping at your heels straight to taking a chunk out of your throat.

The biggest deal is how to handle votes and voting rights in her absence. Buttercup had a massive hunk of voting power and now there's a void that can shift the fates of everything and no one quite knows who's getting that power ... well, no one but us. It's not a done deal, but three individuals are being called up/considered to act as trustees for Buttercup's voting rights until she either returns, or we get confirmation of her permanent demise. We know this because we are one of the three. Yes, we know, this seems like it would create bias, but as we don't really care about money or power but are happy to make an effort to steer a very future-minded megacorp, we'll admit to it and let the great triumvirate handle our access privileges. The weirdest part is we thought we were on the outs. Then again, that could very well be why we were "asked." The second advisor is a SURGED ork shaman by the name of Vice. He's another former runner who settled into working for Evo as a Johnson and fixer. Unlike the two of us, the third is not a former runner and is, in fact, a hardliner from Yamatetsu Naval, named Suketu Sonehka. I'd say he's the odd man out, but we and Vice are so vastly different we think we will all be spending a lot of time working to convince each other of the best course of action. We're happy to be selected but not sure these selections were intended as beneficial or just as a way to placate and leave others able to move while Buttercup's voting block was stalled arguing amongst ourselves.

I'll tell everyone here that part of being chosen is being in charge of the search for Buttercup. As no one knows where she went, we're flying a little blind, but we've got resources.

Problem is, so does our opposition. In fact, while we're held somewhat in check by Buttercup's assets, they have access to whatever black budget resources they can pull from the rest of Evo's vast assets. And that's just our internal opposition who



want nothing more than to find Buttercup and make sure she's not returning.

Time for a few specifics. Internals first, and I'll start with the two big hitters, Ysil and Taylor Dacopral. This pair would be devastating if they worked together, but luckily that will never happen. As it stands, Ysil focuses on arcane-based searches. They're contracting metaplanar runs and the pay is ridiculous right now. No one wants another arcane ebb to cut them off from coming back from the metaplanes. Since no one knows Buttercup's home plane, it's a crapshoot, and teams are being pulled together that have a variety of skills. Every metaplane has its own dangers, but teams can't just be security-minded jackboots. Most trips are going to require some serious social engineering in a very foreign environment.

On the back end, teams are getting picked to steal paydata from teams coming back and forth from Ysil's central datastore. The trouble is, Ysil is collecting all the reports and intel on an offline server in Angkor Wat. Not many places in the world you can stick out like a sore thumb more than the naga nation.

As for Dacopral, they've got the Matrix and even the Resonance Realms angles covered. Well, they're hiring runners to cover it for them. Offline datastores, deep dives that require direct access to the main host nodes, and even some off-world gigs to hit compiled data stores that went to Mars with the monads.

Just to be clear on all of this, you'll never know who you're really working for. These two are several steps disconnected from the actual operations, but it's good to know they're pulling the strings at the top. This helps those among us with certain moral bents or professional preferences from working for the wrong parties.

Lower down the line, a pair of names are coming up often that aren't directly related to the top dogs. Both of which are taking a path much closer to the streets. From an outside perspective they seem like long shots, but as you'll see in a moment, they may have a better shot of getting to the truth first. Whether they can act on this paydata before they get squashed is a whole different basket of nuts, but it's always good to see the little guys making a real difference.

Name numero uno is Ramon Dizon, of Evo Australasia. Dizon is using extensive Vory connections to hunt down leads on Buttercup "sightings," along with info on her past dealings. The Vory are brutal in their efforts and prefer to hire runners who share their preference for violence. Dizon is not just sticking with the Vory as go-betweens and also puts runners onto specific trails. One such trail involved a visit Buttercup made to an Evo research station in Amazonia so they could get an astral read on her activities. Jobs have also been hitting the streets looking for objects owned or interacted

with by Buttercup that might still hold some connection to her. Dizon apparently thinks bringing enough of those items together could allow a ritual to locate Buttercup, even across metaplanes.

Our second street sweeper is among us, and we're sorry we need to call you out, but we'd like to see success come your way, mainly because we think one of the shadow nodes is where we expect you to post any real finds. So, if anyone finds Ire, a.k.a. Serrin Shamander, behind their jobs, put in that extra effort. So far, we've seen Ire's efforts focused mostly on talking to runners who worked for Buttercup at one point or another in their career. Apparently, this course is aimed at gathering a huge trove of separate and seemingly trivial knowledge in one place so it can be analyzed and scoured for clues.

Good luck, Ire!

- Thanks. P9/10 is correct in that effort, but I am also traversing several other avenues of research regarding some other arcane phenomena that could be used in my search. Specifics will be discussed on hire, but expect to travel to areas with unique mana features.

▸ Ire

## EYES ON AFRICA

We have all seen the shadow scene in Azania grow with the arrival of Evo and their gravtech labs and monad employees. PWV (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal), pronounced "pay-dub-fau" for those not familiar, is the biggest sprawl in Azania, and has been expanding by leaps and bounds since Evo set up a quiet little R&D facility there for new tech and built up a nice little home around it to cover up everything going on. Fast forward half a decade and Evo is among the most influential powers in PWV, and all of Azania. They've brought in personnel, hired thousands of locals, and as with any megacorp, they have made PWV an even stronger haven for runners in this area of Africa with solid black and grey markets.

All this growth was even before the latest big move that made Evo Africa's HQ in PWV their temporary global HQ. After the assault on their Vladivostok HQ left that facility in need of extensive repairs and even more abundant questions of its safety, Vladivostok's staff moved to a temporary HQ in Kyoto, which quickly went to the wayside as old bad blood soured the big move and Evo got dogpiled by runs from all the Japanacorp. Kyoto is now acting as just the East Asian regional HQ during reconstruction.

This growth and these moves have several forces and players acting and fighting over power from inside and outside of Evo Africa. As if this region wasn't already a hotbed for shadow ops looking to snag new tech and extract Evo researchers, now



the battle wages to prove whether PWV can be a suitable global HQ and make Evo the first AAA to call Africa home.

Internally, PWV is being targeted as too underdeveloped and lacking security and international clout by factions loyal to Shibanokuji and Ysil respectively. Shibanokuji is actually promoting the moving of their HQ to the space station bearing their name and operating as a primarily virtual corporation. He's attacking the infrastructure of PWV and showing how easily the city's day-to-day operations can be stymied. It's dirty work, and the number of local Azanians getting caught in the crossfire is also playing against the PWV move as local support wanes with each attack. On the same side of the aisle, but with a very different angle, Ysil is attacking the security and international clout of PWV. Direct actions against Evo are up, and they come with a lot of insider info to help their success rate. Security around PWV is getting tighter and tighter lipped as they close ranks to root out their own internal troublemakers. No one is happy seeing their battle brothers dying because of internal corporate politics.

As for the international clout angle, well, that's all politics and image work. From backdoor deals to make the stay of a visiting exec at a high-end hotel as miserable as possible, to coordinating mobs of squatters to make a strip look far less appealing than it really is, these runs are interesting to say the least.

On the supporting side of all of this is Phaidin Umbra and all the monads who have found a nice little place to settle and get the frag out of the global spotlight. They want the HQ in Africa because less of them would need to travel and deal with the complications of being a registered monad, or trying to travel unregistered and risking an incident. Phaidin is big on direct action when needed, especially around PWV where he has a lot of influence as a native. Even those who know his true nature have little issue with a monad who is promoting the strength and empowerment of Azania and the continent as a whole.

Externally, the biggest troublemaker for Evo is Erika. While all the other AAA megas are looking at Evo's move to Africa as a pointless gimmick, Erika is genuinely trying to get a solid enough foothold in Africa to become the continent's primary megacorporation. While they lack a third A, they don't come with the history of Evo and they're playing that up all over African politics.

The problem both corps are having is that Africa isn't unified enough to be claimed by any one corporation, and many of the African nations have no desire to be claimed at all. They're happy playing everyone against each other and making money from both sides. The thing is, what government and locals want is rarely what comes to be in this world. Picking a side would be wise, but playing

both sides off each other for as long as possible before they pick is the likely end here.

If we were to speculate on what will come of the megacorporation's claims to Africa, it's going to go with a three-way split. Yup, three ways, because while Erika and Evo are moving in, Spinrad Global already has a solid foot planted in northeast Africa. Erika will likely sway the Gold Coast and Western Africa, SG will be hard to oust from the northeast, and Evo is strongly courting every nation in central and Southern Africa, not just Azania. The only small break in that might be Asamando, which could stick with Evo. Between the metahuman friendliness, the magic, the monads, and the massive fear of HMMHV, Evo is in a much better place to work with the ghoulish nation.

- ▶ From Plan's mouth to ghost's ears. Jobs all over Africa are playing out like this. Protection gigs at tribal political meetings, corporate extractions to soften or shift political ties, network to clear obstructions from the path, datasteals to expose biochemical mishaps and magical background manipulations, and the rest of the gamut you would expect. Work in Africa has been good, and man, do those grav-blimps ride smooth when you need to take public transportation across the continent.
- ▶ Balladeer

Before I leave this topic behind, let me talk about Evo's actual HQ structures. Evo Africa now encompasses several square kilometers of real estate, including the most advanced subarc in the metroplex. Using technology perfected on Mars, they went from small-time players with a research station out near Brakpan, to sprawling across the southeast region of the metroplex and digging down to create their primary subarc—with a rumored 100 sublevels—and connecting it to a collection of two dozen smaller subarcs and towers across the region. It's like an arcology sprawled above and below the ground all owned and controlled by Evo. It's all extraterritorial, it's all got decent security, but it's all accessible by the general public on the surface. Tourist traffic is extensive, and everyone comes to ooh and ahh at the gravtech vehicles floating and zipping around everywhere, along with touring the main tunnels and initial levels of the subarcs and towers. Public transport is all via gravtech, so they also get to ride around in this new future-tech town.

Along with the tourists, everyday workers also roll in here as they work in the production facilities, farms, retailers, and everything else a good company town needs dotted across properties.

The highest and lowest levels have better security and the most likely place runners are going to have to get into. Luckily, most people can get into the public areas pretty easily, so they just need a good plan to sneak into the controlled areas and then get back out through the public swarm.



- Part of the way Evo creates security for their R&D facilities is by putting them at the heart of another manufacturing plant. Access to the high-end goodies requires passing through a room or rooms with hundreds, if not thousands, of workers. Even the drone-operated facilities feel like you're walking through a field of a million eyes, as you never know if the security spider is watching through any given drone.
- 2XL
- Rough for the hooders common to PWV. They're rarely fans of collateral damage, and most even take responsibility if their actions put someone else in danger. Smart move for Evo in this region.
- Old Crow
- Things are changing here. There are a lot more unscrupulous runners in Azania than before Evo's growth spurt, and companies going after Evo know this. They're hiring runners who don't care. They get the double bonus of paydata and disruption of some operations.
- Afrikaaner

## NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Since we've talked about the Africa HQ and the solid chance it has of getting the crown, we feel the need to mention the dark horses as well, because they're backed by other forces inside Evo, and that means work. We also didn't bring it up earlier, but we might as well talk about what we've found out about the attack on the Vladivostok HQ. In fact, let's do that first.

Initial reports tossed a gas leak out there like all good corp PR flaks do. Those reports didn't last a single news cycle before footage of the actual events came out, and no one buys a gas leak story when they see footage of a legit assault on the building. Terrorism got the next news cycle, blaming anti-metahuman activists. That one stuck with a couple of internal news outlets, but outside the Evo family, everyone was pointing fingers at a corporate assault. Shadowrunners, so basically terrorists in most people's eyes, were blamed, and several suspected corporate backers, Yakushima and Erika at the top of the list, were blamed. Newsnets and screamsheets tossed out articles that pointed at everyone, but nobody had any hard evidence. None has yet to surface, but we have seen enough circumstantial paydata cross our node to point a finger no one else has pointed yet.

Ysil.

It was an inside job. One of the first things most people notice about the footage is the complete nonexistence of the building's automated defenses. Not a small outage or a single blind spot, but the complete deactivation of all countermeasures. Sure, this could have been handled by a parallel operation, but nothing in any internal reports indicate this is the case. As for why, Ysil needed

Vladivostok to take a hit so that their pitch for an Angkor Wat HQ, or at least an increased corporate presence in the naga nation, could be justified. We'd love some hard evidence, but Ysil is a very smart and slippery snake who knows how to cover their trail. Job's not exactly official, but we'll pay well for actual evidence. We can't promise it will bring down the Evo CEO, but it will certainly be used for some solid internal leverage.

All this said, right now Ysil is quite happy that their primary arcane opponent is gone because now they can push their pro-metasapient (read pro-naga) agenda within the corporation to the forefront. One of the biggest moves being pushed by Ysil is a different HQ option, specifically closer to Angkor Wat and well within the influence of the naga nation, if not in the nation itself. Ysil is putting a lot of political and social capital into this effort, but in the end, it's also going to require a vast amount of the regular kind of capital, as there is no current office large enough to move into in the region.

Ysil can easily gain access to the same techniques used in Azania and put together one hell of a beautiful base of operations in a relatively short time but that's a huge hurdle. Expect these first efforts to move toward developing contacts and building a base of connections in the region to push the move to a later date.

- Ysil was not one of Angkor Wat's favored children—in fact, that's part of why they worked so hard to get their position at Evo. Now, they're coming back like a conquering hero with a massive corporate backer and a wealth of mystical knowledge available at their whim.
- Snopes

Backed by the 30 percent miscellaneous owners and a majority of the metasapient citizens, but lacking a single major executive to push it, Yakut is being discussed internally as a new corporate home. The Awakened nation is closer to their current Russian home, but it isn't Russia. Yamatetsu moving to Russia was basically just a hop over the water because they didn't want to move too far from their sphere of influence. Yakut is the next logical step. It's closer to their sphere of influence than Africa, but still an Awakened nation that fits the ever-evolving Evo.

Without a single power focusing the effort, it's not likely to make the cut, but it is making a big impact on the shadows in the region. Mr. Johnsons contracted from a wide array of execs and citizens are pushing for influence. This is a lot of digging up dirt and blackmail, but there's a fair share of good old-fashioned favor trading. It's not all sunshine and roses, though; opposition within Yakut is strong, since they don't want any mega claiming them as their home.



Last, but certainly not least, we have Shibanojuji Free Fall Station. This one is an interesting contender, as its supporters know full well they won't be moving vast amounts of production or offices to the station, but instead use it as a centralized operational center with some C-suite-level executives and their staffs on site, but no mid-level execs or any major office staff. We think the biggest supporters of the station are those who enjoy more virtual operations. Shibanojuji would certainly focus on centering the primary Matrix host for the corp as a virtual HQ with the rather unique physical location.

This location isn't high on the list of anyone on the arcane side of things, though, as the lack of a manosphere on the station leaves them unable to safely access the facility. We're sure this effort is more about creating division within Evo than any actual hope of getting the HQ moved to space.

- ▶ Shibanojuji (the person) is playing forces against one another. This is all just more of the tech/mana rift that has been developing in Evo for years. He's not trying to break up Evo; instead, he fuels this feud to get both sides to push innovation and spy on each other in order to get ahead.
- ▶ Icarus
- ▶ Parallel developments between arcane and technological advancements are commonplace. As one field comes up with something new, the other works to imitate the effect and impact. Evo's tech and magic innovations have been playing leapfrog for years thanks to this internal rift.
- ▶ Glasswalker

## TRANSHUMANISM + THAUMATURGY = BAD BLOOD

Evo took some hits during the height of CFD. Most of the issues were self-inflicted, as they chose to slide back out of the nanotech market during the crisis—internally, they knew exactly what the frag was happening. The moves created some serious internal strife and divisiveness within the augmentation departments, which then became reclusive and hyper competitive. While different augmentation lines use different techniques and technologies, they spy on one another for concepts and innovations to imitate, improve, or integrate. This goes across the metaphysical divide, with the thaumaturgical divisions also looking at what the technological side is doing. It's quite the internal corporate espionage war that runs into not just issues of the bottom line, but also differing cultural views of their respective departments, which then come into conflict with or support some of the external connections being made by Evo. It's a complex can of worms.

- ▶ Those reclusive divisions are pushing the envelope again and Evo is once again, advancing cyber, bio, and nano tech at an astounding rate. Most of the new systems won't hit the open market for at least a few quarters, but runners make perfect test rats for these new systems.
- ▶ Nephrite

Back during the CFD crisis, the strong transhumanism movement within the corp stalled publicly while growing in the subculture. This really helped to focus the core leaders of the movement while also keeping out those who saw the movement as trendy or hip—as well as those who were just there for the superhuman power or pure wiz factor. The true heart of transhumanism within Evo was able to solidify, take hold, select a direction, and make bold plans that will be coming to action now that we are beyond the Disian influence. For an idea of what the movement looks like these days, check out this [link](#).

## TRANSHUMANISM IN 2080

Change is not made simply for the sake of change.

The modern transhumanist does not modify their self without a deep and genuine reason. Changing just to be different or countercultural is so culturally normal it is no longer a transhumanist trend. Change is intended to enhance both the body and the mind.

Change is healing.

Transhumanism is a road to ascension. This is not some literal rise to another plane, but a rise within ourselves that heals the broken aspects of our minds and bodies caused by the harsh world we inhabit. This world takes its toll; our road paves a route beyond this pricey highway.

Change is a tool for expression, not oppression.

We do not modify ourselves to claim we are better than others. We change ourselves to express our true state, not create an environment that holds others as lesser because they have not chosen to take the transhumanist path. Guide others to ascension; do not claim their path is failure.

Change is about the subject, not the observer.

We change for us. The need to be seen as different is a road to feelings of judgement, of others and self. When we walk the road of transhumanism, we do so with the intent to make ourselves better in our mind's eye, not in the eye of the beholder.

Change takes place in the mind well before it does in the body; readiness is key.

We do not make our change to see if it is the correct path. We find the correct path and make our change to walk it. The mind must be settled on the new self before the new self can be realized. To force a mind to come to terms with the body is the bane of transhumanism—that path is to force change, not embrace it.





Part of this movement goes back to the internal divide within Evo over progress between the areas of arcana versus technology, and this influence is spreading within the regions they are expanding in. Azania and Angkor Wat, as well as Yakut, are all nations with a strong Awakened population who respect magic and understand how poorly magic and tech mix. Their cultures revere the arcane and mystical past, and this is leading to heavy opposition for Evo when their internal transhumanist elements have a lot of public influence.

Internal PR works to keep those elements from gaining too much standing, though they also understand the need to keep the nuyen flowing, and Evo evolving. The shadows heat up as middle management begins to look out for their own people and careers without looking at the bigger picture.

We'll take Azania as an example. They have a rich arcane history, but Evo is also researching their cutting-edge development for gravtech and nanotechnology in the region. Local cultural forces don't like this, but political and commercial forces are benefiting greatly and aren't looking to overturn this overflowing apple cart. It should be said that this only benefits the political forces that are more aligned with the almighty nuyen than the Giasphere. The Azanian government is not all of one mind, and with all the years of separation between the haves and the have-nots, the population has a lot of people who are envious and angry about all

the attention the magic-users and augmented folk get. They're still the minority but since they bring and spend so much money, they tend to get a lot of favoritism from the local authorities.

- And of course, no one mentions the fact that Evo ripped off Aztechnology and now has the secrets of fragging cybermancy in the palms of their hands! Let me oh-so-delicately remind everyone about the fraggery Evo engaged in during the Disian Shadow War, manufacturing as many cyberzombies as they could to use as weapons against the Disians ... and how most looked the other way. I wonder how many of those were volunteers. Now, I get we were in the fight of our lives, but there was a lot of high talk at the time about morality and ethics—the implications of not only using such weapons, but what would become of that technology if we survived. Well, here we are. So much for “dealing with it once the crisis was over.” Looks like it's simply business as usual. Anyone who buys 'ware from Evo going forward, remember how they developed that shiny new implant.
- Borderline

## FUTURETECH

There is more than just one section of Evo's advanced tech division that is thriving. That success keeps them under constant attack, which might slow their growth and innovative progress, but it certainly isn't stopping them. We can see a future in which Evo is a global household name simply



because the products they are creating are so far in advance of other corps that no one can catch them easily. What their opponents are doing is slowing their ability to get those new innovations out to a global market. Jobs to hit production facilities, steal proprietary data, and even snag the occasional prototype (which is rare with the self-destruct systems in them) are abundant throughout Evo's extraterritorial properties. Properties that are starting to resemble sci-fi cities of the future as they utilize their advancements internally. It's not completely commonplace, and the security protocols around most of the tech are still just as harsh as the early days, but more and more secrets are leaking out.

But getting ideas out is only the first hurdle. Most of this tech came straight from the minds of AIs and monads. They operate tirelessly and innovate without concern for physical limitations. In fact, most of the tech developed by Evo isn't even developed in a physical form, but instead built within UV hosts that the AIs and monads access and program solely for the purposes of tech development. The lack of these environments and elements means it's nearly impossible for another corp to recreate their work. Even if they do get a completely operational piece of tech to reverse-engineer, they don't have the virtual environment and staff of hyper-tech-savvy scientists to make the process work. Most of the samples they're getting for their reverse-engineering efforts are just fragments and bits of the whole.

- ▶ Internal cells of corporate spies are starting to develop inside Evo's PWV facility. They're keeping functional equipment within the extraterritorial borders in order to keep them from self-destructing. The thing is, they need to do their work fast and often have to open and close research shops on the double as internal onsite security is always on the lookout. This is good for us because internal Evo security likes to use runners to root out cells. Whether it's sneaking in a spy to see what they've gotten or hiring a team to cut out a cell, shadow work inside their territory is common.
- ▶ Glitch

Speaking of the PWV properties, this place is not a passing fancy. Evo has settled in strongly. This was probably one of their best choices in the past three decades, as it has led to a strong connection with the local government, including huge investment in the construction and improvement of local infrastructure. They've definitely embedded themselves and demonstrated they aren't leaving any time soon.

Let's go back to the futuretech points that are making them the biggest target in PWV, despite the presence of all the other megas in the metropolis. At the top of the futuretech data desires list is gravtech. Even though it seemed to everyone like

everything was thrusters and motors for one minute, then suddenly it was slight distortions in the air and a technology that has lights added to make it more user-friendly, this tech did not just come out of left field. It was just initially developed elsewhere.

Mars, to be specific. Sure, it was moved to Africa for Earth gravity testing and some tweaking and production, but the African R&D facilities are now working more on improvements than initial development. This often means the payday that gets snagged is the equivalent of handing someone in the year 1900 the schematics for an improved optical chip reader. The base tech isn't even there, so understanding the advancements isn't exactly useful.

Why do we mention this? Because in order to get the base data, someone is going to need deniable assets who have no problem with zero-G, a long ride, and a visit to a planet and facility where there is little-to-no way of making it look like you belong. If another Evo insider can get you credentials, great. Anything else is going to just be you and your team infiltrating a facility with low gravity, unknown defensive capabilities, and a staff that still has plenty of monads who all work together and share data at will.

But this is where you are going to find the best root R&D payday. We also have an understanding that the tech produced on Mars doesn't have the self-destruct features because they never expected anyone to ever get there to take it from them.

Since we're talking space assets, we should talk about the massive opportunity that just opened up for Evo, as well as the jobs that are going down to clear their tech so it can fill a very necessary gap. The damage done to the primary Skyhook space elevator means Evo's gravtech and its ability to smoothly move on and off planet is getting pushed up to fill the transportation gap. The tech is already there, now they just need the authorization of other corps, governments, and the Corporate Court to use the tech on a larger scale. Evo is almost guaranteed to get clearance for widespread use of their gravlift services.

- ▶ Especially S-K. While they're happy as a clam to get nuyen for repairing the fallen hook thanks to being the construction contract holder, they'd be slotted that Evo is pushing to dominate space lifting after they got their hand slapped when they first tried to get in on Skyhook back in the day.
- ▶ Sunshine
- ▶ There are rumors that Evo caused the elevator's failure. Then again, it's also been blamed on almost every other corp and entity on the planet that has any space interests.
- ▶ Snopes

Since we're still proud members of this club, we're going to drop something we caught wind of



that is hush-hush. Africa is not the only place being used to test and develop gravtech. Over in east Asia, Ilyushin Aerospace is slipping gravtech into their standard products and masking them as basic tech. Look for work in the area targeting some of Ilyushin's transports, as they're hiding the gravtech systems in them and using them in the region without proper approvals.

- That makes some sense now. A chummer was telling me some tall tale about a gig to grab an Ilyushin Kuma hauler when the thing just flew off. Went from slow rolling down some switchbacks to just lifting off and settling in on the road at the base.
- Red Anya
- Ilyushin is also doing a lot of passenger safety system work that several of the other transportation producers are looking to acquire after word got out (leaked) they were tracking a 99 percent survival rate in ultra-high-speed collisions. It's not getting scads of nuyen tossed at it, but it is getting attention and it's probably going to get revealed as gravtech once someone can snag good intel on the system.
- Icarus

## A TICK IN THE WIN COLUMN

We're going to toss this into this section as it relates to Evo but isn't exactly about future work, except for filling the power void left behind by the long overdue (and extremely costly) death of Cynthia Bills.

Some of you may have caught a glimpse of the little conversation snippet we put out in the *Power Plays* data dump. The one that put all of us in the crosshairs of Cynthia Bills. This psycho threatened us directly, and while she was quiet for a hot minute after she lit the fuse, she used the Disian Shadow War to make a lot of moves that cost us a lot of lives. She wasn't directly helping the Disians, but her attacks on the runners she blamed for ghost knows what certainly paralleled the Disian assaults on the Defenders.

It was Bull who finally put the pieces together and saw her involvement. You can thank him for putting together a solid team of contractors who had to slog through a heap of red herrings and misdirects before they were able to finally pin down Bills' real location for long enough to put an end to her. She's left some allies behind, but we've been assured her original code is toast.

Body, mind, and digital soul all blasted into the ether.

Breathe a little easier today, chummers. This threat is over.

- The threat is over, but the work is coming in hot. Bills had a lot of power and clout at Evo. It was part of why it took the "contractors" (why don't we just call them runners?) so long

to get a bead on her. Now that's she's gone, there is quite the scurry to snatch up bits of her power. Let's try to help them end up in the right hands.

- Old Crow
- She was quite influential among monads. Most didn't know her true identity or the fact that her code was seriously corrupted, and thus they idolized her. They're not happy she's gone, and some are just a tad vengeful—just a warning to those out there. The big threat is gone, but some minor nuisances have been created.
- Bull

## HORIZON

POSTED BY: CORPORATE RAIDERS

I think we've been using the tagline "On the Horizon" for a while without anything noteworthy emerging. That seems about to change. Big moves are on the Horizon! They've been quietly sitting at the number ten spot, planning and plotting away. But it's not just one big move. There's one move that could be bigger than the others, but it's still not a sure thing, despite lots of speculation and a bit of rising stock prices all around. Let me cover a bit of background and then hit the highlight reel of where the action is going to be in the realm of Horizon.

## JUST A LITTLE LOOK BACK

Horizon is the newest of the AAA megas. They seemed to come out of nowhere, with no Golden Ticket trick, and slipped into their ranks—they've since sat (mostly) quietly in their number-ten seat. In the shadows, we've seen them playing the field across the globe: at home in LA, throughout the PCC, deals with Ares, work in Chicago, operations throughout Europe, heavy connections in South America, research in Africa and Australia, corporate makeovers for hundreds of corps, and quiet acquisitions of smaller companies with a lot of immediate benefits. We facilitated all of this, and yet we never saw their place in the ranks rise. Even when the audits hit, they still somehow managed to keep their value low enough to stay at the bottom, even though we knew they were bigger than they claimed.

- The audits were looking for those who were lying about being big, not lying about being small.
- Icarus

Horizon kept gobbling and growing and raking in profits, but never seemed to gain a pound. It was obviously all part of a plan, but who looks for someone playing weak in the megacorporate world of heavy hitters and perpetual power mongering?



The news about their talks with OmniStar for a corporate merger drew a lot of attention to Horizon that they may not have wanted. Then again, they aren't exactly poor planners, so it's likely just part of the grander plan. This attention has them ready to make their move, and we're on the cusp of seeing just how widely the horizon has expanded.

Now that they've fully fueled up, they're about to pop off a growth spurt that is going to leave them and a lot of others with some growing pains, and that's where we runners will make our nuyen.

Let's start with the upcoming actions items!

## UPDATED OS

Word has been on the street for a bit now that OmniStar (OS) is looking for a way into the AAA pool, and they've been flirting hard with Horizon. Rael Whiteoak and Charisma Associates have been hard at work cleaning up the image of Lone Star, giving pointers to DocWagon, and making Manadyne and Novatech look like the be-all and end-all of their fields. It's a pretty solid sign of good potential for an OS-style merger with all this cleaning up of your soon-to-be-partner's image. While Whiteoak is the CA connection, the merger is being spun up by Cove Morgan. It's a bold move for a bold troll, and it will definitely boost his rep and seal his place as Horizon's next head honcho when Cline decides to retire (more on that later). It's a wild match with OS bringing in a wide array of big names, and Horizon gaining some solid assets in fields where they aren't currently strong in. It's a win-win if they can iron out some of the pressing issues.

Now, this merger plan comes with its fair share of issues, but so does everything else in the world of the megacorps. These touchy points are where we runners come in, either irritating them to the point of breaking or smoothing them down so the process can move on. In the case of OS and Horizon coming together, there are five main issues: trusting Reinadelmar, conflicts of interest between the larger corp's expanded kinship with runners and bringing in a cop corp, keeping internal partners' images clean while still doing so for external customers, Lone Star's involvement in a corp that deals with other corps' dirty secrets, and finally, other corps that might want to team up and that are a better fit than OS, round out our big five.

Let's take each in turn.

First and foremost is trusting Reinadelmar. Yes, I know she's backing OS. I've talked to Stargazer extensively on some issues and research. While her intentions appear to be sincere and I genuinely believe we may have a legitimate and quite powerful replacement for Big D, I understand not trusting a being who thinks in vastly different ways and scales than we do.

To manage this, Horizon is testing the waters with these initial connections in public, but we

runners are getting hired to do some other tests behind the scenes. Infiltrations to get a real feel for Lone Star attitudes. Datasteals to check whether the books are being cooked with funneled-in dragon hoard. Intel ops to dig for hidden connections to other groups and other deals being made by Reinadelmar that could compromise Horizon. Recon on all the new leviathans on the scene who are working with Reinadelmar. Deep hacks to plant the Consensus data collection code in OS subsidiary systems so the program can assess the value of a merger. The jobs are hot and abundant.

- These jobs are interesting because the contracts tend to include a stipulation on silence and minimizing the risk of connection back to Horizon. They want the data, but they'd rather not make it look like they're double-checking a dragon on her word.
- Glitch

Second issue comes in terms of street relations. Outside of the Las Vegas technomancer debacle, Horizon has generally kept a good rapport with runners, especially the ethical or white hat hooder kind. From the early days of trying to look like a good-guy corp, Horizon has tried to avoid treating runners poorly. Problem is, we can all think of a certain corporation, now part of OS, that had just about the opposite reputation with runners. There is a lot of concern over the huge conflicts of interest between Horizon's past and currently expanded kinship with runners, and Lone Star's past of racism, brutality, and abuse of runners. They're a cop corp with a bad reputation, and even though Charisma Associates is doing a great job with cleaning up their image, old wounds leave scars for all to see. They're hard to forget.

As it stands, forces both internal and external to Horizon are playing in this conflict. Some test the integrity of Lone Star changes, while others push LS officers to break with new protocols and fall back on old behaviors. While Morgan and his cronies want to see this merger happen, a lot of executives at Horizon are sick of dealing with the black eyes of subsidiaries with too much freedom, or decisions made with a bleeding heart rather than a corporate heart of stone.

- The Aztlan-Amazonian War and Truman in Chicago were problems they could have lived without, but it at least goes to show us they aren't faultless.
- Stone

This leads nicely into the third issue, and that is keeping everyone in the company's image clean while still making money doing it for external companies. Ares let Horizon do some PR work, but would they have done so if Horizon included a rival private security corp or arms manufacturer? Probably not. For this merger to work, OS needs



to bring in fewer problems than they cause and help find new avenues for Charisma to gain clients. Horizon is on the prowl, and if they find some juicy jobs and ditching OS is the price, they don't need the merger; it's just a booster, not a game-changer.

- ▶ Jobs are flowing that test the waters of these potential mergers. Since they got on the AAA scene, no one has really been afraid of Horizon. They're fun. They're helpful. They have a great rep. All spin. They just avoid stepping on toes because they're smaller, but a merger with any of the prospects is going to be a jump in rank and size, and it's probably going to attract negative attention and publicity. They're using runners to push buttons at OS, Ares, Maersk, and other big prospects. A lot of the runs are false flag operations meant to look like one of those merger rivals taking a shot, but many just point straight to Horizon in order to see how the corps (and in particular their citizens) react. Horizon wants a smooth transition, and if a merger can be shaken by a single incident, they'll want nothing to do with it. Imagine what even a small, concerted effort by another corp could do.
- ▶ Snopes

The fourth issue again runs along similar lines. Horizon has a lot of dirt on clients across the globe. When you do PR for someone, you need to know every dirty little secret that might come up so you have a strategy in place against it. Most never come to light thanks to solid PR and a hefty bit of shadow work. That means they disappear into the data archives of Horizon and forever haunt their former clients. Now imagine they are about to join up with a global police department under the umbrella of a corporation that is all about internal cooperation.

That's a lot of fear.

As an issue for Horizon, it's as simple or complex as whatever deal they make with Lone Star about data sharing—which you can be sure Lone Star is getting the short end of the stick on because the Consensus needs all the data! Now it's all about those current and former clients looking for ways to get their secrets scrubbed. Sounds like a shadowrun to me. Clients big and small are contracting datasteals for their secrets. It's good money for skilled hackers and teams that can get their data ninja in place. Pay is usually commensurate to client size, and the amount and explosiveness of the data.

- ▶ Most are paying programmers good nuyen to code a program that will find copies of the data and erase it too.
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ That kind of program is a myth. Then again, so was a Kechibi Code-level program, and we've seen that pop up.
- ▶ Glitch

Horizon needs to look at whether they want to purge any of that data before a merger, or maybe offer a secure subscription service to keep information isolated from sharing even among subsidiaries. It would be like legal blackmail, but it could definitely save them some money and security headaches as their datastores get hit and they have to deal with the collateral damage.

There's also the matter of information security going forward. I think a lot of this situation can be dealt with the way Horizon deals with most things ... proper spin! We here in the shadows talk a lot about OS, but on the street and among the everyday people, it's nothing. Sure, some corps use scare tactics to get citizens to think OS is the head controlling all the arms of the megacorporate monster, but in reality it's not in front of their face enough to stick. It's too distant and disconnected from their everyday lives.

See how that spin goes.

It's true, though. We make connections because they help us know just who we'll be looking over our shoulder for if we scrag a run. But Joe Wageslave only cares if Horizon Media puts out the next season of his favorite sim series soon, or that DocWagon clinics are staffed properly, and Lone Star is out cowboying up against the bad guys.

- ▶ If people wanted to fear intel gathering, they should already fear the Consensus. It's still fragging creepy.
- ▶ Bull

Our fifth and final major issue is competition. OS is not the only game in town, and Horizon has a few other suitors to consider. Now, none are pursuing them with the fervor of OS, but that doesn't matter if the deal is better. There are three serious contenders, but only one of them would bring a similar bang for their buck as OS.

Ares.

Yup, the talks are quiet, but since all the trouble Ares has had in the past decade, Horizon has met and discussed a merger to strengthen both parties. With a similar feel to OS's style of merger with independence rather than subjugation, Ares and Horizon would be looking to consolidate power in North America but maintain their independent images.

- ▶ They could just make a handshake deal to avoid each other's toes. It would be about as effective as a merger if the execs aren't all on board.
- ▶ Glitch

That's not every possible issue, but that covers the highlights, and it's plenty to go on if you're looking for work or trying to figure out who you're working for. Keep in mind this merger could get signed tomorrow, or it could be a year or more down the road, it all depends on Horizon's mood and when



they want to make their move. Tensions are already high, so it could be soon to bulk up before escalation, or it could be a waiting game to let everyone else's suspicions fade. All I really know is that when they make a move, they will depart that number-ten seat and jump up; how high is the only question.

## RALLY THE DEFENDERS

Sometimes, when things are going your way, you don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth. Then, once that gift horse has been around and their gifts have paid off, you start to wonder why this strange horse with the dangerous mouth is giving you gifts. That's the phase that those who belonged to the former Defender Movement are coming to with Horizon. As a very general bit of backstory, Horizon, using their mastery of information gathering and application, was a significant influence on the development and accomplishments of the Defenders during the Disian Shadow War. You want specifics, hit the backlog and check out any of the big data-drops in the last few years, you can follow the progress, but I am not interested in looking back, I want to talk going forward. Now that the war is over, Horizon has acquired some new assets and finally earned some respect. They're no longer just the "entertainment corporation," they're a solid all-around mega with a growing reputation as a good information corporation. And their relationship with shadowrunners is no small part of that information network. During the DSW, it was a necessity, but now, after the threat is over, what do we do? Go back to the status quo? Build a future together? Forget all about it until the next big threat?

I can offer Horizon's plan, or at least what the Consensus considers the best way forward.

Mutual respect.

The Consensus not only tracks the HIP score of its own citizens, it has software tracking the info on any and every person it has ever encountered. You may not have a SIN, but you certainly have a HEAT (Horizon Expendable Asset Tracking) score. It covers your loyalty, success rates, negotiation techniques, skill sets, and so on. All of which is used to determine how useful you are to the company. Using this, Horizon wants to stabilize their relations with runners who keep a high enough HEAT.

This doesn't mean all runners are going to become Company Men. The acronym says it all. You're still expendable assets. They've just assigned you an asset value. Corporate Johnsons who have access to this will offer better pay to teams with a higher average HEAT score, so keep that in mind if you want to do a lot of work for Horizon.

- ▶ There's valuable paydata if you can snag HEAT ratings and sell them to other corps. Knowing who's loyal to whom is powerful intel in the shadows.
- ▶ Fianchetto





That's mostly on the positive side of the Consensus's efforts, but everything is not all sunshine and rainbows with their connections to the Defenders. On the other side, not everyone is entirely comfortable with Horizon's newfound power or their enhanced relationships with runners. Several problems should definitely be pointed out before we move on.

First and foremost, runners can expect less direct retribution from Horizon going forward to maintain a decreased level of animosity, but work from the corporation will be reflective of their HEAT status. That sounds better than it really is because runners with a low HEAT score can expect to be at risk for jobs that focus on that "Expendable" portion of the acronym. The repercussion hits won't be direct, but the work you get hired for will be dangerous. Watch out for gigs that seem too good to be true or that Mr. Johnson refers to as a "milk run."

Horizon's friendly demeanor isn't popular with some of the old guard of runners who see the younger crowd getting too chummy with the megacorp. The rift is apparent in the shadows, and while no one wants to admit it, it's a serious problem. The cohesiveness of the network is only as good as the membership, and outsiders are looking to play on this rift to break up this burgeoning band. They're pushing jobs that look like Horizon gigs but aren't and smudging the megacorp's reputation with the former Defenders who are susceptible to the right manipulations.

What we need to be aware of in all this are the tricks and techniques being used by the other side. Money is the first big tool and something the opposition has in spades, and it's what we runners want more than anything most of the time. The opposition is using money to buy allegiance or trick runners into doing work for the wrong side while thinking they're in the right. Money is a great manipulative force, and since tracking a money trail isn't always linear and many hackers are masters of monetary misdirection, it's a popular opening move.

The next great manipulator is the dangerous crossover between business and pleasure; or making work a bit too personal. Horizon makes you feel good. They make you feel useful. They make you feel like you have meaning and power. They make you feel cared for as if you matter to them. But you're just an asset. You're disposable. And they're going to use your feelings against you. They'll play you until you aren't of use, and others who know your loyalties are going to do the same, or at least try to masquerade as your new buddies and do the same.

Be careful who you trust. Horizon is not your friend, they're not your benevolent benefactor, and they are not on your side. They're on their side, and only their side.

My point here is simple. Be wary. We gained a lot working together with Horizon against the Disians, but we always need to remember they are still a megacorporation. We help them profit, and they help us profit—as long as we keep the proper perspective.

## THE CLINE DECLINE

We may be nearing the end of an era, but how that era ends hasn't been determined. Gary Cline brought Horizon into the AAAs and has fought hard to keep them there. His contributions to the success of Horizon from actor to CEO have been immeasurable, but he has indicated he is close to bowing out and cueing the final curtain call. His departure isn't assured, and there are myriad questions on what comes next.

That call and those questions have fired up the shadows like nobody's business. Several parties are vying to fill the power void he leaves behind him, others are looking at ways to ensure the dirt he carries stays buried, and Cline is looking to harness the best golden parachute he can while also looking to set up some influence that can last beyond his departure.

Most see Cove Morgan as the obvious choice to step into Cline's role. He has successfully led the Unity Project and shown he can turn the worst of situations into a shining diamond, but no one is sure exactly how that will translate to the CEO position. His own camp is making sure to sew up any loose ends his efforts have left behind while building up some dirt to fling at opponents who may also vie for the title.

Most know Corinne "Corey" Potter as Governor Potter, a leading face behind the independence of Seattle. She was also a member of the Dawkins Group. Obviously, I can't pull up proof of that or else someone else would have tossed it out long ago when people were trying to figure out who was behind Seattle's move for independence and what forces were pulling the strings. Now that this huge undertaking is completed, Potter is poised to return to the Horizon family under her new moniker. The move could likely coincide with the departure of Cline, and who better to step in as CEO of Horizon than the CEO of Seattle. Seems like a perfect transition.

There are others with a chance, but they are more likely to function as distractions from the two main candidates, or as pawns in their battle. The shadows should heat up with this battle between the king and queen of Horizon, and the data trails are going to be convoluted by Potter's Seattle position and the fact that she's not publicly part of the megacorp. Add in her direct connection to Dawkins, and while Morgan may seem like a shoe-in to most, he is most definitely not without serious competition.



- ▶ Potter's ties are likely to come out as rumors, but I don't think that will work against her. As she moves over to Horizon, she'll get a fresh HIP score. If rumors connect her to a Dawkins operation that successfully liberated Seattle and gained Horizon some serious standing in the city, you can expect that to boost her HIP, not hurt it.
- ▶ Sunshine

Cline is looking at two schools of "dirt buriers" coming his way if he looks to step down. On one side there are those who will want to bury him in the dirt and keep him from ever using any of those secrets or letting them slip from his grasp. On the other side are those who want to bury him in money to make sure all those secrets are neatly erased with no reason for him to ever want or need to use them.

Hidden among those who want him dead to hide the dirty secrets he holds are those who are well aware of Cline's intelligence. He is most definitely the type of man who would keep a dead drop set up. Should he die mysteriously or suspiciously, you can be sure his cache of dirt is going to flow down from the megacorporate mountaintops like an avalanche. With this as the case, assassinations against Cline aren't going to be one-off affairs and will definitely be a complex operation that not only eliminates the CEO, but also gains access to all of his communication systems. Personal commlink, Horizon commlink, private hosts for the CEO and other C-suite members, and so on. This is the kind of run where legends are made.

For those looking to simply toss money his way, it's still not a straightforward proposition. Sure, they could hand him certified credsticks by the truckload, but just the production and loading of that many sticks will create a rumor trail. Those rumor trails will be enough to point fingers in the right direction and the digging will begin. The point of the money is to hide the source, not create a blazing sign over their head. This means creativity when it comes to getting him assets with a large and steady enough value to serve these purposes that aren't bulky and obvious. Sure, someone could drop a pallet of gold bars at his place in LA, but that's going to draw attention. If someone, however, were to quietly deliver a rare Van Gogh or Monet or even one of the more modern paintings by Chernik, the money is there and it's not thousands of pounds or covered in data trails and rumors. It would just be a matter of paying the couriers well or making sure those couriers don't have a chance to talk about what they delivered.

No matter whether you end up playing for a side or not, the shadows we all work in are going to heat up, and that means attention we don't necessarily want. Keep all that in mind when you take this work.

## MONADS AND WORSE

Luckily, CFD is no longer the terrifying problem it once was. Cures exist, and the rampant propagation to preserve their code has dwindled. This doesn't mean it doesn't exist, and it certainly doesn't mean the monads are universally loved and accepted in the world—court cases still ebb and flow with news cycles over corporeal rights and remunerations. But this does mean the monads face the same ebb and flow of fear and hatred as news reports look to get more attention and draw in more ad revenue. Since the dawn of shared stories, everyone knows that violence, sex, and fear garner the most attention, and the news agencies play that game better than anyone. "If it bleeds, it leads," is a principle known by every newshound, whether they like it or not.

The only way to battle this is with good PR—a Horizon specialty. Several monad groups that have managed to develop deep enough pockets to buy some Charisma Associates assistance are garnering attention. These ties aren't exactly making CA or Horizon universally popular, and the blowback usually comes via shadow contracts.

Thus far, CA has campaigns promoting the community culture of the Collective, the generosity and forward-thinking strategies of We Stayed for Our Future, and even the cultural blending and humanitarian efforts proselytized by Eshraki in Salem. This is not sitting well with those who have seen and experienced the darker side of all three of those groups.

The Collective is led by a monad named Hisp, and that community culture is focused on the commune part of the phrase. Monads isolate themselves from those around them, creating fear among those who listen to rumors and fear their children being stolen in the night by the Bogeyman. Problem is, they aren't all rumors. The Collective has built their numbers by gathering what they saw as "unwanted" youth. They've contracted runs to clear out orphanages and deliver all the kids to a Collective site, sent out their own to gather the young from among the outcasts and squatters of society, and even taken children from their rightful homes when their hacking efforts have revealed a family that is either neglectful or abusive.

And Horizon is spinning them into a pleasant community that welcomes lost souls and takes care of the abandoned and downtrodden. Jobs to take back kids, prove coercion, or get revenge on Collective sites responsible for the deaths of children that didn't take to their "assistance" very well are on the rise.

At We Stayed for Our Future, Charisma Associates is painting Xander Colt as some sort of progressive messiah, looking to advance metahumanity through understanding, as his members seek to bridge the divide between monads and metahu-



mans by reminding both that they could not exist without each other. For every monad who sought to return to their code-based form, another found comfort and peace within the physical. He and others within WSOF are painted as patient and understanding souls who look to make the best of a situation that started in tragedy.

Behind the scenes, WSOF is most focused on that “O.” They don’t care about the future of meta-humanity, they care about the future of monads and the way the world treats them. The whole organization is littered with zealots who are little more than terrorists who believe monads and metahumans should not live side-by-side, but instead as master and slave. They see themselves as the next step in human evolution with their transition from metahumans to mechahuman.

- I will never understand the quantity of money it takes to not only buy the humanity of the PR reps within Horizon, but also the sheer volume that’s needed to make the bulldrek they pander palatable to the masses. The only good thing about it is the small percentage that trickles down into the shadows and could potentially end up helping someone with a soul.
- Turbo Bunny

I’m still trying to wrap my head around the message of Eshraki and her organization in Salem within the NEMA, formerly part of the QZ.

Okay, it’s really a cult, so I’m going to call it as it is.

Their cult consists of monads who were pummeled by the nanite cocktail that rained down on Boston. Sure, it consists of the more stable survivors, but anyone who experienced the lockdown knows the horrors that came from the minds twisted by the battle between Cerberus and Deus for control of anyone peppered in those nanites. Now, add the rather unique mentality and viewpoints held by the witches around Salem who have affiliated themselves with this group—thanks to their most prominent member and the primary patron of the cult: Eliohann/Cereus.

From what Charisma Associates is spewing, Eliohann and Cereus are the pinnacle of mental health and a prime example of how well an electronic mind and physical form can integrate. Anyone with experience inside the QZ knows full well that Salem and the surrounding area are the physical manifestation of the mental stability of E/C, and it’s usually a fragging nightmare. Luckily, most of the world has no clue what it’s really like inside the QZ, and therefore, they buy into the drek CA is spewing. The line of drek has been bought so wholeheartedly, rumors have been popping up about Eliohann being spotted outside the QZ. Wales, Denver, Seattle, St. Louis, Shanghai, and Lagos all have reported sightings of the “opalescent dragon with the massive earring in its horn.”

But I’m not here to focus on that, I’m here to focus on the lies and misinformation Horizon is spinning in order to make Eshraki look like a peacemaker, and the calming voice coming from within the formerly turbulent QZ. I know their opponents are contracting gigs to head into the former QZ and get feeds from the Salem region to see what it’s really like, but it’s a rough place, and no feed looks good when a group of runners are rolling in guns blazing. Looks like the runners are the problem. A few teams that have made it back out with what they thought was good footage have discovered the footage edited surreptitiously and tweaked to once again make it look like the runners are terrorists attacking the peace and tranquility of Salem. Take these jobs with care and back up your data often, preferably off-line or faraday-protected to keep the monad hackers from doing their digital dirty work.

- Whatever the situation is with Eliohann, I’m looking forward to getting some real data on him. He was a solid dragon back in the day and he didn’t deserve this drekstorm. If anyone has the mental fortitude to hold off the likes of a digital Deus, it’s El. Hit me with any uncorrupted data you gather, I’ll pay and keep it quiet.
- Bull
- Making a good name for the monads isn’t the worst PR effort. The problem is the monads whose reputations they’re laundering are bad hombres. There are plenty of other monad organizations that are legitimately trying to do good, but they don’t have the resources to buy a Horizon makeover.
- Plan 10
- My better half isn’t wrong. The good thing is those organizations may not be resource-rich enough for a CA makeover, but they got enough to buy shadowrunners for a gig or two. Expect work to make CA and Horizon look like heels here. Most monads think it’s better to maintain a neutral rep than to get all shined up, only to find out the chrome is just plated and chips off easy.
- Plan 9

## A TRUE CONSENSUS

If anyone can get access to the Consensus analysis of the mergers before announcements or decisions are made, they can make a fortune—because we all know the Consensus is going to be making that call. Cline and Morgan can have whatever opinions and desires they want, but if the Consensus feels the minds of Horizon’s citizens are not behind any mergers and the will of the masses could create unrest, it’s going to do its damndest to right the ship.

I’m not sure everyone knows that the Consensus is a common shadow contractor. I didn’t even think about it for a long time. I just looked at it as this creepy program that guided the choices of Horizon based on the input of its citizens and its



own analysis of what was best for the corporation. I didn't even think about the fact that what was best for the corporation could involve a need for shadowrunners to manipulate things in their favor. It makes sense.

This means as talks of mergers get closer and the Consensus starts to lean in a direction, it's going to put out contracts to push things one way or the other. This work could look like anything. The Consensus doesn't do linear. You aren't going to get a contract to hit an Ares production facility in order to slow Ares' production on their latest drone. Instead, you're going to get a job to lean on the son of a local mob boss who has been betting a little too heavily on urban brawl matches. The Consensus knows the mob kid is going to be desperate for cash and that one of his best friends from grade school now works as a project manager for Ares' latest drone program. Mob kid is going to ask a favor of his friend, and that friend is going to lose focus at work or possibly pull some early production models off the line with "defects" to sell them on the black market for some cash to help his old friend out.

The Consensus doesn't just know its own citizens. It knows metahumanity and it tracks everyone it can. It may only generate HIP scores for citizens, but we've talked about HEAT scores for other assets, and it maintains a massive behavioral and informational database on everyone it can. The better it knows the metahuman mind, the better it can serve to please not just the conscious minds of its citizenry, but also their collective subconscious.

## DUCKING DAWKINS

Let me wrap up with a little look at what the Dawkins Group is up to during all of this. First, they're obviously picking sides. They're an intel gathering group, and they know where their intel could best be put to use—or better stated, where it could be respected enough to be put to use. That's often the problem with merging into a corporation that already has an intel operation.

Dawkins is definitely trying to get away from Spin-Global, even though those talks seem more about keeping off toes than collaboration. With

Aegis among their assets, Dawkins is going to be looked at as second fiddle. The jobs aren't usually something direct against SG, but usually some counter-intel operation or a parallel operation that cuts off another runner team or thwarts their efforts somehow. Dawkins doesn't like direct conflict, and they definitely don't like the trail or the fingers to be pointed at them after the smoke has cleared.

Then you have Ares. They've had intelligence connections since their inception, and while relationships have strained, ebbed, and flowed over the years, they have the UCAS alphabet soup agencies in their back pocket, or at least back doors into all their systems. There is also the ego to contend with that Dawkins just doesn't want. Ares Macro-technology has a history, and they aren't going to let their history be sullied by mistakes caused by a merger partner. They've had their issues in the past, and rather than learn, they've just built up a stronger "we are always right" mentality.

So, yes, this means the Dawkins Group is generally leaning toward OmniStar as their preferred merger partner. For them, it's the least of all the evils. They can bring their intel-gathering skills to a place where maybe the law could act on it (as long as there is profit in it), or at least know they aren't going to be outright ignored or countered at every turn. Dawkins Group agents are especially keen on gaining access to Manadyne and Novatech. While Lone Star and DocWagon, along with dozens of the smaller members, will benefit from the new data access, it's a lot to sift through. But with the formula and coding access offered by that pair, they know it will be a benefit to all.

It's a crap shoot outside of those three. Dawkins agents are constantly working the angles, and maybe a dark horse could come from behind, but as it stands, Dawkins is leaning OS, and that's good for the new umbrella megacorporation.

- Expect Dawkins to push their agenda in the shadows hard. If the speculation above about Potter is accurate, that means both potential CEOs are on board with an OS merger. Interesting time to be alive. Better to play in some corporate games than to deal with another metaplanar fragfest.
- Bull





# BREAKING EVEN

- For some, simply surviving a massive catastrophe and a war is considered a win. For those who survived the Disian Shadow War, this can't be expressed enough. But corporations are a different kind of animal. Because in their mind, breaking even is the same as failure. And for Ares and Spinrad Global, it's ... well, it's complicated, especially considering some of what was previously posted. And that's what we're here to discuss.
- Glitch

## ARES: GOD OF WAR(?)

POSTED BY: TURBO BUNNY

Ares is in an interesting place. According to public perception, they're huge, sprawling, and successful. And they've also finally settled into their new home in Atlanta. According to internal memos, they've gotten rid of a ton of problems. Take that for what it's worth.

For the first time since I can remember, the company's not tearing itself apart from infighting, the bug threat has been dealt with (so they say), business is looking good, popular opinion is behind them, there aren't any real corporate enemies looking to take them down (for the time being), so it should be a clear road ahead, right?

Well ... perception and reality are two different things.

From what I gathered, Ares put a lot of money—and I mean “annual budget of a small nation” money—into fighting against the Disians, and they did it all without anyone knowing about it. And I mean that literally. Those of us in the shadows only *now* know the role Ares played with *Operation: Cheshire*, but as far as the general public is concerned, it's been business as usual.

- Which is an intelligence feat that rivals any in history. And that's not hyperbole.
- Fianchetto



- But at what cost? Rumors are starting to circulate about the lengths that Ares and the Defender Movement went to in order to keep Cheshire a secret.
- Old Crow

And if that wasn't enough, there's the question of how they pulled it off. Details are sketchy—and conflicting depending on who you ask—but by enacting *Cheshire*, Ares pretty much confirmed they had methods for extraplanar travel. How does it work? No idea. Give me a VCR, DNI, or an old-fashioned gear shift and a steering wheel, and I'll show you things you can't imagine. But all this magic stuff? Way over my head. All I know is that it worked, they blew the bad guys up, the sky broke, magic itself caught a cold, and it don't work anymore. Whatever Ares had, it doesn't work anymore. Like, at all.

- Oh, for frag's sake ...
- Arete
- It's good to see what the mundanes think sometimes, even when it's dead wrong.
- Glasswalker
- Ares is likely in the same boat as everyone else. With magic and most of the metaplanes in a kind of flux, travel between metaplanes has become not only near impossible, but extremely dangerous.
- Ethernaut

Apparently, the project's budget was cut back and a skeleton crew is currently trying to figure out how to make it work again. And while that freed some funds up, the big thing they were expecting, either in terms of PR, using footage from the whole thing to make movie money, or somehow mining the astral plane, went poof. But that apparently has just as much to do with the Corporate Court as anything else. It's kind of hard to collect accolades when the monster you just helped slay never existed. Instead, Ares is simply claiming they, like a lot of other people, suffered some losses because of the raging manastorms and other natural disasters.

- Which is odd, because one would think Michael Bishop would be slotted at missing out. But instead, he seems to be taking it all in stride. Our guess is that it's part of the deal brokered regarding *Cheshire*.
- Corporate Raiders

Now, Ares isn't broke (not like, say, the poor fraggers over at MCT), but Bishop is definitely pulling himself up by the bootstraps. Fat is being trimmed and funds reallocated as the budget surpluses are being tapped. Worse, it happened right as the fines on MCT were coming together, so a bunch of things that Ares would have loved to

scoop up, like the rail lines across North America, slipped away. They're not racing forward, but they're not rolling back; they're just stuck in neutral and looking for some traction. Once you understand that, a lot of things start to make sense.

Right now, Ares seems to be going back to basics and re-investing in a few of their key divisions to find, or make, some of that traction.

## ARES MACROMOTORS

We'll start with what I know best: cars. Ares has been leaning on new production lines in nearby Alabama with the kind of all-American advertising campaign that made them famous. Cars mean freedom, and Ares cars mean *more* freedom. Showcasing large engines on cars and even bigger trucks, putting monster rides on the road that are normally just for offroad, demilitarizing vehicles to sell on the civilian market—Ares Motors has been pushing hard to make this the norm all across the CAS. They've even put feelers out in the PCC.

Even if the worldwide market is more interested in the smaller, cheaper, and electric lines, Ares has their cake and is trying to eat another one as well. The problem is that production lines are too focused on trucks in the CAS, it's leaving a shortage in the smaller, more popular cars that are made overseas.

They'd love to re-open facilities in Motor City and get production back up, but that's not going to happen anytime soon. Rumors say Ares has sent assets, and is hiring more, to find and exploit cracks in the shadow city.

- Yeah, but I'm not passing those jobs on. Taking shots at a corp is one thing, but trying to wreck a bunch of people for simply trying to survive?
- Bull
- That kind of anti-corp collective will collapse soon enough. Pushing it over faster will help them get closer to getting over it, and you get paid for doing so. Bull's not the only one with contracts to fill. Drop me a line if interested.
- Cosmo
- We're doing just fine, *frag you* very much. But go ahead, send whoever you want. We'll give them a nice welcome when they show. And we have more than enough room to bury bodies.
- Johnny Redline.
- Nah, that's too good for them. Drop a few of them in the Scar and see who wants to take jobs for Ares in Motor City again.
- Shockwave
- I don't know if Ares thinks that they can just swoop back in and retake Motor City, but they're cracked in the head. Maybe in a generation, maybe two, but now? Not happening. They betrayed too many people by pulling out the way they did.
- Butch



- › And honestly, I think they have bigger issues to deal with in Seattle.
- › Sounder

I've looked at this year's models, but the specs for next year are more interesting. They're pushing some big engines, so this next generation is either going to be fast (sports cars) or strong (trucks)—either way, they're going to be *loud*. Expect to see lots of big athletes roll around in the new models, like the Longhorn or the Alpha Lion, which are expected to drive sales. Hell, I want to get behind the wheel of an Eagle myself, even if I got better wheels in the garage. But with production lines maxed out, and demand crazy high, prices should go up as well. Not so bad with the CAS economy hammering on all cylinders, but don't expect to see many in the UCAS.

## ARES ARMS

Guns are doing fine. There's even talk about work on the next generation of the Alpha-series, as well as an expansion on that line, but that's years away, so there aren't any real Hot New Things™ here. The more interesting stuff is going on above my paygrade. Executives talking to national armies and leaders about “the future,” pushing Ares guns back into the forefront of firearm excellence, or some such drek. My guess is they really wanted to roll out combat footage during *Cheshire* to wow potential buyers with whatever kinds of guns they were using. But that footage “doesn't exist” and basically cut them off at the knees. Instead, Ares is refocusing on command-and-control options, showcasing a disastrous UCAS performance against the Oceti military during the Blackouts of 2080, and how they would have handled it if they'd been active.

To sweeten the pot, Ares is supposedly working on their version of an integrated combat system. This system, supposedly called “Neo-Spartan,” is designed to make a post-modern war machine based on well-established concepts and “emerging tech.” So far, it hasn't moved past the proof-of-concept phase, but there has been some interest with long-time Ares clients.

## ARES SPACE

While Ares was rightfully slotted at the loss of the Space Elevator and condemned the loss of investment and lives (in that order), in truth, they're overjoyed. Evo and Saeder-Krupp are the only rivals they have in the current space race, and Evo's the only one with a regular metahuman launch of note. So Ares finds themselves with a massive lead in space assets once again. They're already booked with nearly two years of launches, and more are on the way. Luna City has opened and a new flight

from Houston is already being planned. Not sure about the “Feel the Buzz!” tagline, since, you know, *bugs*, but it's supposed to be connected to some old guy who used to be in space. Not really my area, but the demand for lunar tourism is bigger in the CAS than I would have expected, and getting tickets is the talk of high society right now.

- › I once had a suit try to win me over with a moonrock ring he picked up in the souvenir shop up there on opening weekend. It's cool, but not “get into my pants” cool.
- › Kat o' Nine Tales
- › I should let you know that those start at thirty grand right now.
- › Orbital DK
- › Well, frag. Still not worth it.
- › Kat o' Nine Tales

On the downside, there's not a lot of new development in aircraft right now. This area's budget got absolutely devoured for their astral gateway programs, and it'll take years to get that edge back. Expect tried-and-true aircraft being churned out with minor tweaks (Comfier chairs! Internal detailing!), rather than whole new airframes for a while. Even drone tech looks to be stalled right now.

- › And I'm slotted about that. Looks like I'll simply shop elsewhere.
- › Clockwork

## ARES HEAVY INDUSTRY

There's a lot of blame going on between the corps that helped make the Space Elevator, but since Ares' other stuff seems to still be standing while the nano-cord core crumbled, they've managed to dodge a lot of the heat on this one. If anything, they've started pulling a bit of business away from Saeder-Krupp. This has brought more demand on the Ares facilities in Pittsburgh to churn out good old-fashioned steel, which they're only too happy to make. Ares Chemicals is also on the upswing, and some other industry things that I don't know much about. This part is just not my strength—I care more about driving cars than how they get built, you know?

- › The public was only starting to get some trust back on nanotech before Skyhook came down, and now some are back to calling it “untrustworthy” and “flawed,” and the public is turning away from anything nano-related. Nano-forged is one thing; all cyberware has nano-surgeons helping to wire it to your nervous system, for instance, but anything that has a nanobot on it after it gets built is just unwelcome. Ares' focus on doing things the “old-fashioned” way with people (mostly orks) and steel, instead of nanotech, is getting a ton of coverage.
- › Clockwork



- > People are stupid. You can't turn your back on the new because of fear.
- > Icarus
- > Maybe, but when the bridge crumbles under your feet, you look for another way across. I think they're going to take nanotech in a whole new direction. People just don't trust it as it stands.
- > Pistons

## ARES SERVICES

Nobody ever talks about this division, which is weird because on paper it's the biggest part of the corp. More people work in Services than any other division, and it's bigger than any two parts (other than media) put together. Now that Knight Errant has been demoted from a full division to just a sub-division of Services, they're even bigger, even if the KE part isn't happy about it.

- > A massive understatement. It started way back when a number of high-end retirements occurred after Clayton left. Then the Disian Shadow War took out another chunk, specifically from the ACMF and special ops, either as battlefield losses or, more commonly, people who just quit afterward. Some had their brains broken, some are dealing with stress and breakdowns, and the biggest chunk just decided that they weren't getting paid anywhere near enough for this kind of thing and walked away.
- > Bull
- > All that's true, but there's much more to it than that.
- > Nightfire
- > Several of them have entered the shadows and are now looking for work. If anyone needs a good gun hand, let me know.
- > Red Anya

On a positive note, there's talk about remaking Firewatch teams entirely. For a while, the unit was seen as damaged goods, and if the aftermath of the shadow war went the way they wanted, Ares could have flipped that around with great footage and brave tales. Instead, the entire thing's been muted, footage doesn't exist, and Firewatch numbers haven't been this low since they were founded. When it looks this bad, the usual Ares response is to re-brand and relaunch—but they're not ready for that yet. The new Firewatch is still being discussed, like if they should keep the name or not, uniform redesigns, and mission creep.

One thing I heard when asking around was talk of "spirit eliminators." They designed this tech to use against the Disians here on the real world. It's supposed to catch spirits in some kind of container, so they can be hauled back to HQ for a proper disposal. The plan is to open up stations in every major city they can and let the money roll in. Sounds like a good idea if they can pull it off.

- > Are you fragging kidding me?! You're talking dark tech! If Ares, or any of the other corps with it, has one iota of intelligence, they'd bury it all and seal it forever. But we know how corps think.
- > Borderline
- > Do we want to piss off the astral plane and set spirits *against* us? Because this is how you do it. I get we were in the literal fight of our lives with the Disians, but using this drek now is on par with declaring war against the astral plane.
- > eX-Proressor
- > Spirits don't frag with us unless we frag with them first. This is a monumentally bad idea!
- > Ethernaut
- > You can't just "dispose" of a spirit! It's a living thing, which reconstitutes after being disrupted! You can't just stick a tube of spirit in a garbage disposal and call it a day!
- > Winterhawk

### <SYSOP-02 REMOVED/ARCHIVED 15.1 MP OF DATA>

- > This is a hotter topic than anticipated. I've moved the replies to another, private thread for now. Still, this is something we should keep an eye on.
- > Bull

## ARES CONSUMER PRODUCTS

We always look past this one since it's so mundane, but ACP remains a major money-maker for Ares as a whole, which is more important than ever with the collapse of their magic plans. New attire—based in no small part on Michael Bishop's own style—has swept out. The usual round of updated hair treatments, washing powders, food-stuffs, and more are all based on the same core concept—bring in more money than it costs to make and sell as many as possible.

- > Anytime Ares gets a bit of bad press, new consumer products appear as if by magic and dominate the headlines. We always talk about how good Aztechnology is at media matters, but Ares has been doing it just as well but for longer. Never count out the novelty of new toothpaste.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Oh hey! They have mint julep flavor now? I gotta try that!
- > Slamm-O!

Cross-promotion's always a strong suit for them, and I'll be first to tell you that I *want* the new Trash Panda vacuum drone. Just a tubby little raccoon that waddles around the house, snarfing up trash? It's adorable and sold out everywhere.

- > This year, hems are down. WAY down. Ankle-length is queen and if you can get a full trail, even better. Two meters of dress on a



meter and a half body isn't the best idea for a shadowrun, but on a runway? Yes, please!

- > Plan 9
- > I'm with you on this one. Two years ago, skirts were nearly belts. I'm so ready for elegance.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Great place to hide weapons too.
- > Hard Exit

## ARES GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

Last, but certainly not least, is AGE, where Ares is putting a ton of faith. It's not a big R&D budget that can go bust like their magic arm did, and no need for cutting-edge designs like Arms that cost a ton of resources, just pretty faces and new products pushed into the faces of hungry consumers who want more, more, *more!* The recession in the UCAS is hurting them, but the CAS boom makes up for it. And other markets opening up, like the PCC and Québec, means that Ares Global is coming out ahead. Cross-promotions with Ares Consumer Products abound, with sims, music, and more just flying off the shelves at every turn.

The biggest wave on the entertainment front was Kelly Calloway at the recent anniversary of the Brand New Opry in Nashville. Her being at the show wasn't the most closely held of secrets, and her being introduced by Granny Cyrus got a huge round of applause. The two sang three songs together, which would normally close out the show, but Calloway had a surprise in store that no one, not even Cyrus, was aware of. She had her band move up on stage, dropped the lights, found her center ... and dropped "Console Cowgirl" on the crowd.

- > I'm sorry, she WHAT?!
- > Bull
- > How'd you miss it? It's been getting airplay for weeks.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Because I don't normally listen to country, you goober, but ... "Console Cowgirl"? That's a Maria Mercurial song!
- > Bull
- > Not just ANY Mercurial song, but one from her one-and-only country outing. No recording of the song's ever been known, and ticket stubs from the tiny dive bar where she performed are worth a mention in Dunkelzahn's will. How in the hell?!
- > Glitch

It turns out that Mercurial is a fan of hers, and she'd seen an interview with Calloway talking about how she was a fan of Mercurial and curious

about that day's set. So Mercurial sent her a copy of the song to learn, with a promise to keep it quiet until it was a good time to roll it out. The morning after Calloway dropped it, Mercurial's people sent out a press release that showcased the loan of the song and her blessing to perform it. It shattered all country sales records and has gone Uranium at this point with no signs of slowing down.

- > Sweet Jesus. That ... I need to sit down.
- > Bull
- > Well, I mean, you are getting on in years, Bull ...
- > Slamm-O!
- > Is she going to record others? Are we actually going to get an album of those things? Is Mercurial going to come back? What's next, Jetblack?!
- > Bull
- > Funny you should say that.
- > Slamm-O!
- > ... Fred ...
- > Bull
- > Kidding! Kidding!
- > Slamm-O!

Needless to say, people are curious if more will follow. There's talk that she might cross over to doing pop music now instead of country; whether she'll be Mercurial's new pet project or do her own thing, nobody seems to know for sure. But there are millions of "CalloWaifs" out there who want to find out.

- > Rumor has it that Mercurial recorded herself performing the song on a chip and sent it to her so she could practice. I can't tell you how much that chip would be worth, if true. Well, if I look at the contracts I have, I could tell you, but you know what I mean.
- > Kia
- > Scuttlebutt is that Granny Cyrus was so blown away that she finally decided to get leónized by around thirty years, so that she'd be able to see Calloway's career play out. Kind of like how she herself got taken under wing when she was a teenager back in the olden days. I don't know if it's true or not, but she's not really been seen since a week after the show.
- > SeaTac Sweetie
- > Calloway was a big get for Ares back in '78 after her blues deal with Horizon ended. Horizon offered her a decent contract, but Ares swept in with a better offer to let her do what she wanted, and country was a bigger audience, so she moved over. Whatever new contract she signed this year, they're not paying her enough.
- > Pistons



- > She hasn't even hit thirty yet? Girl's going places.
- > Butch
- > All right, we've hit the end of the line on Turbo Bunny's work, so here's where we open up the floor to general comments. Try to stay on topic and please, try to keep it rational?
- > Glitch
- > They forced out Arthur Vogel due to cyberpsychosis, with the entire coup being planned by the Deep Corp. Michael Bishop is just a pawn of the real CEO, Damien Knight, who faked his death!
- > Plan 9
- > ... why do we let you in here?
- > Glitch
- > The big issue is that Ares wound up being cash-strapped at the worst time. There's a ton of MCT assets they would have loved to snap up, but the cash just wasn't on hand due to the massive investment in the Gateway project. The corp isn't in dire financial straits, they just got caught with no cash and no way to get a new line of credit when they needed it the most. The general feeling was the only way they could have snagged parts from the big sale was to sell off their own assets, but the profit/loss calculations just didn't line up. By the time alternate income showed up, it was too late to buy what they wanted. No big conspiracies here, just the unfortunate truth of finances and timing.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Meanwhile, Century Dynamics is buying things at over-market value and getting loans from every vulture out there. The board of Ares has to be fuming that they're seen as a less-profitable loan. There are bound to be a few people there who want to take CD down a peg and get some of that investment capital where it rightly belongs.
- > Sunshine
- > Related to that, while the Gateway tech is a no-go at this point, getting that far led to some serious advances in Ares' magic division. The "anti-spirit" weaponry (as they're calling it) jumped at least a generation during this, and whatever approach they take to replace the Firewatch teams, they're going to have some very interesting new toys to play with.
- > Red Anya

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- > I said keep it rational. But I understand the concerns about dark tech.
- > Glitch
- > So, here's an odd one for you. I recently had a run-in with an Ares mage after I tripped one of his astral alarms. He showed up fast, but didn't ping right on my radar; chummer was an explorer adept, but he also read as a spirit when I assensed him. While I was trying to figure out what was going on, he laid into me like an expert while I was trying to use spells to hold him off.

It went badly enough for me that I whistled up a fire spirit I had on standby to get me a breather. The guy just grins, says "I've been waiting to try this," and ...

- > Hedge Warlock
- > And? And what?!
- > Slamm-O!
- > Hard to put into words. His right arm turned into water, and he just punched through my fire spirit. There's a sizzle, a scream, and the fire went out. He pulled his arm back, frowning at how it'd shrunk from boiling off, which gave me enough of an opening to get out of there.
- > Hedge Warlock
- > So he used a short-ranged water spell to take out a fire elemental? Pretty basic. What's the issue?
- > Lei Kung
- > It wasn't a spell. Like I said, chummer was an explorer. All astral, nothing else. Can't call up spirits, can't cast spells.
- > Hedge Warlock
- > Clearly, he could. You just read him wrong.
- > Lei Kung
- > No, this was something else. It was like he was able to call on a spirit's power somehow? I don't know. Hard to explain.
- > Hedge Warlock
- > He shouldn't have shown you that.
- > Glasswalker
- > You want to share something with the class, GeeDubs?
- > Slamm-O!
- > No, but it'll all come out eventually. Back in the day, when you didn't want to cough up good nuyen for a spell, you could try and talk a spirit into teaching you. Wasn't easy, took a lot of trust, and you were doing the spirit some favors, but if you were poor, or didn't want to be tracked, it was an option. Eventually, enough spellbooks were out there that the practice largely stopped. This is just taking that to the next level.
- > Glasswalker
- > What, learning a spirit power directly from the source?
- > Hedge Warlock
- > Yes.
- > Glasswalker
- > Impossible.
- > Hedge Warlock
- > For you or me, sure, but explorers are astral adepts, which leaves them some options we don't have. Just like most of us can't run up walls or karate-chop through concrete, but a



physical adept can. Astral adepts, if trained right, can learn spirit powers directly. Not many, and getting a spirit friendly enough to do it is a lot of work, but it can be done.

- > Glasswalker
- > Well, this is new!
- > The Laughing Man
- > I'll believe it when I assense it.
- > Hedge Warlock
- > I mean, didn't you just ... \*sigh\* Never mind.
- > Frosty
- > On the more political side of things, Ares is in talks with the UCAS again about re-establishing contracts. After watching the CAS flourish with the help of Ares, the UCAS could really use a shot of that in the arm. Insiders are still wary since the last breakup showed that Ares put the Corporate Court FIRST, and the nation SECOND, but that shouldn't be an issue against a nation-state with a warm border and honestly, at this stage, the UCAS is about ready to beg.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > When magic broke, you'd think that the UCAS military would have went screaming in to retake that territory they lost a couple of years ago, but it didn't. Wonder why?
- > Stone
- > Several reasons. First and foremost, no one knew how long magic would be gone. Would it last an hour? A day? A month? Forever? Even modern militaries take considerable time to actually mobilize. With a few exceptions, few quick reaction forces can hold territory for very long. Not to mention that the UCAS lost their magical support as well.
- > Hard Exit
- > Not to mention that militaries across North America had just been fragged with recently, and they were already on a defensive footing. That, and Oceti Sakowin have a far more capable conventional force than most realize. They're not a one-trick pony.
- > Thorn
- > Switching gears, but has there been any word on unravelling Bishop's past? The official story got rolled out when he got the big chair, but I still think there's a lot we're missing. Anyone got anything?
- > Bull
- > Come now, Bull, you know that in a world like this, information is the only thing of value left.
- > Icarus
- > Call it your monthly membership fee for being allowed in here.
- > Bull

> \*sigh\* Very well, but there's not much. The Philadelphia runner community is surprisingly tight-lipped on the matter. A few have talked about working with him during his time as a fixer, but there's not much there. More interesting is the talk from when he was a face, but those stories are told mostly by those bitter about him out-maneuvering them for a job. Finding a former teammate? That's content for premium subscribers I'm afraid.

- > Icarus
- > He's been having some clashes of late. Aurelius has cracked the whip a bit, since she's the one who got him the job and pointed out that their first order of business is business. She wants profits and she wants them now, which means he's been told to roll out some classic Ares dirty tricks. Said tricks conflict with Bishop's own morals, which is going to cause problems. Right now, it looks like he's going about the business on top, giving orders through company men down below, but somewhere behind his back he's got a third hand that's sending out feelers through the shadow community for activities that don't hit the bottom line. For instance, Ares tried to engage in talks with Motor City about possibly re-opening some facilities, but to say it went poorly is an understatement. The Ares reps barely made it out with their skins intact. Now, under the table, Ares is looking for assets to "encourage" the collapse of the shadow city to leave them desperate for the money that working with Ares would bring in. Rumor has it that Bishop himself doesn't want that to happen, so he has a personal asset or two out there doing something else entirely. What that is depends on the rumormonger.
- > Snopes
- > That one's easy! It's all a faint while he has his personal agents trying to talk to the "tame" bee spirits in Detroit to see if there's a deal they can make. "Fight fire with fire," after all.
- > Plan 9
- > You've got it backward, dear. Ares was so traumatized by the bug infestation they had to clear out of their corporation, and the idea that there are "polite" bugs out there is driving some of them into a rage. They want them dead, and he's being forced to go along with it as part of his deal with Aurelius to get the job. He's not happy about it, but it's them or him.
- > Plan 10
- > You're both wrong. With the Firewatch reorganization going on, Bishop's reaching out to the shadows for Awakened folks who have been fighting the good fight in Detroit for decades. Ares could use whatever they learned in the trenches and tunnels. The talks with the Union are just a way to get people into the city so his shadow assets can fan out and find the right people.
- > Traveler Jones
- > And all of you have forgotten about the Alpha-class bugs that are still roaming around.
- > Electric Blue





- > I haven't. Just like I haven't forgotten about the old Ares Tower.
- > Elijah
- > Hey, what's Vogel up to these days?
- > Kia
- > Good question! He moved to Peru, of all places, at the start of the year, and he's settled into a life of retirement—at least in theory. He's not given many interviews, largely just saying that he's glad the stress is gone (he still looks like warmed-over death), and he's looking forward to having some of his cybernetics removed and replaced with more holistic options. He's generally staying out of the limelight. Of course, there have been an unusual number of animals spotted at his compound whose nature doesn't match their form, if you get my meaning—and some of those are only found in Amazonia.
- > Elijah
- > You know, we never did figure out where he got all that money to buy Ares stock in the first place.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Surely, you're not suggesting that he's teamed up with SIRRURG?
- > Snopes
- > Where the frag did that come from?
- > Corporate Raiders
- > If there's proof, let me know. I know a few thousand people in Borinquen who would love to have words about that.
- > Kane
- > Century Dynamics has been flexing into a lot of the UCAS, taking advantage of the moribund economy to snap up assets at fire sale prices. Ares likes to think of North America as theirs, so they aren't taking it well. I smell a future corp war.
- > Stone
- > There's always a future corp war.
- > Corporate Raiders
- > They're not the only one. The UCAS government is offering certain incentives for smaller businesses to set up shop in Motor City, and the UCAS in general. Guess they figure if they can't get one big corp, they'll make do with a lot of smaller ones.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Speaking of Motor City, it looks like they're taking a bit of interest again. The UCAS government is negotiating with Eagle, Minuteman, and get this, Wolverine Security for the LEP contract there. So much for a shadow city.
- > Det. Gumshoe
- > The game's not over yet. And even if they do, so what?
- > Shockwave



- > Hey, backing up a bit, but isn't Yamana getting her husband's money soon? Think she might offer Ares some help in exchange for stocks?
- > Pistons
- > Maybe, but I think it's more likely she'd go after Century Dynamics. That would give her power over Villiers' legacy, which would be a massive coup for the family history—and CD is leveraged like mad to expand so quickly. She could buy up their debt from a dozen sources and consolidate into a major shareholder overnight.
- > Kia
- > Has anyone seen Truman? Anyone at all?
- > Bull
- > You want some hot intel? Just had a little delivery to Ares Seattle and ... the signs are being taken down.
- > Miko
- > You mean they're going out of business??!
- > Whippet
- > I didn't say that. Personnel are still working and nothing's getting packed up except the iconography. Security didn't look like Knight Errant, at least not the sleek uniforms. More ... I dunno, old-school. Utilitarian, that's the word my agent came up with. Still packing Ares heat, though.
- > Miko
- > Ares produces a significant portion of the armaments in the world. That's not a statement. The rest though ... hmm.
- > Red Anya
- > All this talk, but none of it addressing the elephant in the room that is Ares Seattle.
- > Corporate Raiders
- > Hey, Nightfire. You were alluding to a bunch of drek early on. How, exactly, is Ares handling King, if she's so steamed?
- > Glitch
- > Seems as good a time as any to talk about it, but it's not a short answer ...
- > Nightfire
- > Ugh. I can't believe I'm doing this.
- > Slamm-O!

## ARES SEATTLE: THE CASTLING MANEUVER

POSTED BY: NIGHTFIRE

In the interest of brevity, let me get straight to it: Karen King has cashed out, and rather than take the golden parachute so many others would gleefully take after a long life of corp work, she's claimed her shares in the form of property. More specifically, she's claimed chunks of Ares Seattle territories, property, material, and corporate contracts. While a new name is still to come, the shift is already in progress. In several locations, Ares labeling is being removed (often ending up in the trash or being shipped back to Prime), and secondary branding and loadouts are already being distributed. When the "Pardon Our Dust!" signs are removed and the curtain raised, there will be a new corp in Seattle, and it's ready to roll.

- > Fuck me, that's a bold move.
- > Pistons
- > If you've been paying close attention to the moves behind the scenes, this has been a very, very long time coming. King was one of Knight's earliest hires, ex-military, the kind that believes in the Mission more than the paycheck. What that Mission was is anyone's guess.
- > The Chromed Accountant
- > King is a hero-type as the classical definition reads—not a creature out for fame or patriotism, but a cause. Ares, in its earliest incarnations, had deep ties to Dunkelzahn (remember that's how Knight was able to accomplish the Nanosecond Buyout), and D had a lot of uses for Knight and what he would build with Ares. The bugs were a big part of that. King was on board for that mission. As Knight lost sight of their real purposes (especially after the death of Dunkelzahn), he and King grew apart. With Knight gone and Ares following his more commercial interests, it's not surprising to see King moving fast to get things back the way she was promised it would be. It's long overdue.
- > Resignation

>INTERCEPT SUCCESSFUL<

- > \$1r, is +h@t yOu?
- > Nightfire



There's some debate regarding the new title of what is essentially a burgeoning corp, with a number of employees voting for "Crown" in honor of the new CEO. The popularity of the move has been surprising, at least to some observers. It may have something to do with King's leadership, or even Seattle-local loyalty. Personally, I think the very generous pay, health, retirement, and bonus packages might have something to do with it, both with retaining a lot of personnel and quietly poaching others from other locations and divisions throughout Ares as a whole. Of particular note are the Firewatch teams that made an effort to be redistributed or cycled through Seattle when the move happened. Several of them have either "gone AWOL" or put in for transfers, which Seattle approved rather quickly, shuffling them into staff with astonishing (re: prepared) speed.

- > Crown Industries? That's from a movie.
- > Red
- > Hmmm. There's also been talk about Mars?
- > Nightfire
- > Nah, there's a whole action figure line with a Mars Industries.
- > Bull
- > Drek. Well, odds are that won't stop us. We can always buy the copyright if all else fails.
- > Nightfire
- > How is King looking so fit?! She's pushing, what, 60?
- > Beaker
- > Leónization, prototype modular cyber ... when you've got that kind of money, you can be whatever age you want for a long, long time.
- > The Smiling Bandit

## WE'RE BREAKING UP...

King was ready for action when the Disians came. She had shadow assets running jobs against other corps, if only to keep them in line and their eyes on the prize. What she wasn't ready for was being left out of the war. Bishop, it seems, has seen King as a loose cannon (or thread, depending), and considering the kinds of side operations he wanted working during *Cheshire*, using King as a kind of "Doomed Spy" archetype served to keep the other corps busy. It made sense, in a horrible way, considering King would never have stood for sidelining soldiers to play scavenger hunts in Hell with the world at stake.

- > Motherfucker, did you just quote Sun Tzu?
- > Slamm-O!

- > You've read it?
- > Nightfire
- > I ... no! Frag you!
- > Slamm-O!

Being that we're all so buddy-buddy, now, I've shared a still from her meeting with Bishop when she finally clocked him and told him she's cashing out. I had a bottle of Black Label I'd been saving for a special occasion. I don't mind sharing that I raised a toast to that one. I hope you feel at least some of the joy I did seeing it.

... and I'm Keeping the Dogs.

King, as mentioned, was prepared. She'd taken time consolidating her loyalists, reaching out to Firewatch teams that bought into the idea of Knight (if not the man, himself), leaders, and some internal press that was so blunt and real, I hesitate to call it actual propaganda. By the time she made her move, the majority of Ares Seattle was on her side without even knowing there was a split coming, and it wasn't a hard choice to stay where they were and sign the updated contracts.

Speaking of contracts, King was savvy enough to broker some backroom deals with Seattle's local armed forces. Ares Seattle's arms production capacity, to say nothing of its technical expertise, meant favorable contracts could be worked up to provide equipment, ammunition, and upkeep with on-site support personnel, all skipping the Ares red tape and keeping things in the city. King, in effect, played to hometown loyalty, saying she'd help take care of the city and protect it the way she was looking out for her own. It seems she made a very persuasive case, because I've seen the contracts, and they look good on both ends.

- > I'll bet Bishop loved that.
- > Red Anya
- > In fairness, the jury is still out on whether Free Seattle can last as an independent entity. Maybe King played openly to symbiosis, but the Seattle government must have felt the pinch of fear if they didn't take the deal. Megacorps have a way of devouring territory that can't hold its own, and a double-A on their side must have felt like a surge of relief.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > What about Cerberus?
- > Nightfire
- > Don't you have think-tanks and focus groups for this?
- > Frosty
- > Not my department. But it would be pretty cool to be the one to bring it to the boss. Case in point: Can you imagine the bragging rights you'd have? Some JackPointer being the one to name an AA in one of the most prominent shadowspots in the world?
- > Nightfire



- > Sounds like bootlicking to me.
- > Slamm-O!
- > How about Castle?
- > Kia
- > Chevalier?
- > Winterhawk
- > I'd say Knightfall, but that feels like King digging at the roots more than is necessary.
- > Red
- > Red! C'mon, man!
- > Slamm-O!
- > King's new baby is going to need more friends than just an independent territory. Are they considering any alliances with other AAs? There's a lot of that going around ...
- > Stone
- > Absolutely, though I'm not at liberty to speak about any details there. But we know we're in a tight spot, and that means friends. Or at least the kind of friends you make in a foxhole. Bishop isn't going to take this lying down, privately or publicly, particularly as it may affect Ares' stock performance and public trust. Germane to which ...
- > Nightfire

## THE COMPANY YOU KEEP

Of course, Bishop had counted King splintering off as one of the potential outcomes. And, while King may have had the bags packed, Bishop had his hand in the savings. Between the employees who transferred out and stayed loyal to Ares, and the material they reclaimed (not to mention the Ares facilities in Seattle which somehow still belong to Prime), as well as losses in the shadow war, Ares Seattle has lost between 20-25 percent of their holdings. For all that I want to say King is doing very well, it's a hit, and it'll take some time to recoup those losses and replace what has been lost.

It doesn't entirely help that King has a personal mandate that Ares style and fashion will be phased out. She had a head start in stripped-down gear, and it's quickly becoming internal vogue for our teams, particularly combat and support personnel, to wear very practical military equipment, much more akin to regular armed forces fatigues. Gone is the sleek shine of gear, replaced with hard practicality and utilitarian design.

- > Hey, my agent got it right!
- > Miko

It's worth noting that while Ares remains committed to consistently pushing out fresh tech and updates, with planned obsolescence as part of

their marketing plan, King has opened a contract partnership with a small outfit called Tactical Concepts. Their specialty is weapon modding and restoration—a lot of refurbished and updated gear that still works fine despite not having every single bell and whistle. Tac-Con has enjoyed a niche market for a while, but the partnership with King means access to a lot of material and talent, not to mention the credibility and scope to start updating independent militaries all over the world that don't have the bankroll to buy the latest and greatest that companies like Ares pressure them into. If anything, King's people have insight into what exactly Ares can provide, and that insight translates into effective responses to the new tech without breaking the bank. A good deal of the “new” equipment that King's forces are using is better than “like new,” and may be underestimated by enemies—at least until they learn you can't judge her people at first glance.

- > Geez. It's like restoring classic cars, but for guns.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > \*Grin\* Something like that ...
- > Rifleman
- > And armor, vehicles, etc. Speaking of cars, and this is a little tidbit maybe I shouldn't share, but one of King's takeaways from the split was rights to Motor City facilities and material.
- > Nightfire
- > Sounds like a decoy on Bishop's part. He knows Ares isn't welcome there anymore, and King is going to waste a lot of resources trying to get them.
- > Needles
- > I wouldn't be so sure, but time will tell.
- > Nightfire

## KINGMAKERS

As previously stated, King has had a relationship with the shadows for well over thirty years. She built a reputation as a high-level Ms. Johnson, a straight shooter, big on paying in untampered equipment and discounts, and doing right by teams that did right by her. That reputation is earned, and I'm here to tell you it's still going strong.

Blood is in the water, people. A split like this brings all kinds of sharks, and you're going to see a lot of runs going against us. And I respect that, that's the game. But I want to extend a personal offer of work on behalf of Ms. King: honest contracts for dishonest work. When a runner does right by us, we want to cultivate them for continued ops, and that means offering support, extraction, you name it. For those who can move up the ladder, it's more than just resupply and fresh toys, it's extraction, the



way DocWagon used to do before they got married to the Cowboys. Except this time, it's not DW HTRs, but Firewatch undercover pulling you out. That's for the ones we trust, and who have learned they can trust us back. That's for the ones who have racked up that kind of credit for a good job. It's legal defense, safehouses, and all kinds of perks.

This might sound too good to be true, and you might sense some easy money taking the myriad runs against us. But I put it to you this way: Are any of those corps going to go to bat for you like that? How many times do they have to throw you under the bus before you look for something better?

We're not looking for company suits (though you might like it, I certainly do). We like free-thinkers and independent contracts with a sense of professionalism, and at least some ethics. And if you're up for the big money, consider that we've got a big chunk of Firewatch with us, but not enough to cover all the threats out there. We're already in talks with the Draco Foundation for cooperative ventures, and you can expect a lot of work like what they would offer.

- > Knight's baby partnering with the Big D's legacy. That's poetic.
- > Red
- > Personally, I'm intrigued.
- > Silk

I don't expect trust out the gate. Trust isn't common in this line, and it's never something you'd give away. I expect I'll have to earn it. And to that end, I invite you to try us. Find out if I'm as good as my word. I've been plugging away at the shadows right next to you for decades, and I could have burned a lot of you for Ares if that was what we wanted. Now, I'm telling you the door is open, and the pay is sweet.

You know how to find me.

- > Did you just sales pitch us? What's this "I" shit? You the one calling the shots, or King?
- > Slamm-O!
- > He's speaking with the authority that comes with the job I gave him. Nightfire is the new head of my Deniable Assets Division. I hope that carries some weight.
- > K. King
- > Glitch ... did you authorize her?
- > Slamm-O!
- > No. Bull?
- > Glitch
- > I've seen great dragons and free spirits post in the shadow nets for years. This can't possibly be a surprise.
- > K. King

- > Not even a classy handle ...
- > Slamm-O!
- > I might come back with something new later, I'm still thinking about it. But I needed to make a point. I don't have to hide who I am. I earned my name, and I wear it openly. If you want me to lie, I'll come back and masquerade as an ex-milspec operator. Oh wait, that wouldn't be a lie, either.
- > K. King
- > Earned your name? I always thought Knight was an assumed name. King is awfully on the nose, isn't it?
- > Icarus
- > Your parents give you a name. That's not earning it. I earned mine. And you'll earn yours in my eyes, and a lot of nuyen as well, if you take us up on the offer. Either way, the choice is yours. That's all the freedom any of us get in this life, and I'll respect that more than anything.
- > K. King
- > Gracious, I feel like a debutante at the ball ...
- > Prime Runner

## SPINRAD GLOBAL

POSTED BY: SKARN-KA

Since its inception, Spinrad Global has been, strangely, very silent, which is spectacular considering how Johnny made his legend by pulling some incredible PR stunts. His death, which is officially still under investigation, and a mysterious leaked memo have been the only two occasions the newly born AAA made the news (well, in the shadows). There was a good reason for this "radio silence," and as you'll see in this chapter, this is about to change.

## LEAVING THE COCOON

A close associate who is an expert in corporate acquisitions and mergers explained to me that part of the reason for NeoNET's downfall was the lack of integration between the corporate entities it was made of. Basically, Richard Villiers' empire was a collection of independent corporations with little coordination or oversight (or, at least, that's what history chose to remember).

Assuming my friend is correct about NeoNET's fatal mistake, this is one that Spinrad Global has been carefully trying to avoid since its creation. It's also why the AAA didn't make the news so much in the last five years. It's been focusing on itself, ensuring that all its components become cogs into one well-oiled corporate giant.



- ▶ That's the unrealistic dream of many top execs. A super-optimized organization, with zero duplications of work, where the achievements of one subsidiary are somehow immediately leveraged by the others. It's a pipe dream.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds

SG has a huge challenge on this front: their own cultural divide. Now, this is an oversimplification, but between Johnny's European posse and the "devout Muslims" coming from Global Sandstorm, there's a gap that is almost impossible to fill. Fortunately for the AAA, Johnny and Gabrielle understood that. So, while they've been restructuring their assets as efficiently as reasonable, they've also often kept some sort of separation, on many layers, between parts of Global and Spinrad Industries because there were incompatibilities between these two parts.

- ▶ It's a bold move, because this means millions, if not billions, of nuyen lost in duplicated expenditure. Many suits who see the corporation only through the lens of diagrams and numbers would have most likely pushed blindly against this, not realizing how wrong they would have been. It's clear now that, even when her husband was running the show, Gabrielle was helping him with this daunting endeavor. So, the credit for this wise strategy goes to both of them.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds

Be careful, though! This by no means implies there isn't any collaboration across the AAA. SG's internal security and intelligence division, which was already heavily supported by Aegis Cognito, can leverage other parts of the megacorporation, like Sphynx Security, Ifrit Services, or any of its security subsidiaries with a strong presence at a target location.

## WHO KILLED JOHNNY SPINRAD?

Before we delve any further into what's happening with Spinrad Global today, or Gabrielle's shenanigans in the near future, we need to close—once and for all—the so-called enigma of the assassination of the AAA's founder.

Thanks to a brave group of runners, we finally shed some light on Spinrad's demise. Not sufficiently for the people behind his death to ever be on trial, let alone a chance of conviction, but enough for us in the shadows to consider this matter as resolved as it can be.

Late last August, someone hired a team of runners to visit the Foundation of a former SG host that was recently abandoned and now adrift in the Wild Matrix. Locating the node in this mess was already a small feat and, to make things worse, the client wanted them to extract one particular file from its archive, which meant a nasty trip to the Foundation for our shadow friends. Nevertheless, they did it (and lived to tell the tale), only to be used as tar-

get practice by a squad of Sphynx security soldiers at the meet with their employer, who, of course, was totally MIA. Barely escaping the ambush, they started looking to sell their data anyway, and that is when I personally crossed paths with them.

- ▶ This particular Mr. Johnson has reappeared since then. Interestingly enough, they are known to be employed often by Anya Spinrad.
- ▶ Sim-Eon

The file they excavated looked innocent enough at first glance. A brief message referencing an issue in NYC, involving a certain Becky Wu Ping. This piqued my interest because she was mentioned in the *Whisper Nets* download, so I asked the runners to keep digging. The fashion designer was a dead end; however, they managed to track down and extract an SG exec named in the file. He was executed shortly after, apparently by a professional hitman hired by SG, but not before he babbled about something called the Animus Project being in the center of this coverup.

Discussing this particular and hidden initiative is beyond the scope of this file. What matters here is that its technology allows it to manipulate someone's memory. And with this information, all the pieces of the puzzle suddenly fell into place for me. I realized that the stylist had, by pure chance, uncovered that Gabrielle had been exposed to this technology and that secret needed to be removed from her memory, too. But why?

For sure, if Gabrielle was some sort of victim in this story, SG would have wanted to look into it to ensure their CEO was not compromised. The AAA, however, did not want to know, because some of the execs knew that she had decided to delete something from her memory of her own volition: the fact that she organized the hit against her husband. That's why no one suspected her of being behind Johnny Spinrad's death, and why, time and time again, she was deemed sincere by any interrogation experts or Awakened casting any kind of truth analysis spell. She was indeed honest; she really had no idea she ordered Johnny's assassination herself!

- ▶ And this is why the Disians made a poor attempt at blackmailing her in 2082 ... Remember the leaked email stating: "We know who killed Johnny!" that made a few people in SG panic? This is what they were alluding to, probably thanks to intel given away by the Null Sect.
- ▶ Sim-Eon

## SPINRAD'S LEGACY (OR LACK THEREOF)

The main effect of Spinrad's death is that the leadership of the AAA is now far more in the hands of the Global Sandstorm execs than it was at its inception. Johnny was always a one-man show,



and it was no surprise that his untimely murder put his lieutenants in a difficult position. What was surprising, however, was how Gabrielle and a few clans (in particular, the Sudayrin) performed a corporate surgery on the organization with the accuracy of a SOTA meticulous medical drone, at the minute the CEO took his last breath.

If you look at a managerial chart of Spinrad Global in 2078 and note the twenty or so people directly reporting to Johnny (officially or not), you'll realize they are all gone now. And, by that, I don't mean dead (well, a few are). They are simply no longer at the top of the AAA, or even members of it. And today, their successors are under Gabrielle, but they aren't all coming from Global. A fair share of them are execs from Spinrad Industries, but they were promoted to this position by the new CEO and were not, in any fashion, close to Johnny, nor involved in his shenanigans.

- ▶ A perfect example is Theodora de Raville (or von Rollingen in German), the recently appointed head of SpIn Public Relations. She comes from an old noble family of the now-gone country of Luxembourg, and despite her incredible cunning and savvy in her work, the short-legged ork woman never really caught the eye of Johnny for some reason ...

Well, Gabrielle recognized her talent for what it is, and she is now one of her trusted advisors. In fact, the CEO relies almost entirely on her to control the narrative around Spinrad Global.

- ▶ Kat o' Nine Tales
- ▶ I think there is a direct correlation between Johnny's lack of interest in bedding Theodora and the absence of progress in her career until now. Fortunately, Gabrielle is a bit smarter than that.
- ▶ Sunshine
- ▶ I guess this is one way of breaking the glass ceiling ...
- ▶ Sim-Eon

In short, this is the hardest change to wrap our minds around. Gabrielle has successfully consolidated power within the AAA and Spinrad Global is now a fine, globally oiled (haha, see what I did there?) machine. The parts that belonged to Spinrad Industries, however, are both exactly the same as before, while being entirely different.

That's the genius of her strategy. She did not try to redo the AAA in her own image. She simply noticed what worked well and rewarded the ones responsible for it—and got rid of a few incompetent minions of her late husband. It pissed off Johnny's entourage, of course, as they were used to receiving accolades just because they had partied with the CEO for the last three years. Many of them left for this very reason.

- ▶ Sometimes, there is justice in the corporate world (though not often), because most of these inept drinking buddies did not find new homes (or were fired soon after, the minute it became clear they were worthless posers). One of my sources is among them, because selling his deep knowledge of who's who in Europe is basically the only way he can make a buck these days.
- ▶ Sim-Eon

## OLD NAMES AND NEW HQ

When Spinrad Global announced on the September 1, 2083 that their brand-new headquarters will be built in New Monaco, it naturally made a lot of noise. A few smart people, however, focused more on the fact that the CEO had signed the communiqué using her original last name. And since then, she has used her original name of Gabrielle Al-Thani systematically.

I used a few contacts inside the PR apparatus of SG to take the pulse on this and strangely enough, it does not seem to bother people from Spinrad Industries. In fact, and maybe paradoxically, Gabrielle giving up her late husband's name seems to trigger more concerns in the conservative families of Global Sandstorm.

- ▶ It's not really that surprising. For sure, the most progressive executives of Global are more than happy to see a Middle Eastern name appear after the CEO title, but the less open-minded ones perceive that as yet another act of defiance from a woman who is adding the disrespect of her dead husband to her many faults.
- ▶ Goat Foot
- ▶ Thanks to the move to New Monaco, and the unmodified name of the AAA, most in Spinrad Industries are okay with this change, but not all. A few execs are clearly sending signals to other corps, and thus become willing targets for extractions. With the aftermath of the Disian crisis, however, a large part of the market is not really in shape to seize these opportunities. For now, it seems only OmniStar and the recently created Century Dynamics have been able to pull such runs.
- ▶ Am-mut
- ▶ To clarify, it's not OmniStar per se, but the corps making it up. I know, for instance, that a few security agents and execs got extracted from Aegis Cognito by runners working (ultimately) for Lone Star. Some medical staff from Phoenix Biotechnologies in Manhattan have also been willing victims of such operations, this time for the direct benefit of DocWagon. One extraction, however, went poorly in New Monaco a few weeks ago. Because it became a mess, whoever was behind it ensured the job could not be linked to them (they had the Mr. Johnson shot), but I suspect Manadyne to have been behind it. In any case, the run ended in a car chase through the city that cost the target his life. Sphynx Security is not joking when it comes to protecting the AAA against treason.
- ▶ Snopes



► This one's a bit more complicated than that, especially as the asset's death remains to be confirmed. She was, or is, a brilliant Awakened French woman named Noémie Laffont, who was happily working for Spinrad Industries until the merger forced her to become one of the magical experts of Djinn Licit Magic—her project was one of the few to be folded under a Global Oil subsidiary. Being a hermetic mage, she didn't integrate well into a primarily Muslim group of alchemists. While her coworkers weren't all misogynistic pigs, and only a few thought of her powers as "evil," it was enough to make her wish for a change of air. She used a conference trip to New Monaco to stage her own extraction. Sadly, contrary to the previously mentioned operations, she was quite alone in this endeavor, which explained why it all went south.

► Goat Foot

If Gabrielle reclaiming her birth name is interesting, let's not bury the lede about what it means for Spinrad Global to move their HQ from Lisbon to New Monaco.

First, it's an important, albeit somewhat symbolic, gesture toward the half of the AAA that comes from Spinrad Industries. With this change, Gabrielle basically says: "Yes, Johnny is gone, and yes, my name is Al-Thani, but look, our HQ could not be more Spinrad Industries." Indeed, Johnny essentially bought the independent city, in March 2051, when he offered to pay for its reconstruction after a devastating earthquake that leveled most of the sprawl (thus the "new" in front of Monaco). This was also a strategic move to flip the bird to France, the country that had just banned Spinrad Industries following a nasty scandal about sanctioned metahuman experiments in Marseille.

► Note that this embargo against the corp was lifted, de facto, when France ratified the BRA in 2071. And when SG was created, it was suddenly impossible to enforce anyway. Any Global Sandstorm assets already on the territory were theoretically in violation of this interdiction.

► Sim-Eon

The gesture toward Spinrad employees goes deeper than that. There is some serious chatter of a deal between France, SG, and New Monaco to somehow reintegrate the city into the country. That would be huge for the Cyberepublic, as it could boast that its land now shelters one of the Big Ten while pleasing their most chauvinistic citizens, who desire more than anything else to restore "la grandeur de la France." And to be fair, the idea kind of makes sense for SG. Due to its colonial history two centuries ago, one-fifth of the inhabitants are Muslims, but at the same time, it is and remains at the heart of Europe, the home ground of Spinrad.

► Since Corsica was attached again to France on October 3, 2082, as a semi-autonomous region, and with the island quickly

becoming a stronghold of Aztechnology's subsidiary, Dassault, the rulers of New Monaco have seen the writing on the wall. Marseille and Nice have already folded, and it's a miracle the recent civil war in Brittany did not lead to its reintegration.

► IzObel75

Second, it's not entirely a neutral maneuver for Gabrielle. Moving the HQ is, de facto, liberating her from the current Portuguese management that runs almost everything in Lisbon. Not all of them will be allowed to transfer to New Monaco, and she will be free to replace those with whom-ever she wants, starting with her own men and women.

► For sure, some will cling to their power and may even fight back, which is why I expect a few contracts to surface in the next months on Hidden Blades and other assassins' networks to take out a few key personnel of the HQ from Lisbon. Of course, these contracts will stipulate "have to look like an accident" for the sake of keeping up appearances.

► Balladeer

► In the shadows, we will have symmetrical job offers, asking us to play bodyguards or foil assassination attempts.

► Bull

Third, to go with a draconic analogy, this brand-new HQ will be her lair. It's clear from the statement, but also from the chatter inside SG, that Gabrielle will personally oversee the project. And she plans to make this state-of-the-art palace into a true power center for her reign over the megacorporation.

Now, remember that this is just the announcement, which means that Spinrad Global has secured the land and the budget and can start the construction of the HQ. The move itself will not happen for a while, probably at least a year, if not even more. A lot of things need to unfold before New Monaco becomes Spinrad Global Central, which also implies that this can still fail, especially if deniable assets, hired by Gabrielle's enemies, successfully hinder the project.

► It's worth noting that the relocation took the French Touch by surprise. Both Saurat and Fauchon had planned to increase the presence of French corporations in Monaco. The consortium was actually securing land, on behalf of Louis Vuitton and Index-AXA, but those deals fell through at the last minute, only days before the announcement, thanks to the swift work of a few runners (most likely employed by SG). The intelligence apparatus of the French Touch was still trying to figure out who was really behind the job when Gabrielle published her communiqué. Aegis Cognito wasn't on their best game on this one.

► Sim-Eon

► Interestingly, they were not suspecting SG because intel pointed toward Miranda King as the Ms. Johnson behind the jobs. As she no



longer works for the AAA, they assumed something else was afoot. Keep that little nugget in mind for the second part of this dossier.

► Netcat

## SPINRAD GLOBAL'S MATRIX: BACK TO BARE METAL

Johnny's death, Gabrielle and her new management, and the move to New Monaco may sound like the most transformative changes of the AAA, but in fact they are drops in the water compared to this one. On June 30, SG quietly revealed a partnership with Novatech and Erika, which has been kept secret for a few months.

This joint venture has allowed the AAA to migrate their entire Matrix infrastructure away from Foundation-based hosts to the so-called Framework ones. Gabrielle's messaging on this was all about "building for the Matrix of tomorrow" and ensuring that "SG remains at the top of the latest technologies," but we all know very well this is BS. Spinrad Global, like many others, are simply running away from the Null Sect.

- It is definitely a trend. Projections indicate that, at the same time next year, actively used servers based on Foundations will be between 5-10 percent of the market. It's unlikely that any large organization will still use them (at least, massively) by then. For sure, small actors will keep risking the brain of their spider because of the free computing power that it brings, but overall, deckers on a run will be dealing mostly with good old-fashioned hardware.
- Respec
- And remember that there are a few actors, like the Corporate Court, that never used the Foundations from the start.
- Orbital DK
- Yeah, it's actually frustrating because it hurts the SINless and the shadows more than it does the corps. Here in Berlin, I saw a lot of so-called alternative districts, like Kreuz'hain or Lichtenberg, build up their own Matrix infrastructure with Foundation-based hosts. And now, they rely too much on it to give it up and can't afford to get the much-needed hardware to replace it. A few hooders, like the neo-anarchists from the Caligarikiez directly North of the Renrakusan (the former Prenzlauer Berg district, now 100 percent owned by Renraku) have helped by heisting the required resources, but it's not an easy task. To get as much out of framework hardware as you do with a Foundation, you need to have the right equipment and power to make it run. Given the cost and value of framework hardware, the corp invests heavily in the retrieval of any stolen equipment or assets. That's not even factoring in that most districts are often powered by the scraps of electricity they managed to steal from the corps.
- Sim-Eon





- The move away from the Foundation is all well and good, but remember, those hosts are not going anywhere. Instead, they will feed the wild garden at the edges of the Matrix, where the dark things grow and flourish. You've patched the hole in the basement, but that doesn't keep the wolves from lurking in the nearby forest.
- Rikki

One question remains, however: How did Spinrad Global manage to be left alone by the Nulls until now? Yes, the migration is clearly to protect their Matrix assets from those Foundation-based horrors, but the disturbing fact remains that SG servers are, by far, the least affected by them.

Sure, they were infested by the Sect like anyone else, probably even more than the average corp. But from what I could dig up, it didn't have any impact on their daily operations.

- That's not entirely true. Like many other victims of the Nulls, for instance, they lost files out of nowhere, without explanation. The strange part is these were never important files. In fact, I even heard from spiders inside SG that the deleted documents were often compromising. Like this famous memo that mysteriously reappeared a few months ago ...
- Netcat

I'm going to share the current theory about this particular conundrum. Note that, like Sim-Eon, I like when an explanation is supported by good solid facts. Sadly, here there are none. So, take this with not a pinch, but a truckload of salt.

While there is no trace of such an event, it seems Johnny caught on to the Nulls' existence early on. He apparently spearheaded a special project then, with top-tier deckers coming from every part of SG, all commandeered into a special task force with a top-secret agenda: to reach out to the Sect and negotiate a deal. The offer to the Nulls was simple: infest us as much as you want, but don't harm our business. You want to delete files? No problem, but delete *these* files. You wanna put vines everywhere in this critical server? No problem, chap, just don't mess with the flow of data. And so on.

It may seem like an odd deal for the weird monsters of the deep Matrix to accept, but bear in mind that, at the time, they were struggling to understand our world. To some extent, they still have issues comprehending the physical world. So, from this point of view, Johnny's proposal might have been appealing.

While MCT wanted to exploit them, and other corporations wanted to destroy them or reclaim their servers, Spinrad had basically given them carte blanche, only asking for things that the Nulls didn't really care about. On top of that, he offered to teach them what matters to us in the Matrix as a side effect of the deal. Again, this is merely a theory that fits the puzzle. It's unsubstantiated, but it's all we have.

If there was such a deal, it clearly worked for a little while and, in the most ironic way ever, has probably helped Gabrielle bury any potential documents linking her to Johnny's death even deeper. Given the memo's reappearance in the hands of the Disians, it's fair to say that either the Nulls have consciously betrayed their arrangements with the AAA or have now proven to be unreliable allies.

I'm pretty sure, however, that Johnny had planned for this alliance to be time-bound anyway. Either he agreed on a date with them (but do the Nulls really understand the passage of time as we do?), or the dead man set it as a deadline for his corp ("By then, we need to be ready to move away from the Foundation-based Matrix"). What's sure is that you don't migrate the entire Matrix infrastructure of one of the largest AAA in the Sixth World in just a few weeks. This was planned for a long time, maybe even before the merger of Spinrad Industries and Global Sandstorm was approved.

Whatever the reason for the deal to fall apart, it is clear now that SG has lost this unlikely ally for good. Every host abandoned by the AAA in the last several weeks has been swallowed whole by the Null's infamous vines, and I have a report of spiders and other Matrix experts being mysteriously attacked in the Matrix, in what looked a lot like a Null hit. It's not a full-blown war, and it's unsure it will come to that, but for sure, SG's edge over its competitor on this front is now gone for good.

## WOMEN'S CLUB

POSTED BY: NETCAT

I'm taking over from Skarn-Ka on this one, because ... he asked me to. How did he put it? Oh, right, "This one needs a woman's touch." Not sure about that, but I was happy to help investigate this quite interesting happenstance.

A bit of context first. As much progress as the Sixth World has made, let's face it, the corporate world remains largely a men's club. Sure, Karen King has been around forever at Ares, but how many names like Richard Villiers, Miles Lanier, Johnny Spinrad, and a list of old sararimen as long as a kraken's tentacles do we have for each woman like her?

This situation has, however, changed in the last few years. Cara Villiers is stepping into her father's shoes, Karen King seems to be turning Ares Seattle into her own, private empire, and of course, Gabrielle Al-Thani is the CEO of one of the ten AAAs in the whole world. Even Miranda King left SG only to become a more important player in her own, yet unclear, venture. In short, a lot of women are making great strides in the corporate world and, Gabrielle seems to be at the center of it.



I'm not saying she is the mastermind behind it all, but she has certainly taken advantage of this situation and used the "we-are-women-lets-be-smart-about-this-and-work-together" card quite efficiently. And this women's club of hers, to call it like that, might be, if it lasts, the real power behind the throne (of the Corporate Court) in a few years.

- > What? No mention of Empress Hitomi or Sharon Chaing-Wu? Tsk, tsk.
- > Corporate Raiders
- > By nature, I'm less "focused" than most metahumans on gender; however, I do wonder if I should be offended that Gabrielle has not contacted me?
- > Orange Queen
- > It's not even been ten years since you've been basically exiled, you are probably still considered radioactive.
- > Winterhawk
- > Or Gabrielle has reached out to Hestaby and the mama lizard is throwing us off her scent ...
- > Plan 9
- > The Orange Queen isn't the only female great dragon, you know.
- > Sim-Eon

## CARA VILLERS

Before I talk about Cara Villiers and her relationship to Gabrielle, I need to give you some context, and come back to some undiscussed (as of yet) events of the last few months. We'll step away from Spinrad Global for a little while, but it's important for background. So bear with me for a bit.

### ATLAS AND DOCWAGON

First, do you remember when Atlas, the pet AI of DocWagon, suddenly disappeared back in June 2082? Well, you may have missed it, but the so-called ambassador to JackPoint from Garmonbozia discreetly reappeared a few months later and claimed that "the problem leading to my absence has been resolved," and that "such occurrence will never happen again; measures to prevent this have been put in place." The (virtual) balls on this AI, right?!

- > We discussed Atlas' disappearance in detail in the Garmonbozia chapter of the *Null Value* upload. In short, it turns out that another AI called Der Jadedrache tried to murder him in a ploy to sow chaos in the e-nation and most likely used the ensuing confusion and chaos to increase its own influence there. Atlas and another AI, named Alkwarismi, after a long and fruitless investigation, finally guessed the cyberspace dragon was behind it. They used some runners to force the Matrix wyrm to reveal his involvement. That was enough for Pulsar, Sojourner, and

Orion to rescind his refugee status in Garmonbozia and exile Der Jadedrache.

- > Sim-Eon

Anyway, after such a stunt, anyone with half a brain would have assumed that the career of Atlas inside DocWagon would be over, right? Well, guess again, chummers! As Lone Star has been thriving within OmniStar for the last few years, management in DocWagon got increasingly worried about becoming nothing more than a subsidiary to the security corp. Given the culture of "do no harm" still somewhat prevalent (since many of its people, even execs, are trained medical doctors) within the company, it did not sit well with them.

With Novatech joining the fold at the end of June this year and Cara Villiers stepping in and clearly playing for the CEO's seat, they realized that desperate times make for desperate measures. So they opted to name the AI president of their entire branch. Why? Simply because they bet, probably not wrongly, that Atlas has enough computational horsepower to play chess with Villiers and the rest of OmniStar.

- > For now, this particular gambit seems to have paid off. Atlas has managed to counter a few moves from Lone Star that would have been detrimental to DW, but it's also actively engaging Cara Villiers in some sort of seduction dance, for lack of a better term. The AI and the Novatech CEO have an ongoing "Will They/ Won't They" relationship, where they betray and help each other, sometimes both on the same day, which keeps most people inside OmniStar on their toes.
- > Sunshine

Atlas' appointment as the head of DW is the latest event in a long series, proving that Cara's intention to become OmniStar's CEO is undeniable. In my opinion, it puts to rest the idea that she used this opportunity as a decoy until she could get her hands on her father's Golden Ticket. To be fair, it's a valid assumption, but there are a few reasons for her not to go down this road.

### DADDY ISSUES

First of all, her father, Richard Villiers, is brain-dead, but his body can be kept alive for decades, as long as no one pulls the plug. So there is no saying when the Golden Ticket will land in Cara's lap, especially as SG could challenge the lending contract or even use an obscure clause of the document to enforce that the loan can be renewed without her approval. In short, the JRJ Golden Ticket is not as much in her hands as you may think.

Second, from a legal standpoint, it's not even clear if Cara would actually get the Golden Ticket (or rather be the one controlling it). The most



qualified corporate lawyers have been squabbling about this question for years already. Can a Golden Ticket be inherited, as part of JRJ ownership? If so, and if the company is split in two—no one knows how Villiers wrote his will, if he did—between Cara and her uncle, how would that work? Would they somehow both have access to the Golden Ticket? And then there's the question of what is really left of JRJ after the dismantlement of NeoNET? Could an A or AA successfully argue in court that this tenuous corporate entity is no longer the same one that used to own the GT?

I guess you understand now, it's a can of worms no one in the corporate world wants to see opened.

- > For once, I think the true reason might be more mundane. I believe Cara does not yearn to pull the plug on her father, and this narrative is helping her NOT do so. She had a difficult relationship with a distant dad, but the man did get shot trying, stupidly, to come to her rescue ... I suspect she, consciously or not, hopes to resurrect him—somehow, someday.
- > Plan 9
- > I have never disagreed more with you on something.
- > Plan 10
- > Gosh, I never thought I would agree with Plan 10 AGAINST Plan 9. After fifty years, Ghost still manages to send me a few curveballs, now and then.
- > Sim-Eon
- > What is also sure is that Lofwyr has no desire to leave this particular Golden Ticket in the hands of SG. There are believable rumors that S-K Prime is looking for a prime runner team, skilled enough to locate Richard's body, infiltrate the facility, and pull the plug, one way or another.
- > Skarn-Ka

Third, factor into this legal mess the whole deal with Spinrad Global “renting” the Golden Ticket from Villiers. At the time, the CC was exhausted by months of procedure and backroom negotiation to dismantle NeoNET as a token punishment for the CFD crisis. Villiers forced their hand by saying (off the record, of course): “Yes, I’ll agree to this and will not challenge the ruling if you let me lend my GT to Spinrad.” So they did, without realizing the implication if Richard Villiers somehow bit the bullet.

Yet, now that he's more or less deceased, this has become a proper legal nightmare. Can one actually loan someone a Golden Ticket? Should Villiers have, instead, sold JRJ to Spinrad? And what are the exact provisions of the deal between the now-gone Johnny Spinrad and the currently all-but-dead Richard Villiers in the event of either of them passing away?

- > It's even worse than that. Johnny and Richard probably made this agreement like old classmates. They acquiesced and shook their hands. They put very little in writing, and the contract, from what I heard, is pretty shallow for a deal of this magnitude. Legally speaking, Gabby has as much chance to argue in court that the Golden Ticket lease can be extended indefinitely or even transfer permanently to her or her AAA, as Cara and her uncle to successfully assert that it should go back to them, effective immediately. In short, the only sure thing, in all this mess, is that any legal proceeding will be long, expensive, and its result impossible to predict (even factoring in the inherently corrupt nature of the corporate world).
- > Mr. Bonds

- > And don't forget that there is also a strong movement AGAINST Golden Tickets in general. All the AAAs that don't have one, along with the AAs, have been scheming to simply cancel them to restore a semblance of fairness between the CC members. I'm pretty sure the fact that the Corporate Court just launched a task force to arbitrate this very topic is the result of their lobbying. And legally speaking, they have a valid point. Let's face it, GTs are frankly rigging the game, while bringing little-to-no value to the world's economy. From this point of view, an epic lawsuit on a Golden Ticket could be the corporate equivalent of the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. An event that could trigger a long war that could ultimately lead to the disappearance of ALL the Golden Tickets ...
- > Cosmo
- > And this is why, there was ... a SPA DAY!!!
- > Slamm-O!

### SPA DAY

For those of us who do NOT scour the Matrix searching for pics of half-naked celebs, and thus may not be familiar with this particular event from early June of this year, let me recap.

A few days before Novatech announced joining OmniStar, a photo was leaked showing Gabrielle Al-Thani and Cara Villiers wrapped in cozy white towels and stepping out of a sauna, smiling as their pores were cleaned. Of course, with the amount of money they both have access to, the two looked, as my hubby would put it, “finnnnnnnnnnnnnne!”

Which was the angle the media tackled the story with, and of course, entirely missed the point.

At the time, most tabloids ran a barely believable narrative. According to it, this encounter was an incredible coincidence. The two women simply decided to go to the same super exclusive, dementedly overpriced resort at the same time. And they had a good laugh when each of them realized who the other one in the sauna was! If the brain-dead corporate drones of the Sixth World certainly swallowed this like sweet candy, the truth is most likely that this coincidence was savvily coordinated by runners, working for one or both of them, in



order for Gabrielle and Cara to have a very, very confidential discussion.

- › Keeping in mind also that they reportedly spent several hours alone with each other. In a facility that, for obvious privacy reasons, is devoid of any cameras and happens to be a Faraday cage.
- › Kat o' Nine Tales

So, most reasonable people assume they, in fact, negotiated a deal of some sorts. The popular theory is that Cara and Gabrielle discussed the mess they inherited with the improbable arrangement their father and husband made for JRJ's Golden Ticket. While no one can really know what they agreed on, it seems they are both pushing (hard) for the "let's not open the legal Pandora box surrounding JRJ's GT" from their respective positions.

What is clear, however, is that the two women were not planning for this encounter to become public knowledge. Nobody ever came forward about leaking the story to the media, but a masseur are the spa who was working on the day they met was found dead a few days later. Strangely enough, his fancy commlink has yet to be recovered ...

The fact of the matter is, I'm pretty sure this was NOT the first time they met and that they have been collaborating for a little while already. Maybe even before Richard Villiers became comatose. I can't substantiate it (sorry, Sim), but I'll wager they began helping each other soon after Johnny bought the bullet.

- › Another sure thing is that at least one or two prime runner teams were involved. If Cara and Gabrielle are really collaborating in secret, they have to meet every few months. This requires some coordination that cannot be achieved without a backchannel between them. IMHO, only a runner team, loyal to them and not their AAA, can pull that off.
- › DangerSensei
- › My money would be that one of the teams is the one that Cara used during the mess that led to her father's demise. To act as a go-between for her with Al-Thani, the team must have someone Cara trusts, and I'll bet she bonded with them after what they saw her go through.
- › Juice Box
- › Or, because they witnessed her in a particularly compromising position, those runners are now all six feet under.
- › Cayman

## MIRANDA KING

If Miranda was one of the most trusted advisors of Johnny Spinrad, she does not seem to hold a grudge against Gabrielle for her (most likely) involvement in his death. In fact, from what I've gathered, she left SG on very good terms with its current CEO. There are rumors that they communicate with each other often, but they appear to be particularly careful about it, so it's hard to prove.

- › Lately, Miranda has been acting as a personal Ms. Johnson for Miles Lanier's "pet projects" (as mentioned in the section on Century Dynamics). One of his recent obsessions is OmniStar—or rather, figuring out who or what is behind the AA. Maybe Cara is, in fact, in league with Lanier or even King, and she agreed to the merger of Novatech in order to help. When you think about it, if she does become the CEO of OmniStar, "Reina del Mar" (the Sea Dragon) will most likely need to reveal herself to Cara.
- › Sim-Eon

## CLAUDIA ROMANOV

As improbable as this situation is, I think we have to accept the fact that Gabrielle Al-Thani has a good relationship with Claudia Romanov and that the two women, despite the circumstances, have become friends (or at least are on friendly terms). As a mother myself, I have no idea how the former top model can stand Gabrielle, who basically stole her child from her. But, as you will see, this is the too-surreal-even-for-a-telenovela reality we are living in.

- › Actually, Gabrielle had nothing to do with Anya's kidnapping. It was orchestrated by Miranda King, on behalf of Johnny (as explained in *Shoot Straight*). She, however, took good care of Anya while never trying to replace her mom in any kind of way. The minute Johnny died, she not only allowed, but arranged for Anya to see her birth mother as soon as possible. This was kept under wraps by both women at the time, but Claudia saw her daughter in Dubai, only a few weeks after Johnny's body was buried.
- › Skarn-Ka
- › As her father managed to force the courts of the NEEC to give him full custody, Gabrielle cannot simply let Anya go back to her mom (at least not right away). In short, the mess that Johnny created is not so easy to undo. And doing so, as the kid is about to be eighteen soon, is rather pointless. It also seems, to be honest, that Anya likes being with Gabrielle. And we should keep in mind that, at the end of the day, Spinrad is much more her corp than S-K will ever be. Regardless of her current loyalties, the fact remains that Anya might eventually inherit enough shares to run Spinrad Global, while Lofwyr will probably stay at the helm of S-K for yet another few millennia.
- › Sunshine



Gabrielle and Claudia Romanov's good rapport has often played a crucial role in avoiding crises between their two megacorporations since Johnny's death. In fact, it seems the former top model is acting as a red phone (going with a Cold War analogy) between Lofwyr (or other S-K high-ranking management) and SG's CEO.

- Gabrielle has no interest in fueling the vendetta of her late husband against the wyrm, and the dragon clearly has better things to do than carry on a feud with a deceased mortal. But both are also painfully aware that there are simply too many battlefields still in motion between their organizations to settle into something akin to a unilateral truce. They at least try to have an honest discussion from time to time to avoid making things worse. For instance, the reason the current conflict of influence between S-K and SG in the Caliphate has not escalated beyond this particular theater of operations is because of this very relationship.
- Kay St. Irregular
- I wonder if the dragon has not made peace with the idea, for now, to share Europe with SG (rather than other powers).
- Kia
- Or maybe he sees Gabrielle for what she really is: a pawn of the Sea Dragon, and thus wants to keep her close ...
- Plan 9
- Un. Fragging. Substantiated.
- Sim-Eon







## LONG PIG

BY JAY ERICKSON

*Zero Zone.*

Aiko Chihara looked up suddenly at the words, taking his pen in hand, scribbling down the latest term in a list of assets he never knew existed. As assistant to the Risk Management Division of what was once Mitsuhama Computer Technologies, and now just MCT, he was paid well to always be prepared. White noise generators, drones, and magical errata could muddle conversations and even memories, but old tech was harder to track in the increasingly digital world. So today, he wrote in cipher, the defunct Pig Latin: *Erozay Onezay*.

"They all stay. Far too risky to let them go," intoned Haru Bando.

"I was hardly considering otherwise." This voice, which he knew far too well, belonged to Samba Oi, once a prominent member of the Ichi while Toshiro Mitsuhama was in charge. Now, he was the "Chief Financial Officer," here to steer MCT back on course after it had so recently ... erred.

"Of course, Oi-sama, forgive my impudence."

Aiko rolled his eyes at his boss' pathetic groveling, for he knew what Samba wanted—strength and assurance of the future. With a throaty grunt, the ancient CFO waved the gesture away with an age-spotted hand.

"We have nearly 400 holdings and shell companies we can liquify to keep up our standing," one of the

oyabun added, clearly ready to shovel anything onto the growing sacrificial pyre to keep MCT afloat as a triple-A megacorporation.

Yet Samba was uncompromising, "Everything we sell must not give our adversaries any more of an advantage than they already possess."

"Older manufacturing facilities, perhaps? Many are falling behind on production due to their antiquated functions," Aiko's boss suggested.

Another grunt from Samba. "Tiger Mitsuhama opened most of those antiquated facilities himself."

Haru shifted uncomfortably—he seemed unusually pale. "The risk of knowledgeable staff going to other corps is negligible from those sites, Oi-sama. We won't lose any personnel with more sensitive knowledge to the company and its ... recent indiscretions."

The heat from Samba's eyes burned into Haru Bando like twin suns. "Toshiro Mitsuhama was responsible for those indiscretions and has brought much dishonor to this corporation. How would you deal with those individuals in the know, Bando-san? These are people with knowledge, yes, but also knowledge of state-of-the-art projects."

"They would need to be re-educated. We set up facilities to direct them to a brighter future with the company," Haru suggested.

"Like an internment camp? The kind your great-great-grandfather was relegated to in the 1940s during World War II?"

"No, Oi-sama, that's not what I meant." Sweat beaded across Haru's brow now.

"I think it's exactly what you meant. Stop





supplicating—it does not become you! Even should I humor such a thing, it would only take more assets to see it done, which doesn't help at all."

Aiko cleared his throat, speaking for the first time. "Then we determine their value. If they are necessary, we keep them. If unnecessary, we excise the threat."

"Excuse me?" The look on the CFO's sunken, venerable face was one of complete surprise.

"I think what my assistant means to say ..." Haru began.

"Let the boy speak."

Aiko looked up from his notebook. This was his moment, his time to show his true loyalty. "Oi-sama, MCT must survive by any means necessary. All assets are on the table, so ... which are expendable? If a man knows too much, they become a liability."

"And you are suggesting we do what, exactly?"

Aiko shrugged, all attention on him now. "A trapped animal will chew its own limb off to survive if it knows a hunter is coming. Some of these other corps are hungry for more than just our tech—they want our ideas. But those come from our people, so I hardly see any other option that is not as efficient or cannot be carried out so quickly."

"And by whom, Aiko-san? Contrary to popular belief, we are not quick to hurt our own, not to mention the PR scandal of a companywide culling of its rising stars," Samba defended—yet the look in those predatory eyes belied something else.

"We can use outside assets through an intermediary so it wouldn't be tracked to us."

One of the oyabun piped up, "Like shadowrunners and Johnsons?"

Aiko nodded. "Yes. And as for PR, we can spin it in our favor. Right now, we appear as that wounded animal. Why wouldn't a rival, like Shiawase, strike at us? Last I checked, they've shifted hard into industry, and I think they'd be keen to get their hands on some of our brilliant minds. If played well, any altercations incurred on MCT property could look like attacks against us from other corps—kicking us while we're down, so to speak. Casualties are a given, and even then, it would earn us sympathy from our buyers. We show strength and tenacity in soldiering forward, humility and empathy in those we lost, and even bravery in the face of aggressors. It would be ... a new face for MCT."

"And you would find this an acceptable compromise to losing them to a competitor?" Samba's voice was a calm hiss of air.

"Blood is cheap," Aiko returned in a whisper.

Samba's stare was hard for a time, the room around them still as a tomb. Then, a large smile broke across his aged face. "Bando-san, this boy has a set! I respect his hunger, but he requires tempering." Everyone in the meeting joined a chorus of laughter, including a nervous Haru Bando, his face plastered in sweat. "Aiko-san has presented a suggestion," the CFO continued. "An extreme one, but undeniably effective in application. He even laid out how it could be done, including how to spin media in our favor. Plus, he still takes notes in pen. I see you write in cipher—very wise. I value a man who knows his own merit and doesn't rely on technology." A pause, and Aiko could feel his ears burn hot crimson. "Let's build off this framework and see if we can do better."



It wouldn't do well for rumors to start that MCT has a taste for *long pig*."

The remainder of the time went quickly as they carved more pieces from the proverbial MCT body. The company was going to bleed out if it continued like this, but Aiko had no more input, and he was certain Bando-san was going to rip into him for speaking out of turn. Had he overstepped? Or did Samba appreciate his backbone? It was hard to read the old man.

As soon as he returned home, he pulled out his notes, written in Pig Latin, to find the one line that had so caught his attention. *Zero Zone*. No one wanted to touch those locations—what were they? What did they mean? Perhaps it was time to do some digging.

Maika Hase, his corporate decker friend, might be able to help. She had the clearance, and if he was truly to be an asset to Samba, he needed to learn all he could about the Zero Zone. After all, he only had two more days until the next meeting.

"Bando-san is dead."

This was not exactly the first thing Aiko wanted to hear upon waking up the next morning. "How?" he whispered.

"Heart attack is what's listed," Maika's voice reverberated back to him lifelessly—typical when she was in the Matrix.

He hoped her call was going to give him insight on Zero Zones, but this was ... different. Not worse, just different. He wasn't indebted to the man, he hardly knew or cared about Bando—he was just another wageslave in the business, and now he was a swiftly cooling body in Aiko's way. In fact, this might well be an opportunity for him to secure a solid footing in MCT, if he were quick enough.

"Did you get what I asked for?"

"I did, and it's, well ... it's something to see in person."

Excellent. "Okay, I need to make some serious moves. We'll meet later this evening, my office, 21:00. I'm about to make our portfolios absolutely orichalcum! You can thank me later." Aiko disconnected before Maika could utter another word.

Thanks to the untimely "retirement" of his boss, he spent the day sweeping in like a vulture, feasting on the carrion to make himself as fat and indispensable to MCT as he could. Portfolio-padding, stock mergers, and turning shell subsidies into mercurial liquid equity became his agenda, and he was masterful. By the end of the day, hundreds of lowly wageslaves were about to be out their livelihoods, but frag them. If they weren't as clever as he, then they deserved to drown in the muck.

Aiko would be sitting in the head manager's seat by the end of the meeting, he was certain. His keen understanding of what needed to stay and what could be "trimmed" would ensure his long, prosperous future with MCT. It felt almost like Samba had set this up for him.

"Never waste the opportunity provided by a good crisis," He muttered to himself.

It was a motto to live by.

21:00 couldn't come fast enough.

When it arrived, though, it was hardly what Aiko expected. Maika Hase entered his office with the same pale visage and sweaty hairline as Haru had just yesterday. Was some kind of virus going around?

Nonetheless, he activated his white noise generator. "So, what I asked for ..."

Maika shook her head. "I think this is a bad idea."

"What do you mean?" he asked, curiosity piqued.

"I can't believe they were even mentioned in the meetings."

"Well, it was vague, and then immediately dropped. That's why I asked ..."

"And I'm telling you, I think it's a mistake—for both of us."

"So, what do you think we should do?"

Maika's black locks danced in the dim light as she continued shaking her head. "I ... just don't know, Aiko. It's bad. Really bad."

Maika never acted like this. Was she trying to squeeze him now? Displeasure dripped through every word. "We had a deal."

"Fine. Look, it's your funeral." From a hidden wrist pouch, she extracted a small chip. "I couldn't get you the intel directly—too much black IC. Instead, I BTL recorded what I saw. You can see it all through a simsense deck."

Clever. He reached and took the chip from her thin, pale fingers. "Should I watch it here?"

"God, no!" He didn't miss the lilt of panic. "Just ... we can't do this again. And we shouldn't be together."

More than a little confused, Aiko started to speak further, but Maika was already on her way to the door. Yet, she never got a chance to open it—just as her fingers touched the handle, a coterie of MCT CorpSec guards were there, hands resting on their holsters, faces unreadable.

"Aiko Chihara? Maika Hase? Follow us."

The look in Maika's eyes read only one thing: panic. And yet, Aiko, not truly knowing what he was holding, was still confident in his future. He worked hard for it, and the opportunity was just too good to pass up. "Lead the way."

It was a short walk and a long, uncomfortable elevator ride back to the same boardroom where he met with Samba the previous day.

"Wait here," a guard instructed him as he pushed Maika further down the hall. Where were they taking her? Aiko didn't know, but they did lock eyes one last time. And there was so much fear there! Something was odd, yes, but there was no need for all that drama. Everything was fine—he was too smart, too good. Nothing untoward was going to happen to him.

He watched through polarized glass as they walked Maika across the hall and to another boardroom, leaving her alone there. Across the way, they saw a third individual that Aiko recognized as someone



in the R&D division, but not someone he knew personally. A rising star? Perhaps they were about to be interviewed. Perhaps they were strong candidates for new positions. Indeed, he'd expected things to move fast, but not the same day.

With nothing else to do but wait, he decided to recline in the faux-leather, high-backed chair that Samba had once used. What had he said, something about an acceptable compromise? Maybe ...

Just then, an ear-rending caterwaul echoed across the floor, making him jump. Seconds later, something somewhere far-off died in the throes of mechanical failure. Then, everything went black.

Emergency generators blinked to life, illuminating the conference room like some brothel in the red-light district. Maglocks activated on all the doors, safely securing them, and the glass turned fully transparent to reveal Maika and the other wageslave in their own separate fishbowls.

They were in lockdown.

Aiko lifted his commlink to call Maika, but it was dead. "What the frag is going on?" The words pierced the air like a serpent's hiss.

Since they couldn't speak, he looked across the way for answers, but Maika was hunkered down against the wall, hard at work on her cyberdeck. Was she doing this?

Muffled thumps cascaded through the halls like thunder without lightning. Aiko turned in his glass cage, peering down the carmine-cast chamber.

Then he saw the midnight silhouette of the barrel of a Franchi Spas shotgun manifest from the murk, held by a form in the vague shape of a man. Closer and closer, he stalked forward until Aiko could see his thick layers of Kevlar, Arabic script scrawled incoherently across its composite chest plate. Then his face, square and obscured by black paint and topped with a bone-white topknot—a stark and intimidating contrast, to be sure.

It was his eyes, though, that terrified him most—black as the void, burning with terrible intent. The armored wraith loomed over the trapped wageslave, and Aiko knew then that he'd overplayed his hand. He hadn't made himself indispensable to a wounded corporation... he was nothing but a delectable morsel to the MCT scavengers now, a pound of flesh.

And this shadowrunner was coming to feast.

Frag! He never once thought his actions would place him in the eyes of another corp! Of course they would—he was about to be forcefully extracted. Someone in MCT must've gotten word and was trying to protect him.

Aiko watched as the trio of shadowrunners closed in, first on Maika in her glass cage. They were going to take her to some new corporation because he'd made her look too good. Drek! This wasn't what he'd wanted. His mind raced, trying to think of how he could get out of this. Convince the runners they were taking the wrong person? Buy them off? Try to hide?

He looked up to Maika again. Was she going to fight them or go peacefully? Her eyes were still

closed and her deck was faintly illuminated as her fingers danced fervently across a holographic screen. Aiko could see everything with such clarity—the beads of sweat along her soft brow, the etched lines of concentration forming crows' feet at the edges of her closed, almond eyes, and the flush of color in her throat as adrenaline swept through her.

He could bang on the glass, distract the runners, do something to help Maika. They'd worked together for months now, kind of like a team. But he also knew that their attention on her would buy him time, especially to see how they were going to go about taking her. Would they be civil? Would they bind and bag her? He was curious.

So he got low and made himself a smaller target, harder to see. He watched as they breached her cell, as the large one took lead. His mouth moved, asking a question, but Aiko couldn't hear it, nor did he understand Maika's response.

The monster leveled the shotgun her way—must have been a threat. It was then that she opened her eyes, but she never looked at the man, only at Aiko, across the impenetrable glass barrier. Then... the shadowrunner pulled the trigger, ending the fledgling decker in an explosion of gore that painted the fishbowl red.

Aiko screamed, and collapsed to the floor, numb. They were supposed to take them away. He'd padded their portfolios so well. He heard another gunshot as the R&D man's life too was cut short. And then they came for him.

The maglock to his glass cage was barely an inconvenience, and they spilled into the room as a lethal tide. A dwarf with a large red beard looked at him, and something flashed in his cybereye. "Andros, this be the one."

The massive human's black gaze fell down on Aiko. And for a single moment he thought once more that perhaps they were here to take him. They had to eliminate witnesses. Yes, that made sense. Wrong place, wrong time. Tough luck, Maika.

Then the one called Andros spoke, his voice like crunching gravel. "I am to deliver you a message."

Aiko stared up at the armored man, dumbfounded. "*Loodbay is eapchay.*"

His own words ... they were his own words, so stupid and yet so eloquent in Pig Latin. Samba had taken his advice after all and chosen to eliminate the liabilities standing in MCT's way. And he was one of them.

Blood is cheap.

The barrel of the shotgun was leveled at his chest. There was no time to cry out, cower, or even try to speak.

The muzzle flashed.

The barrel kicked.

There was pain, unbelievable pain, and then ... nothing at all.





# THE HARDER THEY FALL

- Truth be told, I had a hard time reading some of these. Not because of the quality of writing, but because of the still-fresh memories regarding how these specific corporations actively assisted with the near-annihilation of our world. And I'm frankly shocked at the (for the most part) lack of vitriol. But then, I haven't read the comments. Still, in any war there are winners and there are losers. The following is a look at those who were, even if only *technically*, on the losing side. Still, they got off lucky if you ask me.
- Glitch

## AZTECHNOLOGY: CHANGING SUNS

POSTED BY: OXOLOTL

- I've been the prominent voice for all things Big-A for a long time. After the events leading up to the Un-Awakening and the fallout, I've decided to step back. I'm not gone, but I've asked someone

else to step up and help keep us informed about Aztechnology and Aztlan from now on. Oxolotl has operated under different names for a while and has the benefit of being an Aztlan native.

- Pyramid Watcher

When the first sections of Skyhook crashed into the Panama Canal, all forms of heat descended out of Tenochtitlán. With only one surviving member of Aztechnology's board still alive, emergency meetings were held in Puebla as the fires from four teocalli in the capital still raged. Then, Director of Special Projects Armando Salazar met in closed-door meetings with Domingo Ramos and the handful of division heads for less than a week. By all rights, Domingo Ramos should've been selected as the chairman of the board, not only as the controller of the largest single block of shares, but as the sole remaining member of the board of directors. When the meetings were concluded, Domingo Ramos made a stunning press statement and assigned Tsuru Shinoyama as his representative, and that Armando Salazar was now CEO.



- > Why didn't Ramos take Chairman? He's a bastard, but he had all the power.
- > Stone
- > He has all the money and the power that comes with it. But Salazar has the keys to the closets.
- > Oxolotl
- > And then some.
- > Rifleman
- > Wait, Tsuru Shinoyama? As in *Tsurunga* Shinoyama? The former Aztechnology board member who was exiled during the CFD crisis? What gives?
- > Slamm-O!
- > Keep reading.
- > Oxolotl

Typically, Aztechnology's CEO also serves as president of Aztlan. But due to a tidal shift in political actions and the outcry of tens of millions of citizens, Salazar is only acting as president until stability can be declared. Ramos remains a consultant to the board and gets all the news through his proxy. So far, he's been working in tandem with Salazar, which is saying something.

- > Has anyone seen or heard anything from Motecuhzoma? With de la Rosa gone (her remains were found within Waypoint's emergency spaces), that one seems to have vanished.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Nothing officially. While he wasn't present at the big meeting, assistants act like they're still in contact. I've seen witness reports saying he vanished into thin air. If he was a spirit, perhaps he was forced back to the astral plane until someone calls him back. Until then, Salazar appointed Elizar Victor Ruiz, a hermetic magician and member of the Order of Quetzalcoatl, as thaumaturgical R&D head. A native to Pueblo Corporate, he's lived in Aztlan most of his life and is a lifetime employee. He's literally a straight shooter and a certified expert with rifles and javelins.
- > Marcos

## NOTHING BUT ASH

As one of the biggest losers of the Disian Shadow War, it's proven difficult to measure what the Big-A lost. After selling their souls, Aztechnology then lost tangible properties. Employee losses have been measurable in the thousands, with the greatest hits in their security and research divisions. Aztechnology Corporate Security, for example, has lost nearly a third of its officers and a solid quarter of its command staff in the numerous global disasters. If not for then-Director Salazar's stand-down order, the losses would've been more significant. Within Aztlan's borders, the loss of the Skyhook

and their president has overshadowed their massive troop losses.

- > It should also be said that ACS is backed up by the military and its reserves within the nation's borders. The entire military reserve has been activated and channeled into employment with the ACS to meet contract requirements. Military personnel are filling the vacancies within extraterritorial facilities to ensure that legitimate corporate staff maintains service level agreements abroad.
- > Haze

The research divisions, notably those in thaumaturgical agriculture and geological studies, were so deeply intertwined with the faiths of Aztlan that scores of teocalli were used as Harvester locations. Many of these exploded from what can only be described as astral feedback from environmental mana reversing its course, as well as hundreds of concerted, ad hoc assaults upon these locations.

Regardless, the losses mounted.

- > At this point, many key individuals in research had been replaced with Faustians or those too greedy for the collective benefit, similar to MCT's ranks. Low-level administrators and priests pushed back in the final days, often with support from Salazar's Special Projects troubleshooters.
- > Traveler Jones

With these losses came a whirlwind of nightmares as Surrurg, along with swarms of powerful spirits and supporting Awakened, proceeded to strafe remote locations, many of which weren't known about. The remoteness of these locations kept the mainstream media from learning about them fast enough to add them to the butcher's bill.

- > Internal fighting also arose within the Aztlan military, which had strong ties to the David Cartel through their leaders or key officers. More than once, the cartel led insurgencies into enemy-held facilities or hunted down Mobile Harvesters.
- > Corporate Raiders

## THE NEW BOARD

Aztechnology's situation is unique in that it's rebuilding the entirety of its internal structure from the bottom up. The former head of Aztechnology North America, Oscar Ortiz-Peña, was found dead within the Museo del los Conquistadores in Tenochtitlán just before the Un-Awakening. A later investigation indicated he was slain by zealots while defending his wife and kids. The remains of his bodyguards were scattered throughout the museum.

- > Rumors persist that Ding and his guards were responsible for Oscar's death. The investigation is closed, but pirated security feed fragments show a person in modernized "white jaguar"



armor wielding a macuahuitl-whip. There were no signs of Peña's family anywhere.

► Marcos

Pena's wife, **Dominica Peña's**, inherited all her husband's wealth and shares. She's on the list of potential board members and has shown no interest in her husband's death. Most of their children are in their teens and were never described as being close to their father, nor were they in the vicinity at the time of his death.

- Dominica is a quick-witted, sharp-tongued, strong backhanding orator. Many call her a *bruja*, but I think she's a *tzitzimimi* made flesh. She's a magician, of that I have no doubt. I've seen her stare down smaller dragons and other large metavariants. There's a story out of Quito that several monsters came for her in her home and she dispatched them using a macuahuitl decoration on the wall before they made it to the nursery where her three-year-old daughter was being guarded by her older brother. She's a loyal Aztlaner, which, as people will start to whisper in the coming months, is not *Aztechnology* loyal. Her grandfather was a former cardinal in the Catholic Church and was exiled during the revolutions.
- Prime Runner

The feathered serpent, **Oximichtli**, has also risen to prominence as a board member. Holding nearly 3 percent of *Aztechnology's* shares while possessing more than 30 percent of the super-massive subsidiary *Energia Viva*, he's rumored to have three lairs (including his newest one in Puebla), the largest of which is in the San Ysidro mountains between San Diego and Tecate. Early rumors indicate he's begun cultivating a vision of becoming the new head of *Aztechnology* Latin America.

- He's one of seven feathered serpents with sizable portfolios within *Aztechnology*. Someone once called him "the feathered stone" to explain his interest in engineering and physical sciences. The reach of his shares expanded significantly after the Twins. He's not been seen visiting any of the major teocalli in the capital, but he's been observed with priests of Tlaloc and the Aztec creator couple in smaller teocalli along the Pacific coast.
- Wyrm Watcher

**Esai Ferdina** has a sharp eye for tech and a deeply rooted faith in the Four Tezcatlipocas. He's also been a part of Special Projects since the late '70s, with many believing that Salazar was grooming him as a successor. His citizenship with the Big A started in the Arabian Caliphate at the age of four, when he was adopted by the then-Director of Educational Services Olivia Ferdina, out of their Moroccan offices. His placement and the shares he controls center around holdings in the Mediterranean.

- Lots of talk about people trying to learn Esai's genetic heritage, but the records have been scrubbed from hosting services here and in the Endless Archive. That step makes one wonder if he's Emergent or has strong ties in those communities.
- Gramius

Here's a kicker for everyone. **Tsuru Shinoyama** has been chosen as Domingo Ramos' representative to the board. Many will recall that Tsurunga Shinoyama once served on *Aztechnology's* board and was one of its more balanced members. Unfortunately for him, he contracted CFD in a move many felt was masterminded by Domingo Chavez. Tsurunga was sequestered in extended therapy for several years, and during the interim evolved into Tsuru. He's one of a rare group of individuals who developed with a considerable part of his original personality intact. One of the benefits of CFD is a significant recuperative nature, something that has given Tsuru the vigor of a thirty-something man. In exchange, Tsuru relinquished their ability to propagate through nano-infection, a move that was denounced among metasapients rights groups.

- I don't know how to take this. Is he—they—a monad then?
- Butch

- My question is, why and how is Ding behind this?
- Slamm-O!

- I've heard that he's retained a strong loyalty to *Aztechnology*. Attempts at extracting him recently were thwarted by his own actions, not unlike those with traits exhibited by certain code-carriers.

► Rikki

- \*smells of fresh popcorn\*
- Marko

## AZTECHNOLOGY CORPORATE POWER PLAYS

POSTED BY: MR. BONDS

As previously indicated, *Aztechnology's* immediate outlook isn't good. The losses and damage done to several subsidiaries, such as Pyramid Arcane Supplies (North America), Mystics and Magicks (Africa), and the unexplained destruction of Aztlan teocallis, has set confidence in *Aztechnology* at levels lower than it's ever been. Major divisions are under significant revision, along with numerous petitions to require an emergency audit of the megacorporation's holdings. Of course, they're not the only ones feeling the pressure.

- *Aztechnology's* massive media empire is working overtime to spin things. Once seen as "Great Big Heroes," *Aztechnology* is now seen





as something of a victim in global events. Not exactly the best look, but better to be seen as a weak victim than, say, a traitor.

- Cool Hand Duke
- That just means their comeback story will be even better. \*rolls eyes\*
- Corporate Raiders

## PEMEX

Aztlan's long-standing petroleum and natural fuels producer, Pemex, feels directly threatened by the news that Aztechnology is being banished from the Pacific Prosperity Group. The innumerable agreements dependent upon the Asian markets are all in jeopardy, including those that reached the western shores of Peru and Chile. Much of the Australasia division will feel the pinch quickly as the upswelling of PPG-related contracts diminishes. The bombing that happened at the Hong Kong offices, formerly the headquarters for Aztechnology Asia, has shown a critical loss of confidence in the security services and their ability to protect investments.

## SEGURIDAD PRIMERO

This firm is suffering in a way similar to Wuxing's insurance subsidiaries in the wake of the CFD outbreak in Boston. The difference is that

SP claims are coming from locations around the world. This insurance and commodities dominator works through the proverbial mountain of red tape, the majority of which was created by SP and others like them.

- Quick break here. Seguridad's bankrolls are hurt, yes, but they are not entirely crippled. They were backed up by the Z-O Bank and insured in the trillions. Expect this not to be a fully settled problem for some time.
- Plan 9

## CUERPOS RADICALES

This medical service provider is being considered as part of a massive selloff to competitor CrashCart. If the sale goes through, the subsidiary will be gone, and Cuerpos properties stretching as far south as Santiago will create a beachhead for Evo to move in on.

- Most have never heard of Cuerpos outside of Aztlan, which worked against it for too long. The division chair, Papaplotli, one of the feathered serpents within the Big A nest, has taken this threat to heart. She's begun an update on all their medical transport services to expand their capacity by including BioForge printers in more than half of their transports.
- KAM



- › Those printers are standard enough in all the Cuerpos clinics, and the similarity between them and the NuBod printers in larger CrashCart vehicles reeks of tech theft. But it would give Cuerpos transports a definite edge that would make others, even DocWagon, take notice.
- › Butch

## CARLSBERG-HEINEKEN

Having suffered a major drop in share value after NEEC's investigations proved the liquor magnate was smuggling restricted chemicals throughout several European nations, several transportation hubs and warehouses were seized. This has raised fears regarding consumer and labor impacts.

## AUSTRAFARM

This agro-corp has suffered a similar drop in shares, partly because of the PPG announcement, but several of their agriplant farms lost support during the Un-Awakening. In a strange turn, their Brisbane fungi farm had to be closed when over half of the samples spontaneously underwent MVE—SURGE to everyone else—culminating in one of the largest mycofundi colonies ever.

- › A buddy down under named Wigs sent me a trideo from first responders. It was insane. Some of those things were more than three times their average size and bashed their way past larger response vehicles. Containment measures and extensive attempts at sterilization ... by fire ... seemed to curtail the problem. Still, some experts estimate that over half a million specimens escaped.
- › Sounder
- › Hold on! The mushrooms ran away?! By themselves?!
- › Stone
- › Yes, they did. As if Australia hasn't been through enough.
- › Sounder

## DASSAULT

This defense contractor is strong, vibrant, and, one might even say, *hungry*. They've deflected the French Touch's many attempts to overtake them and their interests worldwide and have expanded into territories with new acquisitions to give them an even greater reach. This is in no small part due to the Salazar's direct backing. Dassault is not only reinforcing its holdings but expanding its research into aerospace hybrids using new connections with Soluciones Orbitalis Integrales (SOI).

- › Dassault's support of Salazar is also paid in autonomy. The subsidiary has never been as independent from its own AAA as it is today, and the French division isn't remotely concerned with AZT's current restructuring.
- › Sim-Eon

- › It really should be. That autonomy is not as fully independent as you said, and they believe.
- › Oxolotl

## ENERGIA VIVA

As one of the principal infrastructure and energy providers for more than half of the Western Hemisphere, the subsidiary continues to meet the needs of half a billion people and businesses. Their recent portfolio has expanded, bringing Mayan Sol into the fold.

## SOLUCIONES ORBITALES INTEGRADES

Despite losing the Waypoint Resort and the association with Skyhook, SOI remains very lucrative. Though they're in heavy competition with TransOrbital for shuttling to and from the low-earth stations, SOI remains a leader in its research and development fields. Its work on advanced propulsion science at its San Diego facility has yielded impressive movements, which is the reason for strengthening the ties between it and Dassault. The projects that involved several upgrades and expansions of the Spindle were unaffected by recent events.

- › The word is that SOI has found a way to create a thrust-propulsion technology that generates both lift and thrust-to-yaw ratios from which combat and aerospace liners alike would benefit. It's a nuclear plant combined with the plasma generation of systems like the hydrocarbon fuel converters in many ground vehicles. They launched one of their test platforms using the system from San Diego in the first week of September of '82. The acceleration and end-thrust put the vehicle in low orbit at speeds that exceeded GTI's supposed capabilities. If this is true, it will help keep Aztechnology competitive against others in a market where they are one of the few large providers: space.
- › Sounder
- › I'm hearing tales of Dassault working on power plant modifications for some of their best frames with this tech. They exhibit none of the older weapons-integration issues the GTI tech has exhibited. The only real problem is getting weapons tech that can go faster than the plane.
- › Rigger X
- › Oh, these things are also being tested on Lobo frames. Panzers, folks!
- › Turbo Bunny
- › SOI was working with Ilyushin Aerospace when the PPG announcement came out, which triggered significant pressure on the Evo subsidiary. Two years ago, the thruster systems on the Waypoint station's LifeBoats were upgraded in tandem with Ilyushin's engineers. There were even talks about the



Aztechnology subsidiary working on agreements with Evo's *Angel* station as one of the midpoints of travel.

- > Gramius
- > The few survivors from the Waypoint Resort that the Space Rescue Service didn't pick up found their way to the *Spindle*.
- > Orbital DK
- > Were there survivors?
- > Red Anya
- > Fourteen in total, yes. Contrary to earlier reports, the LifeBoat system on Waypoint didn't completely fail. The SRS intercepted three of the emergency capsules. Two LifeBoats made their way to the *Spindle*, and it was hoped that President de la Rosa was among those. But only her pet clouded leopard, Cemelli, was aboard one. Fernando Nestor, the Aztlan Minister of Housing, and his wife Emilia were on the others.
- > Orbital DK

## SURPRISE TAKEOVERS

Even though they've taken multiple hits and are being reviewed with the finest silk-tooth auditing combs, Aztechnology has (somehow) managed to snag two acquisitions from one of their rivals. Both were part of a concession between Aztechnology and MCT's representatives after an undisclosed class-action suit was brought before the Corporate Court.

The first is Mayan Sol, which has long been a competitor to Energia Viva. On more than one occasion, they've tangled for market share and representation over false or misleading advertising and deflections used to cover up ecological mishaps performed under the Mayan Sol name. With its inclusion, several coverage gaps that Energia Viva had in the Americas have now been filled.

VeraCruz Shipping is seen as a patch, considering the PPG decision regarding Aztechnology's membership. Historically, Pemex handled most regular shipping and maritime transit, with some corporate contracts through Wuxing picking up the rest. With Aztech out of the PPG, Wuxing struggles to keep its shipping contracts with the Big A—including discounted usage of the Nicaraguan Canal, which remains a wholly owned Aztechnology property.

- > Director Wilhelm Zolla, the Pacific operations director for Maersk, arrived in Puebla recently, sparking interest in discovering if Aztechnology—specifically Pemex—is looking for new and expanded business partnerships.
- > Oxolotl

## THE RETURN TO GOLD

POSTED BY: MARCOS

One major surprise occurred in September, and it put a significant spin on Aztechnology's holdings chain. Oro International Holdings lists its headquarters as the city of David in Panama State. The sheer number of stabs in this move is unquestionable, and of course, the chairman and president is Domingo Ramos. The company seems to have sprung from almost nothing, including a sizable chunk of real estate properties worldwide. Overnight, it qualified as an A-rated corporation with plenty of nuyen in value and holdings in twenty-two nations. One additional plot twist is the inclusion of Global Finance within the OIH structure. This has given the budding corporation reach well beyond its Central American headquarters.

- > So that's what Ramos did with all his end-of-the-world shelters. Smart.
- > Mr. Bonds

This is a massive plot twist. Global Finance is all that remains of the once-great lending house that Inazo Aneki first used to secure loans to buy up Keruba, which evolved into Renraku. Mitsuhamma acquired it once it attained the leading position in the megacorporate world, a move of ego, and some might construe it as overreach as it splintered it back out from the Z-OG Bank. When the eventual audits are complete, they'll certainly show how much of the financial capacity was used to direct, redirect, and at times, create monies for Harvester-related operations throughout the Southeast Asian, Indian, and East African markets.

- > More like "if." I'd put down good nuyen that Aztechnology data-wizards are making sure those records disappear like a rabbit in a hat.
- > Orbital DK

Global Finance, once known as Global Financial Systems, was one of Mitsuhamma's many branches left open by Toshiro Mitsuhamma's final actions. His sale of shares and closing personal affairs at the end paved the way for Global Finance to bleed faster than recovery could compensate for. When Toshiro's negotiations with Empress Hitomi took place, it was also through Global Finance that numerous reparations were pre-arranged. What wasn't foreseen was who would pounce upon Global Finance.

BANCOMEX is one of the world's largest financial powerhouses, and among the top three in the Western Hemisphere. When its financial sharks swooped in through the world banking services of Zurich-Orbital, it caught even Renraku and Shi-



awase off-guard. No sooner had the buyout been arranged than officials within various structures began a battle cry for, you guessed it, more audits. Surely, Aztechnology's subsidiary, which was already stretched thin by way of its own financial and insurance woes, could not front such an offer. As it turns out, they could by way of the loans that had been confirmed for the Bolivar Group, one of several components of the Aztechnology banking conglomerate, and one of those financial and insurance providers that are deeply tied to the earthside portion of the Skyhook and Waypoint operations. Emergency funding was moved into place by the Corporate Court and United Nations in response to the Skyhook catastrophe, and part of that money was used to buy out the floundering Mitsuhama property.

- I asked Rikki to confirm the numbers I found from the Asian side of the Pacific, and what we've confirmed is that multiple institutions used by the David Cartel were involved. Rikki believes two or more moles from the cartel are, or at least were, operating inside Shiwase and Mitsuhama. His reasons for the theory are solid as it would take people actively on the inside to pull this kind of timing off.
- Mr. Bonds
- I've also confirmed that Oro International Holdings and Domingo Ramos jointly control nearly 30 percent of BANCOMEX, a move that I'm sure doesn't please CEO Salazar. Mr. Ramos has also served on the Bolivar Group's board since 2031.
- Rikki
- Renraku is taking the loss of Global Finance personally. Expect activity in this area, and probably bloodshed, too.
- Lei Kung

## SHORT TERM GOALS

POSTED BY: PRIME RUNNER

I debated calling this "the Salazar Bonfire" because Aztechnology's goals are likely to divide into two camps: what is wise for the megacorp, and what Salazar is taking for himself. Salazar may possess all the secrets to keep things moving in the way he wants (for the time being), but there are distinct issues he'll have to contend with sooner rather than later.

## CONTROL THE MESSAGE

This is going to be a major media playing card. Aztechnology and the people of Aztlan were given bitter fruit when Skyhook came crashing down, but that piece of history is being fashioned into some intense *pulque*. Domingo Ramos has been seen more and more frequently engaging in this message, and if not him, then one of his growing

number of office counselors from Oro Holdings. He and Davina Nestor, the editing manager and chair of Televisa, are keeping a message of recovery front and center. Many of Televisa's production gurus have been working on upcycling material and story concepts that became more common during the discovery of the bugs and the surge of the shedim. This gives the everyday Aztlaner, and anyone who watches the feeds, a point of origin upon which to base an allegory. This helps provide hope against the trauma and shock, and a path toward relating the trials and lessons from the past into tools to overcome the present and shape it into a better future.

Comparing recent events to actions by the shedim or bug spirits of the past has also allowed the Aztlan faiths to regroup. A return to the Four Tezcatlipocas philosophy and spirituality has helped to fill the void in the many hearts and minds of the nation's people. Within the corporation, this has helped to shore up the morale of the everyday employee at nearly every level. The damage to the physical religion and its many icons is measured in the tens of billions. And while this blow should have slowed down the thaumaturgical and meta-planar research divisions, it has instead allowed a concentration of survivors and a new sharing of theorems and discoveries in the wake of everything that has happened.

- I worry that this is also reconcentrating metamagical research that was dispersed in the late '60s. Salazar is a sociopath and an initiated blood mage. He won't be one to turn over his power or listen to the new rhetoric being heard, especially as the largest teocallis have been ruined.
- Elijah
- You're partially right. But don't think for a moment Salazar is simply letting all this happen. Whatever plan he enacts, he's always five steps ahead of his adversaries.
- Rifleman

## TAKE NO QUARTER

Among the losses, Aztechnology has also made gains. In the short term, these gains aren't enough to compensate for the bigger losses, but they're more than enough to bolster pre-existing areas of strength. Among these actions is a ruling already being challenged in the Corporate Courts.

In light of the news of the Pacific Prosperity Group's removal of Aztechnology from their roster, all member agencies of the PPG have had their shipping and transit approval revoked for use of the Nicaraguan Canal. With the damage sustained in Panama City from Skyhook's falling coils and the lack of structural improvements to the canal's waterways, the largest supertankers cannot take a short route crossing from the Pacific to the At-



lantic, or vice versa. This has not impeded corporations like Maersk or KondOrchid, but has put Wuxing's main source of income onto the back burner. Additionally, air freight owned or operated by PPG members has also been restricted from utilizing Aztlan airspace.

- > This has been stated three times in this upload; surely it isn't that big of an issue?
- > Stone
- > It is. The waters between the tip of South America and Antarctica are perhaps the most treacherous on Earth. The northern passage means dealing with the NAN, Yakut, Russia, or the Scand Union. Two of those aren't friendly to megacorporations and impose heavy transit fees. The waters around Antarctica are still under military-level restrictions. Aztechnology remains one of the only avenues of access to the area because, ultimately, Salazar ordered a stand-down command. Yes, they're being watched, but they still get to play ball in the big leagues.
- > Sounder

## COUNTING COUP

Salazar is said to be creating a list of enemies and potential threats. Exactly what that entails is uncertain, since every megacorporation considers every other megacorporation its competitor, if not its enemy. I'm including this because someone I know has heard the term *tepohua cuepiltia*, which my Neo-Nahuatl translator came back as "taking the names of revenge." The same sources have led me to believe that Salazar's Special Projects division is being expanded. At the same time, official statements indicate that many of its personnel are distributed to other divisions and subsidiaries. This type of misinformation is not uncommon, but a few items of interest have surfaced regarding this tepohua of his.

At the same time, he makes one list and crafts another, which is more in line with the darkest history of the megacorp. The insulation of outside agents within Aztechnology leading up to the Disian Shadow War has given rise to a method of ensuring one's loyalty that goes above and beyond one's name on a piece of paper and a virtual engram signature. Salazar has initiated something my sources call a Blood Pact with those of the highest and most secure nature. I don't know precisely what is involved, but it involves ritual blood magic that Salazar himself performs upon those he brings into his inner circle. The agreement involved is one of absolute loyalty to him. Not to Aztechnology. Not to Aztlan. To him, and him alone.

- > This is something I was worried about. Ritual blood magic has included many methods of creating binding agreements between magicians, supplicants, and free spirits. Organizations

like the Black Lodge and the Ordo Maximus reportedly have similar rituals.

- > Marko
- > Sounds ... Faustian to me.
- > Lady Greenfire
- > I remember stories of mages bursting into flames when they broke a stricture within their initiatory group, but never non-initiated individuals.
- > Winterhawk
- > This is part of that reconcentration I mentioned. This type of magic is the next step in genuinely dark blood magic. This seems very contradictory to the political movements rising within Aztlan. Domingo Ramos himself has come out publicly against using excessive bloodletting in the case of magic, reminding people of the value of their spirit. Come to think of it, Ramos seems to be coming out more and more against blood magic and its corruption of late.
- > Elijah
- > Rumors of a secret cabal continue to plague Dassault's rise. Whispers spread of Salazar's Blood Pact, and Dassault managers quickly acquiesce to Salazar's demands. The same rumors explain that the cabal that led Dassault's original defense against Disian control spoke of blood mages. Questions persist about whether Salazar is a member of this cabal or even one of its leaders. We need to confirm this.
- > Plan 9
- > Domingo Ramos has never pursued the use of blood magic in his adult life. Given the very similar magic used by the Disians, I can see why he'd be distrustful of it.
- > Oxolotl
- > Do we know if this new ritual form was taken from the Disians? Their link to the Faustians and many of their chimeras was exceptionally potent.
- > Arete
- > And while we're on the subject of lists and blood magic.
- > Glitch

## THE DESTROYER

POSTED BY: WYRM WATCHER

In the aftermath of the DSW and the Un-Awakening, Sirurg has continued to make appearances, striking out at pockets of remaining Disian artifacts and strongholds. Though not as great a rampage as during the Amazonian War, they're just as intense when the strikes occur. Several were recently destroyed along the Panamanian Isthmus and the Yucatan east coast, with one yielding an unusual outcome. Witnesses nearby saw the great dragon



descend alongside a flight of feathered serpents into a larger cenote, and Pobre was confirmed to be among them. When they departed, something as significant as Surrurg took flight with the aid of the other feathered dragons. The beast's feathers and wings indicate a great feathered dragon ... not Arleesh, Mujaji, or Hualpa.

- The colors on the beast were diminished, but the crown of feathers around its maw was described as white and green, with a beard of similar color and feathers tipped with gold. It even had barbules and whiskers, as seen on eastern and leviathan dragons. The trideo evidence of the creature was destroyed by a technomancer tribe calling themselves Wrath, but several eyewitnesses conveyed the stories.
- Oxolotl

For whatever reason, the Destroyer is not blindly rampaging through the Aztlan countryside, and occasional reports come in from as far abroad as Turkestan and Russia. Aztechnology and its subsidiary properties were targeted, but former Mitsu-hama facilities and shells were often attacked with greater ferocity. The damage that he and those with him have wrought has certainly not helped regarding the loss of corporate assets. In at least two instances, he arrived at a location and found nothing of value, which also alludes to other parties working to recover what they can for their purposes.

- Teams traced back to Renraku and Shiawase have reportedly sought out such hardware, as have units fronted by the Draco Foundation. Surrurg is undoubtedly powerful, and whatever is giving him intel is knowledgeable, but they cannot be in two places simultaneously. This has created openings that others are exploiting. In western and central parts of Russia, S-K has often found itself in a race to reach rumored locations against Shiawase, Evo, and even occasionally Yakut.
- Traveler Jones
- Let's get back on track; this is about Aztechnology, folks.
- Glitch

## REHABILITATION THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION

POSTED BY: OXIMICHTLI

- Whoa! Does he have access?
- Slamm-O!
- Guest access.
- Glitch

In the aftermath of the DSW, several of the largest pyramids and business structures on the

Tenochtitlan central core were heavily damaged, with several collapses and the workings of two of the four great pyramids gutted by fires that would not be contained. Salazar temporarily relocated the most impacted offices to the sister metroplex of Puebla to the southeast. After Domingo Ramos's poignant public statement in the footsteps of the gutted Templo Mejor de Tezcatlipoca, came announcements for the planned rebuilding, restoration, and, in one instance, complete replacement of those structures. Many of the largest construction agencies in Aztlan have been brought in, along with assistance from those at Cityscapes once their headquarters in San Diego were re-opened. Initial project estimates give a completion of the Templo Mejor de Quetzalcoatl in the spring of 2085, while Tezcatlipoca should be reopened six months sooner. Salazar's own Special Projects Division is relocating permanently to Puebla, which gives it and him a significant increase in perceived privacy.

- I heard Cityscapes went dark during the Un-Awakening, having lost more than half of its employee base, which, as it turns out, are free kindred beings.
- Glasswalker
- They did. We've learned that Cityscapes is an extension of a corporate structure headquartered on the Kindred Metaplanes. It works extensively with neighboring metaplanes for engineering complements there. Several of its board of directors are extremely powerful city spirits. If Cityscapes has agreed to help in Aztlan's capital city, someone is working on cleaning up more than just physical structures.
- Traveler Jones
- Oximichtli approached them and aided the concessions through his influence within Energia Viva. Their reputation for solid work in record time is being tested.
- Oxolotl

## WUXING: UNCERTAIN PATHWAYS

POSTED BY: SUNSHINE

Dr. Spin is fond of saying a good PR department covers a multitude of sins. So, when Lian Mei "Evangeline" Starr went missing from Charisma Associates only to be spotted exiting a Wuxing board meeting six weeks later, I knew things at the AAA were about to take a very dark turn. It wasn't long after that Wuxing announced the death of Wu Lung-Wei alongside the largest quarterly losses in the history of the corporation. Yet all of that, even as honest and as devastating as it sounded, was just a façade to hide the true face of the issues threatening Wuxing at its core.



- That elven slitch was absolutely ruthless at CA. She was gunning for an executive VP slot when she vanished. Up until now all signs had pointed to Spinrad Global being the ones who snatched her to help them navigate the shift toward putting their Middle Eastern roots at the forefront of their global brand. That led to both corps taking shots at each other from the shadows. I wonder what they'll do once they realize it was Wuxing?
- Kia
- That sounds rather personal, Kia. Care to spill?
- Slamm-O!
- Take one of her jobs. You'll find out soon enough.
- Kia

Wuxing is in serious trouble, but not just because of what's happening to them from the outside. The corporation is festering from within. We all know Wuxing was corrupted by Disian agents. This corruption festered for years, supposedly without President Sharon Chiang-Wu even knowing about it. That failure of leadership hasn't gone unnoticed. Nor has the fact that Chiang-Wu capitulated to the Disians in order to avoid a split, or worse. We also know, however, that she sacrificed one of her top agents to smuggle the Divine Map out of the corporation. Ever since then, things at Wuxing have taken a turn for the worse. Only, unlike MCT, your average corporate citizen doesn't know about the troubles. Even the death of Wu Lung-Wei and subsequent rising of the Quints was ultimately part of the story already slowly unfolding at Wuxing since its creation.

Check the Central Asian newsfeeds and you'll hear all about Eastern Tiger auditioning for a new idol band, but not about the increasing rift between them and Wuxing. You'll get a pleasant story about the acquisition of Meechi Games, but nothing about Ming Solutions losing 9 billion nuyen worth of reagents. You won't hear about the near assassination of Sharon Chiang-Wu and the attempted theft of the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire only a few hours later.

While MCT's problems rose so quickly to the surface that they resulted in a massive selloff, Wuxing has managed to keep the bleeding mostly internal. As any runner who's been through it can tell you, though, that's the worst kind. The forward-facing message is that there is no threat to the corporation. Just like all the other gas-lighters, they pretend the Disians never even existed. The corporation never helped the effort to bring about the end of the Sixth World. Except, there are still powerful people in the corporation who were aligned with the Disians working right alongside those who were trying to stop it, and nobody can be absolutely sure of who was who. That's left Wuxing vulnerable, and their enemies

are pouncing. The corporation needs allies they can trust. They need more assets in play. More than anything else, they need Maersk off their back.

## MARKETWATCH SEARCH: LOSSES//REVENUES// WUXING//2083//Q3

**Transport and Shipping ...** Cathay Pacific Airlines reports 21 percent losses in the quarter.

**Transport and Shipping ...** Wuxing Worldwide Shipping reports 11 percent losses in the quarter.

**Finance losses ...** Kong-WalMart reports liability loss at 19 percent above expectations.

**Arcane Goods and Services ...** Ming Solutions reports shrinkage at 8 billion nuyen

## COMING UP FOURS

Wuxing has always been a corporation where the concept of luck is core to their relationship with the Sixth World. That this particular company rose out of several dozen Chinese corporations that all had similar initial funding and opportunities at the birth of the Hong Kong Free Enterprise Enclave in 2015 was luck. That they won the bid to build their HQ on exactly the right plot of land despite multiple bidders with a much stronger financial track record was luck. That the wealthy Lu family chose to invest in their company over the others was luck. When Dunklezahn bequeathed Sharon Chiang-Wu a coin of luck, it became the status symbol of the corporation. Kong-Walmart even minted a comically inaccurate version of it, with three fish hopping out of the water on one side and the Wuxing sigil on the other. They sold millions.

The terrible, horrible, no good, very bad luck all started when a small team of shadowrunners broke into Sharon Chiang-Wu's office and attempted to steal the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire, the artifact that actually depicts three leaping fish. When the runners were discovered, instead of trying to escape they hunkered down and tried to hold the room. They fended off security for two hours while Wuxing personnel came up with a plan to breach without damaging the artifact.

- No way a group of runners no one ever heard of breached the office of a triple-A corporation's CEO without a lot of help or a plan for how to get out of there. It had to be an inside job gone wrong.
- Mika
- Mission accomplished, then.
- Winterhawk



- How's that? They all died, and the statue is still there.
- Jimmy No
- Their survival was immaterial to the job they were hired to do. Drek, I'm starting to think they knew they were going to die. If the goal was to escape with the artifact, they would've adopted a different strategy. Someone executed a similar attack back in '61, but they did so astrally, taking advantage of the damage to the magical wards brought about by the passing of Halley's Comet. Without a major geo-magical event like that, the only way to upset the delicate intersection of magics in that room would be to get into the room itself. I'm pretty sure the team sent in for the Jade Dragon were only there to move it and to keep it moved off its spot for long enough to affect the feng shui balance of the space. I also don't think it is a coincidence that all these financial disasters started happening in the days after the statue was moved.
- Winterhawk

A week later, Wuxing was formally censured by the PPG. Now, Wuxing's stock is plummeting on multiple fronts, and investors cannot figure out what ties these losses together. All anyone can seem to do is track it back to the four unrelated areas where their luck has turned.

## FINANCE

Wuxing's financial problems started long before the Disian Shadow War. Following the Boston Lockdown, Wuxing's Fidelity Mutual Insurance pleaded with the Corporate Court to absolve them of responsibility to pay for the damages their insured clients suffered during those events. If forced to pay out in full, the corporation would've been crippled. The Corporate Court eventually let them off the hook, but this year multiple FMI managers reversed course, taking matters into their own hands and paying out on hundreds of claims. That pushed FMI deep into the red.

- The reversals were the work of a number of shadowruns meant to dig up dirt on those managers, and boy was there a lot of dirt to be found. After the payouts, some of those managers were fired. Others disappeared from the grid entirely. What's interesting is the corps who benefited from the runs weren't the ones funding them. Most originated from a single Mr. Johnson. Who he worked for remains a mystery.
- /dev/grrl

Meanwhile, Albion Mutual Funds saddled itself with a number of loans and other financial dealings that weren't advantageous to the corporation in a bid to strengthen their presence in the European market. Saeder-Krupp countered the move by creating conditions so many of those lenders would default on their loans. Wuxing was forced to deal with the losses by shifting funds from other

banks they owned. Unfortunately, some of those banks, like the Bank of Vienna and Hong Kong, were already overleveraged from trying to deal with losses accrued by the Prosperity Development Corporation, which found itself in trouble thanks to a shift in dynamics with the Pacific Prosperity Group. In the end, Wuxing opted to sell off the media corporation AA Entertainment in order to offset these combined losses, effectively bringing them closer to even for the quarter.

## SHIPPING

Global shipping is the backbone of the Wuxing empire. The only threat to their dominance is Maersk. The two are embroiled in a nasty shadow war of their own that has seen both sides take heavy losses. That war inched into the light recently when Wuxing released recordings of a Matrix attack on Cathay Pacific Airlines flight 103. The flight, erroneously listed in the system as a cargo flight, was hacked by individuals later traced back to a Maersk employee. The hack triggered an on-board systems malfunction, causing the plane to nosedive into the waters off the coast of Taipei. All 605 souls aboard were lost. The crash was the third experienced by Cathay Pacific Airlines since beginning passenger operations in 2081.

Regardless of the cause, the airline is tanking. Those crashes, coupled with a half-dozen Cartwright Cartage and Freight ships lost at sea, formed the impetus for several smaller corporations to shift contracts away from Wuxing subsidiaries and toward Maersk. Fortunately for the corporation, the newly rebranded Century Dynamics agreed to a massive deal, putting their entire shipping concern in the hands of Wuxing, severing their own contract with Maersk.

- Here's a little inside baseball: Moag was the person who brought this deal to the table. The Quints all knew Blake from his short stint with Wuxing during their childhood. She was able to use that connection to get in a room with the CD leadership and pitch her idea. The AA Entertainment sale to Century Dynamics became part of a larger arrangement that resulted in CD transferring all their shipping operations to Wuxing. That deal not only turned CD and Wuxing into allies, but helped stop the corporation from falling even further in the rankings. By the time the ink dried, Wuxing had stabilized its losses, and Maersk was suddenly out of one of their biggest clients.
- Dr. Spin

Stealing the CD contract helped soften the blow of losing the shadow war against Maersk's operations in the Algonkian-Manitou Council. Despite multiple successful shadowruns that put Maersk on bad footing in the region, the rival corporation was able to stand its ground. In the end, the local ports, owned and operated by S-K, sided



with Maersk. Since then, Wuxing has readjusted its strategy with Maersk toward limiting and sabotaging the shipping company's operations in central Asia, where Wuxing's shipping concerns are struggling to secure routes along the New Silk Road.

- The New Silk Road is exactly why S-K sided with Maersk in preventing Wuxing's expansion through the Algonkian-Manitou Council. Wuxing pushed for inclusion in the Silk Road project and were rebuffed. In retaliation, the company sabotaged several deals S-K had in place in Africa. How's that old saying go? Never screw with a dragon.
- Kay St. Irregular

Wuxing is facing a growth ceiling, and the markets are responding accordingly. With Maersk blocking the corporation on one side, and Evo and S-K limiting their ability to expand operations throughout Russia, it remains clear that any future growth in shipping hinges on their ability to win safe passage between the various splinter nations on the Chinese mainland.

- Easy to say, but impossible to do. The Chinese mainland is a mess of monarchs, despots, pirates, and terrorists who can't stand each other. The only thing holding the bandits of Guangxi together is that they are all fiercely anti-Canton Confederation, which makes them anti-Wuxing. The only realistic chance Wuxing has is to push the Canton Confederation into open conflict with Guangxi. But the monarchy doesn't have the stomach for that level of violence. It would take something really bad to push them to it.
- Jimmy No
- Like say, the assassination of one of Queen Michelle's heirs? Perhaps even the one least likely to support climbing in bed with Wuxing?
- Plan 9
- Don't even put that in the universe. Do you know how massively destructive a war in China would be?
- Jimmy No

## CONSUMER GOODS

Kong-WalMart saw market share losses to Stuffer Shack as that brand rose to number one, backed by support from Evo and Ares sub-brands switching to their stores, and Light Clouds Fashion pulling their lines in favor of smaller boutique markets and online storefronts. KoGo, Wuxing's own executive fashion house, hastily announced plans to release an urban casuals line directly to Kong-WalMart, replacing the losses. That fashion boost won't be available until sometime in '84, however, which is too late to impact the quarterly report. Following the trend of backfilling consumer loss-

es with in-house products or those made by close allies, Nagato, itself now a Yakashima subsidiary, recently signed on to sell goods at Kong-WalMart.

- The Nagato connection is one to be watched. The combine is in bed with the Yakuza, which doesn't play well for the Triads who make a living reselling Wuxing goods on the black and gray markets. Once Nagato product starts filtering into that pool, we are likely to see real conflict between the Yaks and the Triads over who has the right to move stolen product.
- Yankee

Wuxing isn't shying away from the losses. They are writing them off as a global expansion and re-launch also scheduled for 2084. Kong-WalMart plans to remodel two hundred stores and open an additional one hundred fifty globally. Most of those new stores are planned to be built in China, Africa, the CAS, and Japan. Renovation and construction costs will provide the company with acceptable losses and write-offs for the next two years at least.

- Not to mention inflating the numbers of their magical division. They'll be rolling out Wu shamans to every one of those potential sites and remodels to make sure the work is done in proper spiritual alignment. I swear, with companies that large it's always a shell game. They keep mixing them up right before our eyes. We can never guess which shells the losses are hiding under.
- eX-Professor

## MAGICAL SERVICES

Next to shipping, magic is what Wuxing is best known for. The face of this franchise, so to speak, is Ming Solutions. That corporation posted an inventory shrinkage rate of nearly 5 percent this last quarter, double that of any other business in the *world*. Even Kong-WalMart whose well-documented losses due to shoplifting and damaged products have created an entire gray market, and they never posted losses over 2 percent. Wuxing tried to cover up the losses by spreading them out over future years, but some well-intentioned (or at the very least well-paid) hacker rooted out the raw data and posted it on the Matrix. Ming struggled to explain where all the lost product went. Some of it is listed as lost at sea, but we know quite a bit of product went into the hands of the Disians, resulting in unexplained losses. As a result, we've seen them leaning on their agreement with Telestri-an Arcane goods to put products on shelves in the same way they lean on the A-level corp to bolster their own Matrix identity.

It isn't the only product Wuxing has lost. A spreading lack of faith in the brand name has led to the cancellation of multiple contracts, especially those site-exploration contracts connected to their heavy construction. Multiple corporations, even



certain subsidiaries of competing AAA corporations, used Wuxing geomancers for site exploration. Many of those contracts have dried up.

Fortunately for Wuxing, they're just one of many major names in magic undergoing turmoil. The absorption of Ipissiumus into the Century Dynamics brand reduced their major competitors by one. Wuxing sought to further reduce that number by purchasing Pentacle, but their banks were already so overleveraged they couldn't outbid the company's eventual buyer.

- When Jonathan Blake joined Wuxing for that brief time, he paid an awkward amount of attention to the Magical Research division. It is only noteworthy because Blake made his money the same way Wuxing did—a bequeathment from a dead dragon. With word coming out about all the corruption in that division, and the subsequent sale of Xuanlong Arcane Research to Century Dynamics, you have to ask if there was a deeper endgame here.
- Plan 9
- You're making connections that don't exist, Plan 9. Xuanlong was conducting research into social adepts. Most of the money bequeathed to Wuxing went into the study of the type of ley line magics that would be more closely associated with the Divine Map that was leaked ... which as I write this, I realize I'm falling right into your trap.
- Frosty
- You see it now, don't you? You can't unsee it. I've tried.
- Plan 9

Personnel is where Wuxing's magical services were hit hardest. So many of the people aligned with the Disians came from this area that it is difficult to know who to trust. Instead of being able to take advantage of the momentary uncertainty caused by all the shifts in the industry, Wuxing is looking inward, trying to figure out who gets to stay and who is culled. A lot of that work is being passed down the line to shadowrunners in the form of deep background checks and, all too often, network.

## THE NEW OLD DOGMA

I should've tapped Lei Kung to write this part, but I'm sure he'll chime in eventually. Following the death of Wu Lung-Wei and the ensuing losses, Sharon Chiang-Wu gave a speech from the base of Skytower in Aberdeen. In her address, she focused on all the things the corporation was doing right and stressed that Wuxing was a "reflection of the philosophies that made Asia great." Then she announced that the Quints had cast an I-ching for the corporation, each tossing the coins in turn until they had five readings. Those readings would point the direction for Wuxing moving forward. She listed the results

as Hexagrams 8, 18, 49, 61, 64. A quick reading of the I-Ching alludes to those numbers representing core concepts of balance, change, and adaptability.

- There is a lot that is open to interpretation here. If it happened at all, the Quints probably cast their I-ching at the epicenter of Wuxing's magical power, which is also where the Jade Dragon resides in Sharon Chiang-Wu's office. The gathering of energies there would allow them to tap into whatever forces were used in the past to guide the corporation's growth. It's unclear, however, whether that space remains as balanced as it was before the statue was moved. Furthermore, the true meaning of the cast is more complex than she alluded to in her speech. The changing lines are particularly important in a cast. They tell you if the situation you've cast is unstable or perhaps transitioning to a new state. We don't know if the hexagrams they cast are the secondary hexagrams, or results of changes to come, or primary hexagrams reflecting the state of where Wuxing is presently. It casts doubt on the entire process not to see the casts themselves and understand how they've chosen to interpret them.
- Lei Kung

Chiang-Wu spoke on Hexagram 8 in terms of developing new partnerships throughout the region. She used that moment to announce the acquisition of Meechi Games as well as the expanded relationships with the Nagato Corporation and Century Dynamics. She pointed to fostering more relationships like these as a key goal for Wuxing over the next several years.

- By expanded, she meant to say that Nagato agreed to honor existing contracts in spite of being acquired by Yakashima, a corporation that doesn't like Wuxing very much. This is partly caused by past PPG-related conflicts and the very real possibility that they could move up to the realm of the AAAs by knocking Wuxing down. However, the longstanding agreements between Nagato and Telestrian demanded they "remain in bed" with Wuxing, at least for now. Who knows what they plan to do in the future?
- Mr. Bonds

In regard to Hexagram 18, the message was about repairing the damage done to corporate citizens by the mistakes of the past. She discussed the tragedies associated with Cathay Pacific Airlines, the half-dozen cargo ships lost at sea, as well as the dozens of Suez Security officers who died fighting to keep even more ships from being stolen by pirates. It represented a dark moment in an otherwise uplifting corporate address.

- And most of it was lies. No doubt pirates are hitting ships off the coast of Africa, but half the incidents you're hearing about are the result of Suez Security Consulting taking direct action against Maersk vessels at sea and vice versa. They cover it up by riding in on captured pirate vessels or hiring a few runners to tag along just to make it look good.
- Kane



Hexagram 49 is where she started to dig into Wuxing's way forward. In some readings, 49 represents metamorphosis or change. She thanked all of the people who supported the company, from corporate citizens, to consumers, to fans. She pledged that Wuxing would refocus on their consumer base and work toward making the best possible products for their people. Again, she pointed out the acquisition of Meechi Games, one of the largest toy suppliers in Asia, as a step in this direction. Another, larger part of the plan is to build additional corporate enclaves throughout Asia, expand the services of Cathay Pacific Airlines to 60 destinations, and expand the reach of Bach Mai Medical within the Asian continent.

- Of course she's harping on Meechi. In a year filled with losses, it is practically their only gain. And a small one at that. All the talk of expansion is Wuxing reaching for something that isn't really there. In order to make those gains, they're going to need more capital than they presently have.
- Mr. Bonds
- Another interpretation of that Hexagram is revolution, which reads to me as Sharon Chiang-Wu calling out the people who were working with the Disians. She knows she needs to clean house, because that faction doesn't trust her and clearly wants her dead. The failed assassination attempt you alluded to earlier is all the proof we need to see that things aren't stable in Wuxing. Chiang-Wu was ambushed exiting a private meeting with Cathay Pacific executives that only her closest advisors were supposed to know about. To me, that plays as an inside job.
- Lei Kung
- I don't think the attempt was meant to kill her—just like Winterhawk doesn't believe the runners who raided her office intended to steal the Jade Dragon. If she dies, especially so closely following her husband's death, the company is going to take a massive stock hit. Not only that, but the leadership would likely transfer to one of the Quints. If whomever is behind this is internal, they don't want to tank the corporation, they want to take it over. Doing that would require proving that Sharon Chiang-Wu and her kids are inept.
- Jimmy No

When the conversation turned to Hexagram 61, Sharon Chiang-Wu adopted a spiritual stance. She spoke on the loss of her husband, confirming long standing rumors that he'd been sick for years. While she didn't explain his illness, she did promise transparency in the future. She claimed that Wuxing "belonged to its people" and the I-Ching said its people deserved the truth and Wuxing needed to be true to what it was as a corporation. She believed that authenticity would foster a new era of trust between Wuxing and its customers.

- Just more corporate bullsh\*t about how the corporation is for the people when the reality is that Wuxing only prints SINS

for individuals indebted to the corporation. The rank-and-file employees of Wuxing are working for less than a living wage. They're forced to consume Wuxing products because the company provides credit against future income, which means they can buy all the Wuxing stuff they want and just work it off later. If later lasts beyond the span of their lives, that just means their kids will need to work off the debt.

- Borderline

The final Hexagram, 64, focused on innovation. Here, she talked about Wuxing's tradition of geomancy and how they haven't tapped the potential of what geomancy could truly do for the world. She announced plans for the company to purchase land between Addis Ababa and Djibouti in the Ethiopian Territories to expand experiments already being conducted outside of Cairo that could help chart the best use of these lands and possibly enrich the soil to the point of creating new areas for agriculture. She cited the work as one example of how Wuxing is focused on "Shaping the future of our shared world." She later revealed that specific phrase as their new slogan.

- Wuxing isn't alone in trying to turn parts of Africa into an agricultural zone. In addition to being the second-largest continent, it is also the second most underdeveloped behind the larger Asian continent. What I'm more interested in, though, is why she didn't talk about the similar projects Wuxing has running throughout Mongolia, Turkestan, and Yakut—including some black sites as far north as the Arctic circle.
- Elijah
- Africa is becoming a focus lately if for little else than a handful of megacorps deciding that it is the next battleground in which to decide who has the biggest ... market share. These battles ignore the people who've lived on these lands for generations. Worse, these shadow wars place the native population in harm's way as the corps fight to change what is natural into what looks more like the way they envision the world.
- Am-Mut
- Just another Tuesday.
- Old Crow

Chiang-Wu closed by referring to the casting as Wuxing's fivefold philosophy, calling it an evolution of the company's founding elements. The five elements of Wuxing have been a tremendous push in the press from the very beginning. The company was quick to align those elements to the Quints. When asked who cast which I-Ching, Chiang-Wu responded by stating that Shui cast 8, Fo cast 18, Moag cast 49, Tou cast 61, and Gum cast 64. Without directly saying it, this new fivefold philosophy is being overlaid on the girls in the same way. Since that press conference, the stories you've heard about the Quints are being written in a way





that establishes each as a separate focal point of the new corporate identity. Moag in particular is being aligned with the philosophy of change while Gum, the National University of Singapore-trained engineer, is being broadcast as the embodiment of innovation. The question remains, which of the Quints, and thus, which philosophy, will rise to become the next leader of the corporation.

- Why any of this matters is beyond me. We're acting like these kids are more than the spoiled brats you see all over the trids. I watched Fo and Shui partying on the Grand Tour this year. Tou is practically a ghost. Gum is a showboat more interested in her K-pop-star girlfriend than anything having to do with science. Don't even get me started on Moag. Not a single one of them has what it takes to run a megacorp.
- Baka Dabora
- Ahhh ... yeah, not worth it.
- Snopes
- Stories about the Quints are a source of passion for billions of Asians. They represent what is possible in the way that Johnny Spinrad did, or in the way royalty did back in the era of the Windsor Dynasty. Only here, belief in the Quints is a type of religion. It's believed they were birthed by magic, and as their naming suggests, they represent the foundational elements of the Wuxing way. That is why different factions are pushing for "their quint" to become the next leader of Wuxing. Presently,

it looks like Moag has the inside track to be the next leader of the corporation. How this is playing out between the Quints themselves is anyone's guess. From the outside they appear to be completely in support of one another.

➤ Snow Tiger

## ACTIVE MEASURES

What Wuxing wants you to believe is vastly different from what is happening inside the corporation and in the shadows surrounding it. To start, Chiang-Wu knows who was behind the Disian infiltration of her corporation. It was her husband and his best friend and business partner, Fu Peng. She's known for years without being able to do a thing about it. Now Sharon Chiang-Wu is fighting back. She's trying to hold on to her job and save her company from attacks on multiple fronts. Wuxing's role in the Disian incursion left them exposed. Now every AA and A corporation with an issue is taking their shot. For now, the Corporate Court is standing by and letting it happen. If Wuxing is going to survive this thing, it is going to be striking back in the boardroom and in the shadows. They know where the threats are coming from. It remains to be seen if they can stop them all.

## THE ENEMY WITHIN

The paper trail tying Wuxing to the Disians leads directly to Wu Lung-Wei. Fu Peng continued



that work through the special acquisitions division, convincing the board to give his projects more and more money. Unfortunately, for Chiang-Wu, she was required to sign off on everything Fu Peng did, as was the nature of her agreement with her husband. That means that everything linked to Fu Peng is linked to her as well.

- Wu Lung-Wei's corruption went beyond seeking financial gain. He wanted to become a Faustian. Even with all we know now, it isn't clear what happened to him. It's possible the process didn't take, but it's also possible that Fu Peng betrayed him, and he was turned into a chimera instead. Whatever magics responsible for keeping him going over the past few years failed when the Disians were pushed back. President Chiang-Wu and the Quints agreed to the fabricated story of his death in order to save face and preserve his and their own legacy.
- Snow Tiger

That's where shadowrunners come in. Wuxing cannot fight this civil war using their own people. Any hint of that would create a money trail leading directly back to the individuals at the top of the schism. While they know who those people are, there isn't enough hard paydata for one side to make a formal move against the other that the board would support. Remember, all of this is happening while Wuxing is trying to pretend like the Disian threat never existed. So, it's shadowrunners who end up fighting another shadow war between two internal factions struggling to hurt each other without hurting the corp.

- I'm not getting all this dancing around. Why not just handle it like we do in the shadows? Geek Fu Peng, pin the job on Maersk—or better, Lofwyr—and move on.
- Ladybug
- Not everyone can do things the Smoker's Club way. Fu Peng is a major shareholder. Beyond that, he has stepped in to clean up enough of President Chiang-Wu's failures so that if he dies, she could wind up looking like she lost her protector. On the other hand, if she dies, it simply becomes a question of which one of the Quints takes over, as has been the plan all along. Neither can afford to kill the other. They need each other but also need to make each other look as bad as possible until Wuxing can stabilize itself and one gains enough actual power to force a public ousting of the other without throwing the corporation back into disarray.
- Jimmy No

Thus far the Quints have been kept out of the fray, but with Moag becoming more active in the day-to-day corporate dealings, it is beginning to look like the Quints will be fair game in this internal war.

## WUXING FOR THE PEOPLE

Wuxing is bigger in Asia than any other corporation in the world, and Asia has the largest population in the world. That means the way Wuxing stays a top corp is by protecting its base. Wuxing is seeking to repair that damage with their allies and the people who support them the most. Unfortunately, most people who know a little of what is going on at Wuxing see a corporation that appears to have turned against itself; betraying its core tenets in search of who knows what? So, Wuxing is working to address this issue through creative social involvement.

The key to Wuxing's plan is controlling the narrative. That means limiting the influence other corporations have in the region, as well as limiting the influence of voices that don't support Wuxing. In Jimmy No's report on Wuxing in *Power Plays*, he wrote about the Hearts and Minds initiative and developing local infrastructure. Hearts and Minds hasn't taken hold, and even though Wuxing is spending enormous sums of money to develop new rail lines in China and infrastructure surrounding those new lines, the Chinese Reunification effort appears to be dead in the water. Wuxing's new strategy is closer to tactics they've used against Maersk, S-K, and other rival corporations in the past. Wuxing believes that controlling the narrative starts with local business. They are taking steps to create loans for new and existing businesses in areas they seek to control. These loans are being offered at rates advantageous to the borrower in the short term. Should the borrower default on their loan, however, those terms shift dramatically. They've issued several thousand such loans through multiple banks over the past year and are poised to offer more. Not everyone needs a loan, which is how local runners are becoming involved in the scheme. Runners are being hired to create the conditions for businesses to need a loan—be it through destroying property, delaying necessary shipments, or any number of actions that could unbalance a delicate financial situation. The work pays well, but if you're taking the job, you might want to understand what it is you are doing.

## EXPAND, EXPAND, EXPAND

Being a global corporation means having a presence on multiple continents. Wuxing is keenly aware that a limited global presence is what held them out of the Big Ten. The acquisition of Kong-WalMart and expanded shipping helped to overcome this hurdle, but what worked yesterday might not be enough to survive tomorrow. Wuxing is focused on expanding its presence in Africa, the UCAS, and Japan.

Wuxing's role in China is an extension of the Canton Confederation, whose strategic partnership there is older than the corporation itself. Tens



of thousands of Chinese corporations and small businesses operate throughout the African continent. Wuxing is working to buy out those businesses and turn a million voices into a chorus of one. Not everyone is willing to sell out to the megacorp, and as a result, runners are finding more and more work leaning on smaller corps in an attempt to help Wuxing increase its presence.

- You make it sound so poetic. The truth is, Wuxing is crushing livelihoods. I am not a fan of the thousands of Chinese businesses filling the streets of African cities. Many of them have existed, however, long before I was born and are critical parts of the communities they fleece and serve. When Wuxing comes in and takes over these businesses, it is often with the goal of putting their name on it and reducing the overhead costs. This always means more suffering for the people, be it through raised prices, fewer well-paying jobs, or the like.
- Am-Mut

In the UCAS, Wuxing continues to develop inroads with Telestrian Industries and the Nagato Corporation, two A-rated corps with large footprints across North America. Wuxing recently announced that Gum would be conducting her Caltech graduate research internship with Telestrian's office of Matrix Research. Tou is presently performing her medical residency at the Nagato-owned Hackensack University Medical Center. Telestrian and Nagato have themselves been connected for decades—the two corps even operate an exchange program featuring the children of highly placed executives. On the Nagato side, the Telestrian elves are placed in a specialized security force known as the Green Serpent Guard. It isn't as clear what happens to the Nagato exchanges. Some reports suggest they are funneled into less-visible management castes where they can work for the company without ruffling too many feathers within the elven nation. Other people in the know suggest that the Nagato personnel are trained as deep cover operatives and deployed in other businesses and corporations. There's been talk of that type of exchange being extended to Wuxing, with the megacorp offering personnel to both corporations and vice versa. Regardless of an exchange in personnel, an expansion of the relationship between the three corporations would help to increase Wuxing's footprint in the North American continent—something the company has struggled with for the last decade.

- All this cozing up to Telestrian, and now Nagato, feels like a play for a merger—or worse, a corporate takeover. Wuxing's Matrix presence is abysmal. Having control of two corporations with strong Matrix backgrounds would go a long way to cementing the corporation as a well-rounded mega and help keep them from the bottom of the list. The backing of Yakashima means this is less likely to happen on the Nagato side, but it

doesn't take it off the table entirely, especially if we are talking about a corporate takeover. If I'm Yakashima, I'm making sure Nagato is not a rotten apple poised to ruin the entire barrel.

- Mr. Bonds
- Telestrian is a household name among the elves. Even if the people running the place are as slimy and money-hungry as you think, they are also smart enough to realize that putting Telestrian in the hands of non-elves would effectively destroy the brand.
- Frosty
- It will also come without the support of the megas already in place there. We saw this with Evo when they "decided" to move to Russia. We're seeing it now with MCT and all the fallout surrounding that corporation. There are too many Japanese corporations looking to indebt themselves to the people and the existing megas for Wuxing to have a real shot at expansion there. Given Wuxing's rough relationship with the PPG, they won't be getting any help there. They need to look elsewhere to maintain that global brand.
- Mihoshi Oni

## MISSION MAERSK

Not to be forgotten, Maersk remains the thorn in Wuxing's side. The transport corporation is only kept at bay by the fact that Wuxing holds a seat on the Corporate Court, limiting how much Maersk can expand. If the company continues to grow and align itself with other like-minded corps, such as OmniStar, there's a real chance that Maersk and its allies could push Wuxing out of the Big Ten.

## MCT: FORMERLY MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

POSTED BY: MIHOSHI ONI

Good riddance to bad rubbish. No one is crying at the issues MCT is having except their stockholders (at least the ones who haven't suffered from self-induced gravity poisoning). They did too many bad things on the way up, enemies are coming for them on the way down, and everyone is going to get their licks in once they're beaten.

We in the shadows know that certainty is a rare occurrence. On that note, you can be certain MCT will no longer be number one after the next corporate audit. The only question left is whether they'll be number ten, or will the Corporate Court make an unprecedented move to pull AAA status from



a Golden Ticket holder. They made a whole herd of enemies on the stampede to the top, but they definitely backed the wrong horse. While this drop is a certainty, it doesn't mean they're going quietly—in fact, quite the opposite, but that's a mixed bag for us. While they may be hitting rock bottom, that doesn't mean they're out. It does mean they've reached a point where they have nothing to lose, and things can get more heavy-handed.

Yes, even more heavy-handed than a zero-zone.

On the plus side, it means a flood of shadow work, both for and against the former corporate behemoth. I'm stoked to take a look at what else is coming down the pipeline.

A quick recap is in order. We know most of the damage done to Mitsuhamama came from their affiliation with the Disians and the barrage of runs and corporate takeovers that came with it. All of which was made possible by the internal explosion of one of their own. Every megacorp came hard after them once Toshiro Mitsuhamama struck that massive first blow and put blood in the water. Then, at the end, came the edicts from on high as the Corporate Court laid into them with fines, reparation dues, trade sanctions, and extensive internal investigations resulting in repeated asset freezes and corporate buyouts.

Toshiro Mitsuhamama may have been a wretched corporate scumbag for the bulk of his life, but in the end, he gave everything for revenge in the name of honor and family, and his massive personal sell-off dipped Mitsuhamama's stock. It wasn't devastating initially, but it was enough for others to follow suit and create some doubt in their ever-rising value. It was the shout that started the avalanche and eventually Toshiro played, and died, on our side to help take down a Harvester.

Bigger than his sell-off or Harvester assault, Toshiro revealed the cancer of Dis within Mitsuhamama. The Disians were fully intertwined within almost all facets of Mitsuhamama. While they weren't the numeric majority, they were a massive majority in power. Disian agents operated at all levels, and Toshiro turned the spotlight on them. The Disians used Mitsuhamama with impunity by the end, and it wasn't until Toshiro turned that all the blind eyes finally opened to what was happening around them. Internal divisions arose at the same time the corporate powers were making moves to save their bank accounts.

All those open eyes revealed more Disian elements, and it became an open secret that Mitsuhamama was entirely under Disian control. Executives started selling off subsidiaries to maintain funding and protect the value of their own portfolios. The betrayal of Mitsuhamama (as it was billed internally) led the corp to change their name, eliminating Mitsuhamama from all elements of the corporation and replacing all of it with MCT. The name change kicked off another round of corporate selloffs to

pay Corporate Court fines, and we were well into their collapse at that point.

Now that they're broken and beaten, we need to look at what kind of aftershocks this is going to cause. With such a massive corporate collapse, there's a lot of debris falling and a lot of secrets that are about to either be revealed or lost in the shuffle.

## PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER

While it was one of the earliest events in the collapse, Toshiro's selloff has had some serious aftereffects. He made quiet backroom deals with a wide array of individuals to sell off every bit of MCT he owned. While the prices they were sold for still left him with a massive fortune, it was a massively undervalued rate because he knew it would rapidly drop in value. The sales were spread out to avoid one party gaining a controlling interest through the sales, but in the aftermath, things are still going crazy.

Toshiro's first line of defense on his share sales was anonymity. He kept the list of buyers secret, but after it was all said and done, he didn't control what they did. Now that all the shares are worth a fraction of the original value—but likely still more than they were paid for—those same buyers are looking around to see who else is on the list. They're looking to find others with a fractional stack in order to buy it and build a massive share again. If even a fraction of Toshiro's ownership shares can be gathered in a single place, it gives that individual power within MCT. Runners are being hired not just to find out who these people are but also to press trades, find blackmail to facilitate a buyout, and outright assassinations to gather up the stock in an estate sale or buy it from an unwitting next of kin who only sees it as worthless MCT shares and not what it truly is.

Along with the devaluation of the company, their corp scrip has taken a nosedive. This led to an interesting phenomenon: scrip forgery. While scrip is protected with solid anti-forgery tech, it's all designed to prevent production of the bills. What's becoming commonplace is the gathering of smaller bills, scrubbing the electronic ink, and reprinting with higher denominations like in the old days where the paper was the key to beating countermeasures. Because the smaller bills can be gathered in such large quantities, the larger bills can be created on the cheap. This fake scrip is making its way into the shadows.

Be wary of massive payments being offered in MCT scrip. Even if it's not all fake, any of it that gets identified as fake becomes worth nothing and you are going to find yourself on the wrong end of an investigation by MCT's internal auditing services.



- No joke there. Seattle has had a run on it lately. Payouts that are running three to five times the norm for jobs, especially with the various syndicates. Teams are seeing five-figure payouts made with bills that aren't worth more than three.
- Bull
- Any runner who falls for that deserves what they get.
- Clockwork
- Most of these scams are hitting inexperienced runners looking for a break, and as they said, they're coming out of the syndicates. Groups that are hard to say no to and also hard to go back after.
- Bull
- They'll find out how bad this idea was once they've made enough enemies who all come together.
- 2XL

The last ripple I want to talk about is the fate of Toshiro's fortune. He sold his stake for a fraction of the real value, but when you're talking multi-billions in value, the fortune is still hundreds of millions. He used a massive portion of that to take down a Harvester, but there's a healthy chunk, likely seven-to-eight figures, still out there. Thus start the street legends.

Legend one is a mysterious Matrix-based fixer named Shokan. They hire runners for hoodier gigs, mostly against MCT, or benefiting the innocent citizens of MCT. The nuyen is good, and the runs make you feel good after as well.

Legend two is a bit more sinister. All his fortune has been placed in trust with the Hidden Blade, with marks placed on the heads of every member of the MCT board, the C-suite members, and any other executive or citizen of MCT with a provable connection to the Disians. It's like the polar opposite of the happy hoodier money above.

- The latter legend has some credence, as there is a collection of marks for those big names in MCT on the board. If you've got access, you can take your shots, but good luck.
- Balladeer

## WOULD A CORP BY ANY OTHER NAME STILL SMELL LIKE DREK ... YES

While the official ranking drop hasn't been declared, we know Mitsuhama is getting slammed. Or do we? Actually, Mitsuhama Computer Technologies doesn't exist anymore. Anywhere. Everything has been renamed MCT. That rebranding doesn't just go for the big corp at the top but has been plastered over every asset they have left.

After the betrayal of Toshiro Mitsuhama, the board of directors demanded the Mitsuhama name

be dropped and the entire megacorporation be rebranded as MCT. Things like this have happened throughout corporate history, though most of the time the change is for a good reason, not because a member of the founding family went rogue. This rebranding covers every corporation still owned by MCT. There aren't many—in fact, there are so few that MCT may barely be a multinational after this, but any talk of a complete downgrade is nothing but a screamsheet headline to sell copies.

I bring this up because it means right now, pretty much every run you pick up against MCT will be quite direct, and you will know exactly what you're walking into. MCT may be knocked down, but they'll get back up again. Probably rising on the corpses piling up in their zero-zones.

The bad news is some of those corps that had some damn solid brand recognition aren't happy. Several subsidiaries have already jumped ship to get a home that respects their brand name. Others are playing some dangerous games of corporate espionage selling off secrets in order to make some quick cash before this rebrand causes *them* to collapse.

Whether this trend sticks and holds true for a day, a month, a year, or a decade, it leaves us with one of the few occasions where we have some clarity in who we are working for or against. For good or ill, we won't need to do much Matrix sleuthing to find this megacorporate connection.

- If you're heavy anti-MCT, you might want to listen up. There's a rising sentiment that MCT doesn't have the right to the golden ticket that should technically keep Mitsuhama in the Big Ten. The rebrand and name change are getting looked at as a chance for the Corporate Court to pull their ticket. If they do, expect the ticket to get torn up and thrown in the trash rather than being handed over to another corp.
- Corporate Raiders
- That's if they even have the golden ticket anyway. The original ticket holder was Mitsuhama. The bulk of the original corporation was held in the assets of Toshiro and is currently in corporate limbo. The name change and absence of Toshiro's assets are going to fund a lot of jobs looking for some actual evidence that MCT doesn't have the right to the golden ticket.
- Mr. Bonds

I'll take a moment here and provide an update of some of the pieces of MCT that still remain. Most are renamed and merged into the whole, but a few are keeping a degree or two of separation, but not many. It's not comprehensive, but we've gotten more than in the *Power Plays* download.

## MCT ARCANA

Similar to the tech division, Mitsuhama moved a lot of data out of the various magical firms be-



fore they sold them off. Only Mitsuhamas Magical Services and Mitsuhamas Thaumaturgical Research remain as pieces of MCT Arcana. It wasn't like MTR wasn't privy to everything from all the other parts of the arcane division anyway, but they lost a massive number of their Awakened staff. While MCT Arcana wanted to transfer every mage they had into their new division, they couldn't afford the overhead. Research magicians are not a big immediate revenue-stream producer, so MCT Arcana couldn't just bleed off funds they didn't have.

What they do have is all the thaumaturgical knowledge they've gathered over the existence of the corporation. This is a great start, but with the recent issues with mana, they don't have the staff to investigate the new phenomena, so they're going to fall behind fast. Where they aren't going to fall behind quickly is the realm of combat magic. To better support the zero-zones, MCT Arcana is going all in with their research into better and more efficient ways to permanently eliminate problems.

- They didn't lose the unhinged arcanists of Unit-13, so that sucks. This happens to be one of the places you don't want to end up being taken to if you're captured alive. They don't have the funds to buy poor people to test their latest innovations on, so they use captured runners.
- Glasswalker

## MCT AUTOMATION

Thanks to the extensive Disian infiltration within this division to use them for logistics in building Harvesters, there's not a lot left here. The subsidiaries they kept for the rebranding seem chosen for a rather specific purpose. Now collectively known as MCT Automation; Automation Systems Inc., Drive-Ware Technologies, ExoMining Systems, Mitsubishi Motor Company, and PWV Advanced Solutions are hand-picked to develop extraplanetary vehicles and mining systems. It seems that while MCT may have taken a beating here on Earth, they're still looking to space for a different revenue stream.

I'm sure MCT Automation will still make cars, drones, and the accessories that go along with them, but you don't include a corp like ExoMining Systems in your division if you aren't planning on doing some resource acquisition in harsh environments. Prototypes, polymer advancements, new programs, and other innovations are going to be in the crosshairs of other corps. And with all the hits MCT has taken, this is going to look like a soft target. Just remember the whole zero-zone thing.

- Most people think space when they hear ExoMining, but this was MCT's main metaplanar resource gatherer. They also have the tech to turn to the depths of the oceans or deep mining.
- Beaker

- Keeping PWV definitely makes it look like they'll be looking at deep mining. With all the subarcologies being developed there, it's a lucrative market for gathering up whatever resources can be sifted out while they're digging the giant holes and tunnels.
- Afrikaaner

## MCT DATA

Focusing on data and technology, MCT Data consists of the remains of Aekei Heuristic Technologies, Mitsuhamas Computers, Perth Progressive Technologies, and Xinhung Solutions. They lost massively in this area because it contained the most valuable bits of the corp. It's also the easiest stuff to make copies of, creatively alter, and shift over to a new corp. It's important to note that Perth Progressive only stayed in the fold because no one wanted to buy anything to do with Australia with all the problems they're having.

## MCT INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

When you need a lot of money fast, one of the best ways to get it is to sell off financial firms. Thanks to steady investment values that were diversified outside of Mitsuhamas, their financial division didn't take the hit the others did when the stock value took a nosedive. This meant the heat of their financial division, MCT Financial, along with other assets, still held an impressive value so it was sold to cover debts. MCT Investment Management now only consists of EuroFi, Green Investments of Sao Paulo, and Sydney Financial Solutions. They didn't hold onto much, but they kept their major institutions in key global regions, especially areas they weren't able to keep a lot of physical assets.

## MCT MEDIA

This one is a little weird. The only corps they kept around are Africa for All, Mitsuhamas Media, and Mitsuhamas Music. The latter two make sense, but I still haven't figured out why Africa For All didn't get sold. There was definitely interest, especially with Erika, Evo, Renraku, and Spinrad all trying to gain power in Africa, but MCT held onto this.

- That's because Africa for All is nothing but a shell to hide all sorts of unreported holdings in Africa. Not sure how this is going to be maintained with the rebranding, but it means MCT has held onto quite the resource load on the continent.
- Am-Mut

## MCT OPERATIONS

This division is a bit of a catchall, but to me it seems give them a lot of wiggle room to hide shadow operations. This is going to be the place to dig to see what kind of dirty work is going on. As



it stands, the corporate elements that have folded into MCT Operations are Outback Expeditions, Mitsuham-Benguet Mining, NEMA Advanced Solutions, and Chicago Support Services. The operations in Australia got rolled in again because no one else was buying but it also fit with the other abstract global operations. The abstract work around Boston and Chicago are going to be used to hide a lot of work and assets.

- Even though they're knocked down, MCT is still heavily embedded and invested in Chicago and its redevelopment. That could shift in the coming months, but Chicago has a weird little time bubble over it. Things take a bit longer to catch up around the CZ.
- Traveler Jones
- This rebrand isn't going to fly in Chicago. The CZ isn't a fan of direct corporate intervention, hence the creative names with Chicago in them. Expect it to take a while for the signs to change in Chicago. The electronic trail might say MCT Operations, but the letterhead is still going to say Chicago Support Services.
- Snopes

## MCT SECURITY SERVICES

This division already had MCT Private Protective Services and MCT Public Protection Services, which have merged into MCT Security Services. Their correctional services were moved over as well with their name changing from Mitsuham to MCT Correctional Services. The most valuable data and assets from Nizhiny, Petrovski Security, Parashield, Sakura Security, and TK Armors were sold off, but the hearts of all those corps were folded into MCT Security. None of them exist independently, but their security corp has quite the breadth of abilities and contracts thanks to this. Too bad they have a problem with their PR and reps as the megacorp tumbles.

## LIKE RATS FROM A SINKING SHIP

MCT had to sell off large portions of their portfolio in emergency fire sales to pay Corporate Court fines and reparations and (barely) keep their AAA status. These sales went through so fast that hundreds, if not thousands, of black bag projects weren't scrubbed or moved in time and are now just waiting out there for some team of runners to gather the paydata and find the right buyer.

On the other side of the coin, they're also out there for MCT to reacquire with a smaller expenditure of funds, as they can offer bundles of insider information on location layouts, data locations, and other potentially valuable intel before the run starts. Some of these projects are now with other corps, but most are just needles buried in a mas-





sive haystack the new corp hasn't had time to sift through yet. In fact, if you're not keen on returning paydata to MCT, you can always seek out a connection at one of their enemies and offer to sell the paydata and information on where it was acquired, thus spotlighting the corp in question.

Lastly, the sudden departure of subsidiary assets has left a large number of MCT citizens out in the cold. If their brand or subsidiary was sold, they may need to move along with it or they might have been left behind. A decent number of these displaced citizens are using this opportunity to disappear. Some are taking slush fund money they found or savings they've built up and rather than moving to another corp or slipping back into a national SIN registry, they're looking for teams to scrub the last little bits of their existence from their former employer. I'm not saying this is a good choice, I'm just saying it's a choice being made and that there's money to be made.

- This is a direct result of the damn Defender Movement along with all the trids and sims that glorify life as a shadowrunner. Everyone sees the glitz, glamour, and gunfights, but they forget we pay scads of nuyen on perfectly good fake SINs just to be able to rent a place, and when that SIN gets burned, we lose everything attached to it. SINless life ain't easy.
- Mika
- I get the entertainment industry's part in this, but why the Defender Movement?
- Kia
- It's become one hell of an urban legend. And since we all know it really exists, the more people who slip out of the corporate lights and into the shadows, the more it feeds the legend.
- Mika
- He's got a point. The word gets back to the other corporate clones well before word of that brand new shadowrunner's untimely demise. No matter how wiz people think the shadows are, most of these wannabes end up in a morgue.
- Bull

## REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED ... IN ABUNDANCE

I'm sure it's obvious that MCT is a target in their weakened state. Everyone they've stepped on will be coming after them now that they're bloodied. Post-war, they were made an example of by the other corporations who dog-piled them during the latter days and now that the Disians are dead, everyone is coming after MCT for their pound of flesh. While it's going to be coming at them from all angles, a few particularly vengeful players deserve to be spotlighted.

**Daniel "Dagger" Duncan** grew up on the hard streets of Tokyo with the wrong shape to his ears. While he wasn't a troll or ork, he was still an elf and was never looked at as a first-class citizen. He joined the street gang life early, worked his way up to the shadows, saved up enough nuyen to start up a small tech-security firm, and hired on bright minds that led to state-of-the-art innovations at the time—all the while settling into normal life with a wife and three kids. His little company, Stiletto Systems, developed an IC pick in the early '70s that was ahead of its time and drew the attention of Mitsuhamas. Dagger was savvy and had every intention of selling, but he wanted top nuyen. While he held out, Renraku got wind of the program and started sniffing around. Dagger knew megacorps well enough that this wasn't going to be a bidding war, it was going to be a shadow war. He went to Renraku to politely decline their offer before heading to MCT to make a final negotiation and settle a deal, but a runner team hired by MCT grabbed his family. Renraku held him and offered to extract his family if he agreed to sell to them. In the attempt his family died, Dagger snapped, and one of his techs sold the program to Mitsuhamas on the sly.

Fast forward to today, and Dagger is a little older, a lot crazier, and has been taking pot shots at Mitsuhamas from the shadows for over a decade. All the while saving his nuyen again. Now that MCT has had their soft underbelly exposed, Dagger is hiring runner teams to join him on wet-work gigs. He's taking out anyone with the slightest connection to those responsible for his family. The money's good, but it's wetwork, so make your own call.

- Not just wetwork. Dagger is killing the families of those involved before going after those directly related. It's ugly work.
- Balladeer
- I've also heard he's been leaving bags containing thirty silver-painted coins with his victims.
- Det. Gumshoe

Revenant number two is **Gillian Lee**. As Mitsuhamas rocketed up in the early '80s, Lee was on the fast track to North American VP. She was a brutal headhunter, growing assets and trimming fat. She made Mitsuhamas Motion the North American monstrosity it became, but she lost control of the reins when the Disian elements inside MCT needed the logistics elements of Mitsuhamas Motion and she wasn't a member of the sect. She got passed up by a Disian-friendly executive. The move tarnished her record and sent her stock plummeting. She went from fast track to VP to derailed in a matter of weeks. Unhappy, she reached out and found a new home with Wuxing, where she has quietly



shuffled laterally for the last few years, unable to make an upward move.

The inability to advance has left her bitter, but her most recent move has opened an opportunity to get back at her former employer. She's back to headhunting, and she's targeting every bit of MCT she can gobble up, but she's playing hard and dirty the whole way. Teams she hires to gather intel, perform extractions, and make messes are getting bonuses for collateral damage. As long as the asset maintains its fundamental value, peripheral pieces are deemed expendable. Logistics assets need their pipelines intact, but current staff aren't necessarily needed. Tech firms need their data maintained, but they can always be moved to new offices.

Now all this looks like Wuxing's doing, and this style of operation is going to leave a bad taste in some folks' mouths. Eventually Wuxing is going to look at what's going on and Lee is probably going to catch hell.

- That is if she's not protecting herself with scapegoats ... which she is. To prove all these tactics are getting green-lit by Lee is going to require some shadow ops. She's doing an exceptional job covering her tracks.
- Slamm-O!
- Start with takeovers involving any exec who were part of Mitsuhamu Motion in '81. She's particularly brutal on these jobs, and more than one bag message has been delivered to someone who crossed her.
- Cosmo
- Her efforts are outing and offing Disian conspirators and traitors. Commendable.
- Lady Greenfire

It's never too late to make motivated enemies. **Hargrave Dolmen** is a prime example. Dolmen Data Systems was an early sacrifice from the Mitsuhamu Automatronics division as the fire sale started. They went cheap, and Dolmen, the namesake of the corp, lost a fortune with the sale. That wasn't the end, though. Since the initial sale, DDS has been sold no fewer than six more times. With each sale, the company has lost assets, employees, and value, further diminishing Dolmen's personal fortune and leaving the company shattered. Dolmen could probably be pissed at all the corps that have bought and sold the company, but he holds the grudge against MCT. Probably because he can actually do something to hurt them.

DDS is dead. The parts are scattered across its string of previous owners. Dolmen has nothing but his personal fortune left, along with an undying hatred for MCT. His work in the shadows is focused primarily on individual executives within what remains of MCT. The runs are never about personal violence, but instead they make sure to hit their

bottom line. Tech firms are the most common with Dolmen, as he's bitter that they weren't sold, but they aren't exclusively targeted. Then again, targeting tech firms is getting easier and easier as MCT rebrands everything under their main banner, and Dolmen just needs to go after anything that gains the moniker MCT Data.

- Dolmen does hit the other divisions, just not as frequently. Financial gets tagged regularly.
- Mr. Bonds
- Dolmen is becoming a bit of a data broker as well. Most of it is about MCT, but he still needs income, so he uses his data mining skills to restock his coffers for going after MCT.
- Icarus

This isn't just a single person, but I figured I'd mention how much payback the **Yakuza** is getting these days. It's not universal—some of the clans are leaving it be and just enjoying the show. Others are still quietly backing the powers inside MCT they've always supported. A rather loud portion are looking for payback. Payback that has no specific intention other than suffering. Their efforts are pure brutality. Focused bloodshed with no worry as to the impact on the bottom line.

- Word on the street is this kicked off when elements inside MCT came to the Yaks looking to mend their relations. These attacks are a manifestation of their response. A resounding "frag no."
- Kia

## ALWAYS ZERO, ALL THE TIME

Everyone knows the old adage about a wounded or cornered animal. That's MCT right now. As they're already reeling, they have few qualms about getting an even worse reputation. And with everyone coming for a piece of them, they aren't pulling punches. Their zero-zone philosophy is becoming as much an external philosophy as it was an internal philosophy. In the shadows, this means jobs for MCT aren't going to come with many restrictions. They're more likely to ask you to scrag everyone and make sure they know who they were messing with than to keep the job legitimately in the shadows. For some of us here, that's not an issue. But for runners out there who believe in the *shadow* part of shadowrunning, MCT isn't going to be the place for contracts. Or if you do, and don't show this level of ferocity, you aren't likely to get more.

On the other side, you won't have anyone holding back. Expect extra-lethal options coming your way straight from the gate. If you do get something non-lethal coming your way ... *run!* This means they want you alive, and that's worse than death.

The horror stories are already surfacing of runners, fixers, and Mr. Johnsons now bound to MCT



with cranial bombs and other insurance policies. This isn't making them any friends, and it's gaining them enemies that're going to get real sick of being used as puppets. Expect work coming in to scrub data, steal ritual samples, and cut access to remote triggers.

I've found a trend, and I'm following it. Help in this arena is welcome. MCT is putting small groups of these poor trapped fraggers in some of their major operations zones. The bigger the market they're trying to retain, the more of these folks they're putting in place. I want to know who all these people are, both to offer them help, and to keep them on the radars of anyone in the area who might take work for or against them and needs to know what they might be getting into.

## MCT PUPPETS

While MCT may be down, they're obviously not out, and they still have some allies outside of the regular corporate structure.

### CARIB LEAGUE

**Admiral Bane** is a pirate who operates across the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and Atlantic coasts near the CAS and Amazonia. He's about as crazy as one would expect of a man who dresses like an old-timey pirate and has all his gear custom modded to fit his madness. His fleet consists of some pretty high-end yachts (all stolen) that have been modded and molded to look like something from the era of Blackbeard. The black sails are window dressing, but they still do a decent job of striking fear into his targets. He has close to fifty ships in his little armada and had the backing of the Sea Dragon for a hot minute. Then last year, a runner team grabbed him while he was docked in St. Lucia. MCT took a ritual sample and replaced a cervical disc with a cord cutter. Now he's under their thumb and had to go to the Sea Dragon and explain his new predicament. As far as anyone can tell they parted amicably. Bane has kept this fairly quiet in his circles, mainly by killing anyone who finds out, but that method isn't going to last forever.

- > The plasteel shells on his deck cannons are nice looking, but the Panther XXL internals are no joke.
- > Kane
- > Jealous, Kane?
- > Slamm-O!
- > Nope. Fragger got nabbed, and everyone knows it. I haven't. Still, I can appreciate the style.
- > Kane
- > Outing him on here isn't really going to help him.
- > Netcat

- > It helps him more than keeping it a secret. At least now someone can look for a solution rather than just getting fed to the sharks.
- > Mika

### CHICAGO

**Ogden** is one of the Aldermen, a pseudo syndicate working to "rebuild" Chicago, and point man on their intel network. The group got in bed with MCT in the mid-'70s and carved a little piece of the CZ near the Shattergraves for themselves. They also have influence over several other sections of downtown. During the collapse of MCT, they've held onto several assets in Chicago and in doing so they made sure to grab useful tools from the local population. Ogden got snagged by a runner team and dumped at an MCT-backed street doc who politely implanted a cranial bomb and high-end commlink he can use for secure communications to MCT. It's bad news for Chicago and anyone who works for or against the Aldermen.

**Asher** is the name of a runner who's been hooding in Chicago for half a decade. He had a solid rep as good street muscle, but while on an out-of-town run against MCT, they grabbed him and put a bio sample on file. Now they pull intel from him, manipulate his work, and made his rep pure drek. He's still operating and comes cheap nowadays, but that's not always a good thing, as you've got to expect to get what you pay for.

**Killian Roth** is a fixer with an extensive arms and augmentation network in Chicagoland. Inside and outside the CZ, everyone knows Roth is the guy to go to for hard-to-find arms or to get connected to a good street doc. A recent contract he pulled for Renraku got him on MCT's radar, and they pulled him in for a little chit-chat and a nanohive full of shredders.

- > Roth is currently trying to find a friendly monad in hopes of getting them to hit him with their nanites and overwrite the hive. It's a dangerous game, but at least he knows CFD can be cured. Slavery to MCT cannot.
- > Butch

## ON THE HOMEFRONT

MCT is not doing well there either. They held on to more assets in Japan than other spots, mainly under the original Mitsuhamas and MCT brands, but they still lost a lot of small and valuable bits to rival Japanacorp. Shiawase took the least, Renraku the most, while Yakashima and Monobe are splitting the difference. All of this is definitely building up to some serious shadow action across the country, with Kyoto and Tokyo exploding into shadow wars that have been simmering for over a decade while the power trio kept things friendly at home. Japan is about to turn into a hotbed of internal strife.



While Shiawase and Renraku were the forces that helped break MCT, Monobe and Yakashima will be the scavengers that pick them near to death. But there's a lot more than just corporate power plays going on. The Japanacorps are playing political games as well, and the winners aren't just going to win in Japan, they could be new powers on a global stage.

Both Monobe and Yakashima are vying for MCT's former place among the trio of powers in Japan. In fact, they're both obviously after MCT's spot on the Corp Court and that third A. The thing is, they're going to have to win the war at home before the other Japanacorps even consider giving them a real chance at taking the heart of MCT, and therefore that sweet golden ticket. This leaves the pair regularly going after the same assets and making jobs on MCT often a three-way (or more) affair.

MCT is the target in the middle, and they're digging in and fighting hard (and dirty), but they don't have any allies in the land of the rising sun. This means they're just sticking to brutal tactics and accepting the disapproval of the other corps and the government. This is bloodier than Japanese conflicts usually tend to be. There are precision strikes coming from Monobe and Yakashima, but MCT forces are responding with wanton violence.

- ▶ The precision strikes by Monobe and Yakashima tend to be focused on high-value assets and data. They're making moves to steal MCT's personnel resources and intel on their tech and arcane developments so they can release comparable products at cut-rate prices to continue shattering MCT's bottom line.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ The bird's eye offers a decent warning but let me reinforce, MCT isn't holding back when other corps come after them. This includes when they come after them with deniable assets. MCT isn't looking to capture and turn assets in Japan like they are in other places. In these home-turf battles, they aren't taking prisoners.
- ▶ DangerSensei







# WAITING TO STRIKE

POSTED BY: MR. BONDS (AND FRIENDS)

To the vultures go the spoils. While the AAAs were playing heroes and villains, the smaller corporations enjoyed a renaissance in the art of war profiteering and are now reinvesting this bloody lucre into new projects and acquisitions. Locked in a never-ending struggle for their third A, many AA megas like Eastern Tiger, Maersk, and Yakashima have been gorging themselves on a buffet of fallen giants and former competitors, with OmniStar leading the pack.

But not everyone's playing the same game. Some corps are taking full advantage of the public's limited attention span to rework old, tarnished images. The no-longer-NeoNET AAs exemplify this approach, as they hitch themselves to new brands and markets. Others still are using this as an opportunity to stir the pot, taking advantage of the temporary reprieve from the AAA megacorps who would normally keep them in check. Whether or not these two-faced tactics pay off in the end, it's a bullish market for shameless opportunists.

Mergers, acquisitions, and liquified assets have left the playing field smaller and deadlier. The smart bet is on fewer players left standing by the next audit. With that in mind, the following list includes all (as of the time of this download) pertinent AA-rated corporations. Now, obviously we don't have the bandwidth to talk about *all* of them. Instead, we're going to focus on those making moves most relevant to our line of work.

## PACIFIC PROSPERITY COUP

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR

If you ever need to know who your *real* friends are, get into a world-threatening shadow war. In the fallout of the Disian conflict, members of the Pacific Prosperity Group (PPG) held an emergency summit where they dropped a diplomatic nuke



## LIST OF AA-RATED CORPORATIONS AS OF SEPTEMBER 01, 2083

- Aesa (formerly known as Aérospatiale SA)
- AG Chemie
- Brackhaven Investments
- CitiGroup
- Century Dynamics (formerly Universal Omnitech)
- Earth Medicine Incorporated
- Eastern Tiger Corporation
- Erika
- ESUS (European Shuttle Unified Services)
- Ford Motor Company
- Frankfurt Banking Association (Frankfurter Bankenverein)
- Gaeatronics
- Hildebrandt-Kleinfort Bernal
- Incan Power
- Index-AXA
- Kolkata Integrated Talent & Technologies
- Komatsu
- KondOrchid
- Korporacja Opatrzności Bożej (English: Providence Corporation)
- Kwonsam Industries
- Maersk Incorporated Assets
- Merenati (formerly known as Renault-Fiat-Meridional)
- Monobe International
- NYPD Incorporated
- OmniStar
- OMV (Österreichische Mineralölverwaltung Aktiengesellschaft Austrian Mineral Oil Administration Stock Company)
- Precision Defense Systems
- Proteus AG
- Reality Inc.
- Regulus Joint Industries
- ShinSiam
- Société Nationale d'Investissement (SNI)
- SpiriTech Corporation
- Swiss Genom (GENOM Corporation)
- Tanamyre Resources
- Trans-Orbital
- Transys Neuronet
- Trikon Holding AG
- Truman Technologies
- Vedacorp
- VisionQuest Entertainment
- Yakashima
- Zeta-ImpChem
- Zürich Investments

that sent shockwaves throughout boardrooms from Sixuan to Seattle.

During the DSW, smaller corps got real cozy sitting on the fence—reluctant to sell their souls (or their bottom line) for power but lacking the spine to risk pissing off any would-be Disian proxies.

None embodied that political deadlock better than the Pacific Prosperity Group. While, on paper, the corporate alliance was created to act as a shield against existential threats like the AAA Japanacorps, their representatives considered the rumors of apocalypse to be “too politically divisive” or “too great of a financial burden” to warrant action.

- To be fair, the Disian conspiracy was a well-kept secret. While the largest AAs are rumored to have had direct contact with the Disians, others had little more than suspicions. Even Fauchon and Saurat, the powers behind the French Touch, *with* the massive trove of intel from the consortium, hadn't believed it until recently.
- Sim-Eon

Not that Wuxing hadn't *tried* to force their agenda, but this time, the PPG did what bureaucracies do best: They tied up any meaningful decision in an endless parade of summits and committees, and deadlocked any vote that would force their members to take sides.

## PARTY CRASHERS

With the Disian threat neutralized, the PPG's been issued a wakeup call, forcing them to reconsider this toxic corporate relationship that nearly brought them to the brink of destruction. With knives drawn, members called an emergency summit in Singapore to determine how to protect their hoops from their own partners.

- Even the decision to meet outside of their Hong Kong headquarters was strategic, since Wuxing is famous for using geomancy and feng shui to control its home turf. Instead, they met in a more neutral ground of Singapore, sending Wuxing a message: literally, “You have no power here.”
- Lei Kung

The summit began with a high-level meeting: corp-speak for a closed-door gossip-session, where the biggest VIPs share intel, talk strategy, and air their dirty laundry, all off the record. Only this time, there were two noticeable absences from the guest list: Wuxing and Aztechnology.

Thanks to a well-placed source, I've obtained a recording from this classified meeting, the transcript of which follows. While the recording itself is woefully incomplete, I can nonetheless vouch for its authenticity. Of course, I cannot say the same for anything the executives themselves may say. As such, I present this written transcript as-is, and I trust you will read it with your bulldrek-detectors on.



## THE SLEEPING TIGER

The cynics out there (and those who skipped history) often assume the Pacific Prosperity Group (PPG) is a glorified corporate social club where suits shake hands and make empty promises between shots of baiju. While not entirely wrong, when they do get off their hoops, their combined power can move markets, topple governments, and dictate the future of entire regions.

The PPG was first formed as an answer to the Japanacorp, to resist the stranglehold they once held on the Pacific rim's economy. Members take on joint ventures, give each other sweetheart deals, engage in price-fixing schemes, and limit competition among themselves, all while forming a powerful coalition in the Corporate Court.

Of course, the theory quickly falls apart in practice. For

one thing, the PPG was founded on the premise of equal representation, with each corporation getting one representative and one vote regardless of size or rating. Ever since Wuxing picked up the Malaysian Independent Bank, however, they've leveraged their control over the region's finances to strongarm their cohorts.

Even when they're not acting as Wuxing's puppet, the PPG is often too fractured to agree to real action. Sure, they share a common goal of "frag the Japanacorp," but that ideal doesn't translate well into policy, especially when members have wildly different methods and goals. With Wuxing and Aztechnology destabilized after recent losses, however, their grip on the PPG's leash is slipping and thus freeing their fellow members to flex their muscles.

### ««OPEN TRANSCRIPT»»

**#HFG-5309DATE: AUGUST 24, 2083, LOCATION:  
ORCHID BALLROOM, THE FULLERTON HOTEL, SINGAPORE**

#### MEMBERS PRESENT:

**Mira Castillo:** Vice President of Horizon Americas  
**Edda Collins:** Foreign Minister of Australia and New Zealand Allied Confederation  
**Deng Wei:** COO of Tan Tien  
**Joriz Dizon:** CFO of Evo Australasia  
**Malcolm Grant:** CEO of Manadyne, representing OmniStar  
**Mamsir Zoren Galang:** Acting Chair, CEO of Lami Look Pagkaon  
**Jing Qiang:** COO of Shangui Corporation  
**Kim Kwang-seon:** CEO of Kwonsham  
**Ko Min-jung:** Director of the Korean Agency for Economic Security  
**Riley Lawler:** CFO of Tanamyre  
**Lee Se-jong:** Former CEO and acting representative for Eastern Tiger  
**Lin Gao Daoshi:** Sichuan Foreign Minister  
**Te-Moko Ngata:** CEO of Polynesian Fuels  
**Chakrit Shinawat:** CEO of ShinSiam  
**Jessica Sirianni:** CEO of Federated-Boeing  
**Inigo Tan-Reyes:** CEO of Shibata Construction and Engineering  
**Tran Thiên Anh:** CEO of Khouang Combine

### ««BEGIN TRANSCRIPT»»

**KIM:** I don't see why we're still talking about this. Let's just axe them both and be done with it. Some of us have businesses to run.

**LAWLER:** Do you *want* Wuxing to call in their debts? Because that recklessness has already bankrupted your company once.

**GRANT:** They won't. They have enough problems as it is without adding bad debts and mass defaults to the equation.

**TRAN:** Which is why we need a united front. They can't afford to go after us all.

**LIN:** That might be how *your* company does business, but we're not about to alienate our closest strategic partner, especially given our shared financial interests.

**GALANG:** To reiterate, we are *not* terminating our partnership with Wuxing, and they will remain members in good standing. We're just establishing boundaries to protect our corporate autonomy.

**KO:** One vote—that's all we're asking for. Just get through *one vote* without fucking it up for everyone, then you can go right back to sucking up to daddy Wuxing with our blessing.

**LAWLER:** Speaking of protecting our interests, we need to talk about Aztechnology. There's no way they're going to take this well, and some of us actually do business with them.

**TRAN:** Well, if they wanted to keep enjoying the perks of this little club, maybe they should've played nice and paid their dues.

**TAN-REYES:** They made it clear from the start that they're only here to collect benefits and buddy up with Wuxing. And wouldn't you know it? Wuxing's the only one who's seen any repayment after the NatVat bailout.

**NGATA:** Let's not pretend they earned their seat either. They wouldn't have made it past the front door without Wuxing shoving them through, and even then, half of us were ready to walk.

**LEE:** The problem isn't that they're freeloading. It's that they're a ticking bomb, and if we give a pass to their behavior now, we'll have only ourselves to blame when they destroy us.

**KIM:** And let's not kid ourselves. If they tried to sell us out to the Japanese instead of some planet-eating monsters, we would've kicked them out ages ago.



**CASTILLO:** Must I remind you that, even if this is a secure space, let's not entertain such controversial theories. Suffice to say that their conflicts of interest have proven problematic.

**KO:** Suffice to say that they *fucked* us. And here we are, standing around with our hoops in the air, debating whether we should finally pull our pants up or wait for round two.

**\*THE DOOR OPENS. ENTER SONIA MARIA SOTO, FORMER CEO OF AZTECHNOLOGY AUSTRALASIA.\***

**\*SILENCE FOR 20.4 SECONDS\***

**SOTO:** Please, don't stop on my behalf.

**GALANG:** You'll have to excuse us, Ms. Soto, but this is a private discussion.

**SOTO:** Then consider yourself excused. This topic is clearly relevant to our interests, so it's only appropriate that we're represented.

**DIZON:** You'll notice yours isn't the only company that wasn't invited, and Wuxing had the courtesy of respecting the established guest list.

**SIRIANNI:** ... though they're undoubtedly listening in through less direct means. Whoever's eavesdropping on their behalf, say hello to Dewei for us, would you?

**SHINAWAT:** Ms. Soto, our understanding was that you'd stepped away to ... attend to your health. The last thing we would want is place additional demands on you.

**JING:** And wasn't Ms. Ganika Dugal our point of contact with your organization?

**SOTO:** It's clear that Dugal has failed to adequately convey Aztechnology's position to you. And this is no inconvenience, especially if it prevents you from making an unfortunate mistake, like throwing away a seat on the Corporate Court.

**KO:** That reminds me, I'd been meaning to give Ms. Spinrad a call ...

**LEE:** Rest assured, we are anticipating an adjustment period, but this is a necessary step toward our long-term stability.

**SOTO:** Funny you should mention stability, given the current climate, specifically the current condition of Australia. I know several of you are particularly invested in that region, and we stand by our partners in such times of crisis. Of course, if we're no longer welcome, I see no reason to keep such arrangements in place, nor allow access to our formerly shared infrastructure and shipping routes.

**COLLINS:** You're not seriously threatening to pull out of an entire continent. Doing that now would threaten millions of civilian lives. The ripple effects could last decades.

**LAWLER:** Even without membership, these are still profitable enterprises. Do you really want to explain to your shareholders that you're throwing them away out of spite?

**SOTO:** Spite? No. We're simply ... demonstrating the value of our contributions.

**NGATA:** By torching the place on your way out. Subtle.

**SOTO:** Subtlety is for those with something to hide. Besides, you clearly need your consequences spelled out for you, so here they are: Should you proceed as intended, your ports will stay closed, your supplies will be stranded, and your operations are about to get a lot more *complicated*.

**GALANG:** I think we get the point, Ms. Soto. Now if you're quite finished, we have a meeting to conclude.

**KO:** Yes, you can get back to your usual business, whatever that entails—probably biting the heads off goats.

**SOTO:** I see. Well, if you're so eager to assert your independence, I'll leave you to it. But you'll soon discover just how dependent you've become.

**\*SOTO EXITS\***

**SIRIANNI:** Well, that was fun.

**LAWLER:** Fun? They're not bluffing. We all know what Aztechnology is capable of. Are we really going to risk all this just to make a statement?

**COLLINS:** It's easy to talk about unity when you're not the one facing collapse. You saw what she just threatened.

**NGATA:** She laid it out plain and simple: They'll make us bleed if we move forward. But if we don't, they'll choke us out slowly.

**KO:** So cut the leash. At least pretend we still have dignity.

**GALANG:** Fine. Then let's move to vote.

**<<END TRANSCRIPT>>**

**<<<CLOSE FILE>>>**

- I have so many questions, namely: what the frag was *that*? That felt less like corporate politics and more like a telenovela, complete with a bitter ex crashing a wedding.
- /dev/grrl



- ▶ That was Sonia Maria Soto: Aztechnology's "Black Widow" and Ding's ex-wife. She built Aztechnology's Australasian holdings through strategic investments backed by old-school cartel tactics. And this wasn't some tantrum, but a warning shot: a reminder that when Aztechnology loses a game, they don't just take their ball and go home—they burn down the whole stadium.
- ▶ Oxolotl

## PACIFIC COLD WAR

This secret meeting, beneath its corporate catininess, set the stage for a new era of the PPG: one with Wuxing knocked off its pedestal and Aztechnology out on their hoops. By contrast, the public half of the summit was completely unremarkable: veiling the backstabbing behind a parade of pomp and manicured statements. After cutting out the corpspeak dressing about how "the PPG remains committed to fostering unity and collaboration among its members," the final resolutions were as follows:

"In light of recent developments surrounding Wuxing Inc.'s conduct and performance, the Pacific Prosperity Group has unanimously voted to enact the following resolution: Effective immediately, Wuxing Inc. is formally censured for actions and affiliations deemed inconsistent with the strategic interests of the Pacific Prosperity Group. Wuxing Inc. shall retain PPG membership but will be relieved of all leadership positions within the Group's executive and advisory committees.

"Furthermore, in recognition of Aztechnology's persistent conflicts of interest, challenges to the integrity of the Pacific Prosperity Group, and failure to fulfill obligations commensurate with membership, Aztechnology's membership is hereby revoked, and access to joint ventures and collective economic agreements terminated."

In other words, both Wuxing and Aztechnology lost big. Whereas Wuxing could previously treat the PPG as an extension of itself, they'll have to step up their diplomacy game if they want to restore face and influence votes. Luckily for them, they have Sharon Chang-Wu, the reigning master of politeness-judo, to drive their hearts-and-minds campaign.

But for Aztechnology, there's no bouncing back, and surprising no one, they're not going quietly. Of course, their PR team issued the obligatory public response, expressing "profound disappointment in the short-sighted decision, spearheaded by a vocal minority of members," despite also claiming that they had outgrown the format and had no interest in seeking future membership.

Meanwhile, with costs rising and their political clout shrinking, Aztechnology has to act fast to salvage their Pacific investments, either jacking up prices to cover "operational adjustments" (read: lost benefits), or cutting their losses entirely, leaving both big industries and local populations

feeling the squeeze. Aztechnology subsidiary Austrafarm, which manages massive renewable energy-powered farms across the Australian outback, has caused a supply crisis among small businesses and grocery grains that can no longer afford their new rates. Small communities that once bought from their agro-centric power grids now have to contend with rolling blackouts and angry citizens, at least until Tanamyre can get the diesel flowing for their generators.

Other investments have proven themselves too lucrative for Aztechnology to drop, especially with other corps eager to snatch up abandoned assets. Stuffer Shacks across the Pacific aren't going anywhere, especially after attempts at withdrawing elsewhere have proven disastrous. When Aztechnology started to divest stores in Vietnam, the government laid out a net of red tape to ensure it would be the only possible buyer for those locations. Vietnam is a unique case, in that legally, any foreign business operating there must do so as a joint-venture with Khoang Combine (which is itself a Vietnam-nationalized corporation). Locations where Aztechnology pulled out were immediately subsumed by Khoang and rebranded into functionally identical "Nom Nhanh!" convenience stores.

- ▶ State-run Stuffer Shacks? Good luck finding anything left on the shelves that's not expired or overregulated garbage. Meanwhile, those soja-taquitos are going to be hot on Saigon's black markets.
- ▶ Slamm-0!
- ▶ This nationalization has been a massive propaganda win for Vietnam's isolationist policlubs. If anything, should such takeovers prove lucrative, we could see Khoang start sabotaging their own partners in the name of short-term profits.
- ▶ Dr. Spin

With former allies at each other's throats and vying to control the narrative, purveyors of covert-services are about to find themselves in a sellers' market.

Wuxing's financial-industry success owes much to its subsidiary, the Malaysian Independent Bank, which handles the lion's share of the PPG's banking and debts. Unfortunately, these loans do little good when their own finances are in turmoil—and with Wuxing lacking the stability they'd need to call in debts, renegotiate terms, or challenge their partners' détente, their tarnished reputation has pushed some clients toward third-party financial backers. This leaves Wuxing desperate to curry favor and rebuild their image as trustworthy allies, and without the liquidity they'd need to buy loyalty, they're employing more creative tactics to inflate the perceived value of their friendship. This includes sabotaging the projects of their PPG peers,



if only so they can heroically swoop in with miraculously timed solutions, and greasing the wheels of diplomacy by “greasing” any whistleblowers who might threaten their good name.

- ▶ That’s to say nothing of the countless other PPG corporations now competing to fill Wuxing’s leadership vacuum. Evo now has the perfect chance to shake their reputation as dirty monad-touchers, reviving their glory days as one of the group’s founding members while they challenge Shiawase and Renraku.
- ▶ Butch

When Wuxing and Aztechnology began hemorrhaging assets after the war, PPG members also benefitted from early access to the fire sales, snapping up prime contracts, real estate, and other shed assets at bargain-bin prices. Of course, once the Azzies got the boot, they cried foul, claiming those sales were negotiated under “false pretenses”—namely, the assumption that they were partners in good standing. Now they’re looking to claw back whatever they can and take revenge on those who capitalized on their weaknesses, and they’re not about to limit their war to the courtroom.

- ▶ We’re talking shadow teams armed with blackmail and an excess of firepower sent to “convince” buyers to reconsider their bids—and that’s if the Azzies are feeling nice. More likely, a lot of execs are going to wake up to find their shiny new properties burnt to the ground.
- ▶ Balladeer

## MASTERS OF THE HOUSE

Nature abhors a vacuum, as does corporate politics. Wuxing’s demotion left their PPG leadership seats vacant, and now a new generation of opportunists are stepping over the fallen old guard to take on their mantles.

The most visible among them, and ironically, the least consequential, is the acting chair, CEO of Lami Look Pagkaon “Mamsir” Zoren Galang. Because Galang is a soft-spoken pushover who poses no corporate threat to anyone, he had been no one’s first pick for the job, which made his election a surprise even to himself. Devoid of obvious ambitions, he has nonetheless garnered approval from his peers simply by taking roll and covering for the more ambitious power-players working behind the scenes.

To find out who’s really running the show, look no further than “Ajumma” Ko Min-Jung, the non-voting representative of the Korean Republic. A career bureaucrat with seemingly no personal financial stakes, Ajumma is an enigma wrapped in a tacky floral print. Officially, she runs the Korean Agency for Economic Security and uses her control over the nation’s coin purse to maintain tight relationships with the local

*chaebols*. Unofficially, she’s a corporate matchmaker, known for her blunt language and talent for brokering deals amongst companies at an impasse, able to grab ears of executives and syndicate leaders alike—neither of whom dare to stand against a surly old woman with a knot perm and an axe to grind.

- ▶ I’ve heard of old folks with no social media history, but this Ajumma’s something else entirely. I must have scanned every public record in Korea and found nothing on her early career. It’s like she burst into existence as a fully formed obatarian.
- ▶ Glitch
- ▶ The current rumor links her to Shin Soo-hyun, the former leader of the Korean Celestial Path policlub, who disappeared a decade back under suspicious and politically convenient circumstances. If true, she’s in deep with the hardcore nationalist crowd.
- ▶ Rikki

Unlike other corporate executives, Ajumma’s known to hire runners directly, using her rolodex of connections to obscure who’s behind any given job. If you ever find yourself in a room with her, be respectful, don’t waste her time, and whatever you do, let her handle the check. Then maybe—just maybe—you’ll walk out with a fistful of credsticks and your dignity intact.

## FAMILY DRAMA IN KOREA

POSTED BY: LEI KUNG

Between Ajumma’s machinations and the PPG’s internal revolution, Korean chaebols like Eastern Tiger and Kwonsam have been steadily gaining ground, positioning themselves to challenge the Japanacorps on assets they’ve held for decades.

For those unfamiliar, the chaebols are Korea’s megacorporate giants: family-owned conglomerates built on blood ties, backroom deals, and a near-feudal dynastic system. Unlike their AAA peers, the chaebols owe as much to their founding families as the Korean government itself—or at least, the part that isn’t still beholden to Japanese interests. Specifically, they hold a symbiotic relationship with the Korean Agency for Economic Security, which controls the country’s purse-strings, bringing in a share of chaebol profits for the motherland while providing these corporations a lifeline should they find themselves on the verge of collapse.

While the AAAs were tied up in the DSW, the chaebols positioned themselves to overturn Japanese interests that have been entrenched in Korea since the second Korean war.



## EASTERN TIGER CORPORATION

Leading the charge is the Eastern Tiger Corporation (ETC) and new CEO **Lee Baek-ho**, who sees his corp as the face of a future independent Korea. His father, **Lee Se-Jong**, built ETC into a regional powerhouse through shrewd corporate bets and a reputation for stability. This extreme caution extended to his personal life, and for years, he defied chaebol conventions by keeping his family out of the spotlight, including his wife, Min Seon-yeo, who was little more than a name in the public imagination.

That changed as soon as his kids were old enough to take on their own corporate portfolios. Se-Jong introduced his two adult children, Lee Baek-ho and Lee Noeul, in a corporate press conference that exploded into a cultural phenomenon. Baek-ho and Noeul were catapulted into media royalty, captivating the public's imagination with their ethereal beauty, revelations about their upbringing ... and the fact that both were *dryads*.

- Which means, presumably, their reclusive mom is a dryad, too. According to the more cynical rumors I've heard, this was no accident, but the entire reason he's with her.
- Kia
- ... So, he's got keebler fever?
- Slamm-O!
- No—well, maybe? In this case, it's not about love, but succession. Remember, chaebols are family-run, so having his heirs be genetically wired to stay young and beautiful was a way for Se-Jong to ensure his legacy would outlive any competition.
- Kia

Overnight, the Lee kids became living corporate mascots, especially when corporate branding seized on the fact that dryads are symbiotically linked to their homeland, exalting Baek-ho as a living incarnation of Busan itself, with Noeul channeling Seoul-Incheon.

As the new CEO of the corporation following his father's retirement, Baek-ho broke from his father's more cautious traditions, spearheading aggressive expansions into new industries, including the acquisition of fellow AAs Hyundai and Yangsu. While Noeul quietly dedicated himself to ETC's operations, Baek-ho clearly has greater ambitions for himself and his country, invoking the promise of a new, independent Korea, defined by trailblazing technological advancements, and more insidiously, free of its Japanese baggage.

With this new directive, Baek-ho seems to be setting the stage for a cultural revolution, one shaped by the loving, patriotic guidance of Eastern Tiger. Reviving ETC's post-Crash dreams of connecting the globe on their terms, they've begun laying the infrastructural groundwork for "Foun-

dationless" Matrix across its territories, touting its alleged safety and reliability, while handing the company greater control over its content. At the same time, Baek-ho seems eager to wage a pop-culture charm offensive, snapping up production studios, idol groups, and IPs that were cut loose in the wake of the DSW.

- They even picked up MCT's anime house, Sakura Studios, and their full IP catalog in an apparent scheme to brainwash the public one waifu at a time.
- T3chK1d
- Coming next season: "Seoul Star Ultra: Idol Battle Force!" "My Stepsister Is a Gumiho?" and of course, "I Got Hit by a Maglev and Woke Up in Glorious Magical Joseon!"
- Electric Blue
- After reading those words, I'm starting to think we deserve a Crash 3.0.
- Bull

Se-Jong still holds a "special advisory role" on the board, but it's clear that ETC's done playing it safe. Meanwhile, runners, especially those in Korea, are enjoying a surge in employment opportunities, even if the jobs run hotter than average: arms trafficking into the country, celebrity abductions, even political wetwork, and there's no doubting which corp has their claws in those deals.

## KWONSHAM INDUSTRIES

From austerity to prosperity: in the aftermath of the second Korean war, Kwonsham emerged like a roach from a nuclear wasteland, rising from the wreckage of North Korea's military and heavy industry. Founder **Kim Jae-kyung** capitalized on his ability to scrape profit from scant resources, employing the hungry populace to process raw materials and sell military-grade weapons to buyers who didn't care where they came from. Meanwhile, investors adored Jae-kyung's talent for working with minimal overhead—why pay for luxuries like "round-the-clock power" or "running water" when your employees are used to doing without?

Jae-kyung dreamed of passing this corporate empire to his son, **Kim Kwang-seon**. Unfortunately, Kwang-seon had little interest in the nuances of running a multinational conglomerate, beyond his ability to look good in a suit. Resentful of the company's reputation as North Korean bumpkins, he styled himself as a megacorporate jetsetter, burning fistfuls of daddy's money on lavish parties and projects with more hype than profitability.

- Kwang-seon likes to style himself as "this Generation's Damien Knight." Everyone else calls him "Thrift-Store Johnny Spinrad."
- Sunshine



- ▶ Not for nothing, that himbo spearheaded the development of Glitterworld: a wildly successful Matrix game that lets users live out their celebrity fantasies. Apparently, he understood just how willing people were to throw nuyen at worthless avatar skins.
- ▶ /dev/grrl

Once he took over as CEO, his reckless spending made Kwonsham a juicy target for rival chaebols. Enter Shin Go-eun, a quiet, homely ork, and daughter of the Samyung chaebol family. The two got married in what nearly everyone knew was a pure PR stunt used to seal Kwonsham's merger with the more traditionalist Samyung, which had been struggling since the last megacorporate audit. With Kwang-seon having as little competence as Go-eun had confidence, the Shin family assumed they could easily run the show from behind the scenes.

Go-eun had other plans. Shocking her family by proving an ambitious and bloodthirsty executive, she seized the reins of Kwonsham's operations, building alliances and restructuring the company from within, while Kwang-seon kept making headlines. Meanwhile, the merged megas have expanded their reach into new industries, though they're still shaped by Kwang-seon's whims. Most recently, he seems fascinated with the idea of space and has taken to promising flashy new ventures, from "Orbital Cruises" to mining. Shockingly, Go-eun hasn't walked this back, drawing speculation on her intentions: where Kwonsham could possibly find the research and experts to make this work, or whether the company intends to succeed at all. Either way, keep an eye on your inboxes now that Kwonsham's in the market for "consultants" who can make their plans work (or *appear* to work) by any means necessary.

## CORPORATE DRONES: PRECISION DEFENSE SERVICES

POSTED BY: CORPORATE RAIDERS

Chrome beats claws, drones shrug off spells, and bullets don't care if you're Awakened, mundane, or possessed by an interdimensional nightmare. When Dis came at us with freaky magic and biological horror shows, both Federated-Boeing and Lockheed kept metahumanity flush with shiny new toys that pushed them back and saved our collective hoops. It was this very reliance on their tech that turned both companies into money printers ... and targets for disruption.

Federated-Boeing seems to have made it out unscathed under the unflinching guidance of their iron CEO, Jessica Sirianni. For decades, she's kept a steely grip on the company, weathering countless storms in the public eye while staying sharp as a monowhip,

despite pushing seventy. Even when industry wonks opine that *maybe* she should think about retirement, she has yet to entertain the idea. Not only that, but every candidate who's shown promise as a potential successor has ended up dead, disqualified, or scandalized into early retirement. Some say she's holding on out of pure spite, though rumors abound of some nefarious power keeping her afloat.

- ▶ For as long as she's held the chair, conspiracy theorists have claimed that she's a mantid in disguise, with that being both the source of her power and the reason she never settled down or had kids.
- ▶ Snopes
- ▶ What's that last part got to do with anything? Sirianni's a corporate badass who ran a mega for twenty-five fragging years, all without kids or a ring. Clearly, she must be secretly biting men's heads off.
- ▶ /dev/grrl
- ▶ Hey, I'm simply passing on paydata regarding the rumors.
- ▶ Snopes

Lockheed seemed to be sharing the same trajectory, at peak demand and boasting sky-high profit margins, only for them to come crashing down hard. When Lockheed was at its apex, having just absorbed the smaller Integrated Weapon System PLC, the Disians enacted a plan to disrupt its weapons supply chain through one of the most sophisticated corporate infiltration schemes in history, hitting not just their products, but their people.

## LOCKHEED EXECUTIVES SLAIN IN TERROR ATTACK

By Jamila Sykes, International Business Newswire

SANTA CATALINA, September 22, 2082 — A devastating assault on a private corporate retreat has claimed the lives of several top Lockheed executives in what investigators are calling a targeted attack. Although authorities have yet to identify all the victims, Lockheed CEO Michael LaRocha, Board Director Brendan Marinelli, and COO Darlene Kennedy have been confirmed among the deceased.

According to Lockheed Deputy Director of Security Maya Reyes, "This was a targeted suicide attack on some of our nation's most influential business leaders, conducted by a single, politically radicalized individual." Details of the attack remain scarce; initial reports suggest the assailant was able to bypass resort security before detonating several explosives and opening fire on the attendees.

Lockheed stock has plummeted following the report, dropping 18 percent in the first hour of trading, with shareholders and defense clients expressing concern about the company's leadership vacuum and security lapses. Meanwhile, Lockheed officials have released a statement expressing "deep sorrow" over the loss of life and affirming the company's commitment to continue operations despite the tragedy.

This is a developing story, and further updates are expected as more details emerge.



- ▶ Right, a “terrorist attack,” with none of the usual suspects taking credit, and *definitely* no purple blood behind the scenes. Bet the cleanup crew got there fast.
- ▶ Flash Banger

While the corps have spun this as a “terrorist attack,” the grisly truth is that changeling chimeras, including some former returned soldiers, slipped into Lockheed’s corporate ranks, sabotaging the company from the inside and slipping defects into its production lines. Once they had seeded doppelgängers into its top brass, they turned the executive boardroom into a slaughterhouse, massacring its top officials in one brutal strike.

The lone survivor of that attack was Komal Singh, Lockheed’s Deputy CFO, and by the time she was dragged from the wreckage, she was barely breathing. Of course, with access to the finest medical care that nuyen could buy, she not only pulled through, but the docs were able to replace the flesh that’d been clawed off with the shiniest of chrome.

- ▶ Quite literally, in fact. Rather than opt for realistic synthetics, she kept her prosthetics obvious to remind everyone who sees her of the hell she had survived, and for executives in the know, the true cost of this shadow war.
- ▶ Dr. Spin

The story goes that when the bitter and battle-hardened Singh made her debut as Lockheed’s new CEO, Sirianni finally found her successor. With Lockheed hurting for cash in the wake of the attacks, Federated-Boeing offered their old competitors an olive branch—and by that, I mean a truckload of nuyen. Once Singh and Sirianni initiated talks, the corps went from rivalry to begrudging respect faster than a buddy flick, and a new alliance was born.

## DEATH FROM ABOVE: THE RISE OF PDS

The two defense giants are squeezing together under a new umbrella, Precision Defense Systems, with each entering this alliance with enough military-grade weapons, drones, and combat-hardened personnel to subdue entire nations. And it’s not just gear they’re hawking, but experience. As it turns out, when a world-shattering threat rears its ugly head, not every mega, or even nation-state, has the luxury of a full, modern military. Precision is marketing itself not just as weapons dealers or even military contractors, but an army of bureaucrats: defense analysts with an expansive intelligence network at their fingertips that can supplement any government or company that finds themselves with a sudden, unanticipated need for firepower.

Not only does this consolidation make PDS one of the biggest AAs, but it’s now a prime target for espionage, especially from defense industry big dogs like Ares and Renraku. The new emphasis on contracting also means that former soft targets can quickly upgrade their defenses should they be sufficiently threatened. Expect to see new toys on the black market, spooks on unexpected payrolls, and a whole lot of nuyen flowing through the shadows. And you should be damn sure that your intel’s up to date before you get into any firefights, lest you go in expecting mall cops only to find yourself facing commandos.

## OPEN HAND, CLOSED FIST: MONOBE AND YAKASHIMA

POSTED BY: BAKA DABORA

You ever see two spoiled rich kids fight over the family estate while grandpa’s still kicking? That’s exactly what’s happening between **Monobe** and **Yakashima**, with MCT on the chopping block and both racing to snap up the juiciest shares.

As masters of vertical integration, Monobe has been keeping their acquisitions practical. In fact, their biggest prize wasn’t an MTC castoff but another AA. Sony Electronics, MCT’s favorite production partner in drone development, had been banking on ambitious joint projects that turned to scrap once the AAA began to implode. Monobe, long known for their top-tier software division and electronic components, wasted no time taking in Sony as a subsidiary, adding its hardware to their lineup.

We’re talking cheap commlinks, game consoles, home drones, and appliances—slotting Monobe well into the lives of the average sarariman. Not only are these devices attractively priced, since their costs are offset from the value of the data they’re collecting, but they have the latest in agent-driven firmware baked in, shoehorning in cheerful personality-software that’s all too eager to assist. As far as they’re concerned, no consumer is ever going to complain about their smart fridge being *too* smart.

Of course, their plans reach far beyond homes, as they’ve been cozying up to local governments to peddle the latest in shiny, smart-city innovations. As far as they’re concerned, good surveillance makes for good neighbors, especially when they claim this monitoring can perform “proactive risk assessments” to flag potential threats for local law enforcement.

- ▶ Just call it what it is: profiling. And if that doesn’t scare you, remember that Monobe is one of those companies that touts its adherence to “traditional Japanese values” (like xenophobia), so



nobody should be surprised when these allegedly neutral data-driven systems start flagging any gathering of visibly tasked individuals as “suspected gang activity.”

► Bull

If Monobe is playing itself up as the “Good Corp,” **Yakashima** has only embraced its ruthless reputation. **Yakashima Hiroshi** built his company into a biotech juggernaut, famous for its pharmaceuticals, agritech, and above all, hostile takeovers. But Hiroshi’s most dangerous creation might just be his own corporate dynasty, as it becomes increasingly clear that his kids inherited their old man’s ambition and bloodthirsty tactics.

After decades of corporate rule, Hiroshi finally kicked the bucket, though the exact date of his passing remains murky. The rumor being that he lingered in some kind of half-life, kept alive via his own company’s research. Before he passed, he’d explicitly named his youngest child, **Hiromi**, as his intended successor. As Yakashima’s COO, Hiromi had long been considered a frontrunner to take over, if not for her five older brothers vocally opposing her candidacy on the grounds of her being a woman (a crime in itself to some staunch traditionalists)—and even more scandalously, one who preferred the company of other women.

In the wake of the patriarch’s death, Hiromi went dark, vanishing from the grid entirely while her lawyers secured her keys to the kingdom. Her brothers, meanwhile, were rallying their fellow board members for a hostile takeover of their own.

It wasn’t until the public service that Yakashima’s new CEO resurfaced, no longer “Hiromi,” but “**Hiro**.” By availing himself of Yakashima’s genotech, Hiro disarmed his brothers’ arguments, even when he turned up to corporate functions with some beautiful woman on his arm. The few stragglers who insisted that Hiro somehow wasn’t man enough for the job soon found themselves sidelined into *oidashibeya*—or corporate exile—and tasked with overseeing empty shell divisions and left to languish in some windowless room in the least desirable stretches of Yakashima’s corporate empire.

With his CEO seat secured, Hiro immediately set about proving himself worthy of the Yakashima name, returning to the family tradition of corporate predation in a move that would undoubtedly have made his father proud. The first target in his sights was none other than **Komatsu Limited**.

Seeing the successes of its fellow AAs, Komatsu wanted to get in on the post-Disian gold rush and scrambled to snap up **Yokogawa**: an ambitious

ploy that left it dangerously overextended. Yakashima pounced on this weakness and has begun buying up Komatsu’s debts while employing more underhanded tactics to further weaken the unstable giant.

- One effective tactic that Hiro pulled from the Yakuza playbook was the use of *sokaiya*: corporate extortionists who attend a target’s shareholder meetings, disrupting them from the inside simply by being insufferable twats.
- DangerSensei
- So you’re telling me that there are people who join conversations just to be obnoxious fragsticks and shut down discussion? No! I can’t believe *anyone* would do such a thing!
- /dev/grrl

Komatsu, already hurting for cash, now finds themselves struggling to tamp down on damning intel leaks, all while an army of corporate trolls undermines confidence in their new leadership, forcing them to turn to increasingly desperate solutions to prevent a total buyout.

But Hiro wasn’t done. Seeing an opportunity to consolidate power, he set his sights on the **Nagato Corporation**, a smaller conglomerate infamous for its Yakuza affiliations. This time, however, Yakashima broke with its bloody traditions; as Hiro approached with a more strategic partnership and a subtler corporate dance, he leveraged Nagato’s need for post-war stability in exchange for a controlling interest in their operations. In doing so, he made subtle overtures to Yakuza factions that found themselves disaffected with MCT following the Disian War, contrasting Yakashima as a corporation more in-line with traditional Japanese values.

Even more shockingly, this more delicate touch seems to have paid off, and though the ink is still wet on this new partnership, Yakashima may now have a new foothold in the criminal underworld. Of course, not every Yakuza faction is on board with this tentative alliance, but Hiro doesn’t seem to be shying away from navigating this snake pit. This also leaves many Nagato corporate citizens at a crossroads as well, since Nagato had held the rare distinction of being one of the few meta-friendly Yakuza affiliates. With Yakashima firmly in the traditionalist camp, metahuman Nagato employees are watching the fallout of the acquisition with bated breath, unsure of whether they’ll have the same rights under this new arrangement. This itself has opened opportunities in the shadows, as metahuman Yaks reconsidering their choices in friends and tattoos now begin seeking quiet extractions to safer pastures.



# COMING INTO THEIR OWN: ERIKA AND TRANSYS NEURONET

POSTED BY: SPYDER

With NeoNET's ugly breakup behind them, Novatech, Erika, and Transys Neuronet have all entered new chapters of their corporate lives: reclaiming their identities, starting new hobbies, and in Novatech's case, jumping into bed with a new hookup. (More on those dirty details in Stargazer's OmniStar datadrop.) Transys and Erika, gun-shy at the prospect of entangling themselves in new conglomerates, are forging ahead with bold new solo works. Transys is neck deep in research following its involvement on Dis, while Erika stakes out new turf on this metaplane.

## TRANSYS NEURONET

Flush with cash and hungry for new development, Transys Neuronet's work in deciphering the Disian language and codes was no doubt a key element in our survival. They pulled out all the stops and rode the wave of conflict-inspired innovations while pushing boundaries that would make corps like Evo and Renraku double-take. Naturally, they've locked down their findings on ultra-secure servers with encryption that would take a full team and a city's-worth of processing power to crack. But the slightest info, fragmentary as it may be, is worth its bytes in gold.

- I've got a leak from an anonymous decker—and by anonymous, I mean the poor frag's gone completely dark—who claims they were part of *Operation: Cheshire*. Their kit included a peripheral antenna that their deck registered as a "DREAM\_DIVER.0.2.3," and that had Transys Avalon's fingerprints all over the firmware. The real mind-melter is when plugged into their hot-sim DNI, they claim they could get data off Disian memory crystals—those arcane and completely techless rocks the Disians used for data storage—like they were any mundane network.
- Plan 9
- Not *exactly*. Allegedly, interpreting the contents was less like parsing machine code and more like "watching a BTL through a kaleidoscope in reverse after seventy-five pellets of Aisa and half a saltshaker of novacoke."
- Plan 10
- Let's reel that in a bit. The safest bet is that this device was picking up residual signal or interpreting incidental data about the crystals themselves, not that they were actually interfacing with the Disian proto-Matrix.
- Glitch

- Regardless, what it does show is that Transys is deep in Noosphere research. And let's not kid ourselves, no matter how much Celedyr wants to step back from Transys, he's undoubtedly bankrolling this pet project, even if indirectly. Either way, assume any related paydata's not just nova-hot, but radioactive.
- Perri
- We realize the full weight of our work and its contribution in defeating the Disians. We also know the potential of such work, both good and ill. As such, we shall make sure it is not ... misused.
- Script Diver

## ERIKA

Finnish telecoms giant, Erika, has spent the last few years polishing its image as a model for global connectivity, seeding investments across the African continent and even teasing a full relocation to Cape Town, Azania. Fast-forward several years, and it's increasingly obvious the Finns aren't about to leave their forests anytime soon.

To this day, they still insist they're in an "exploratory phase" of an Azania move as they dot the South African landscape with expeditionary facilities, allegedly so they can build out infrastructure and conduct public outreach.

Obviously, that's not what's happening. These little embassies are more like mini spy nests, every crevice packed with high-tech gear to spy on their Evo neighbors. Under this flimsy veil of public deniability, they've cranked up the heat on their shadow war, and runners are raking in the profits from both sides, Erika is making use of these staging grounds, and Evo is sparing no expense to blow them up, both figuratively and literally.

The real story is in West Africa, where Erika is building Cote d'Ivoire (a.k.a. the Ivory Coast) into a budding communications hub. Even more shocking is that this time, it's working, at least from the inroads they've made in Abidjan—to the point they're now laying the groundwork to expand into Mali-Faso, the Asante nation, and most recently, Nigeria.

To understand what changed, look no further than Kwaku Manu, CEO of Lagos Endeavors. Known locally as *Twa Akwan*, the road builder, Manu is one of the region's biggest power-players. He hails from the Asante Nation, and while his company deals in "credit" on paper, he actually manages a sprawling web of goods, favors, and microfinance services that stretches from Dakar to Nigeria, forming a network colloquially called the "New Silk Road."

- Lagosians are famously wary of outsiders, so the fact that Manu, a non-local, made inroads there is no small feat. In fact, that's why his company is called "Lagos Endeavors," not because they're headquartered there, but because it's the crown jewel in his business empire.
- Am-Mut



Lagos Endeavors spent years as little more than an unknown MCT subsidiary, but now that Erika's plucked them out of MCT's fire sales, that dynamic is set to change. Thanks to an internal email that's been making the rounds, we can hear the story from Manu himself.

## INTERNAL MEMO #43551

by K. Manu, CEO Lagos Endeavors

<<<DATE REDACTED>>>

By now, you've undoubtedly heard rumors of our recent acquisition, and since I respect both your time and intelligence, I'll omit any managerial pleasantries and cut to the point.

As it happens, I just came out of a very productive conversation with our new boss, Anders Malmstein. (Since some of you are undoubtedly curious, he's aged like his Finlandia Vodka—doesn't look a day over a hundred.) He had insisted on conducting this meeting in person, undoubtedly as some show of his commitment. Thankfully, he didn't show up in kente cloth, though he did start our conversation in Twi, undoubtedly to show he'd done his research. I stopped him there. The fact he had invested in us, a globally unknown "credit" firm, was proof enough.

After all, cities like ours are where foreign ambitions come to die. Every day, some outsider rolls in, touting grand plans to uplift our underserved communities and promising to build our economy into the next "Silicon Savannah." They pour cash into our streets, assuming they can tame our "feral cities" and win over our grateful populace with the power of pure nuyen. And time after time, they're shocked when their investments vanish, slipping into a black hole of local pockets and unfinished projects.

Even MCT wrote us off as a turnkey operation, a tool to access West Africa's telesma markets and mineral deposits. Sure, we delivered, but let's not pretend they ever grasped our true capabilities.

Certainly, Erika will be profiting off of the same mines and labor, but from the way Malmstein looks at our coasts, it's clear he sees something far deeper than comm networks and fuel lines. He sees freedom—freedom from corporate oversight, vast stretches of land untouched by metahuman hands, and a chance to build something that's never been tried before.

But he knows he needs us to do it. That's why he kept me on as our CEO, and why none of you will be losing your jobs. Still, have no doubt that we'll be working very closely in the coming months. After all, he's looking toward his legacy. Let's help him shape it.

Even with Manu speaking around the specifics, Erika clearly didn't come to town to build schools and lay cable. They're following the techno-colonialist playbook, and it's only a matter of time before they get right to exploiting civilians, strip-mining the region, and using said mining ops for disappearing undesirables—though local reports suggest this is itself a front for something more sinister.

While Erika's work in Africa is in its fledgling stages, it still requires infrastructure: communities and utilities, to house local employees and make it happen. Images and blueprints from these new sites suggest they're not just setting up arcologies or homes. The layouts are closer to prisons or hospitals, complete with life support systems, and hot-sim-ready hard-wired networks. And *no*, nobody thinks they're using metahumans as *batteries*. If anything, the likely answer is more unsettling in just how mundane it is: in the ultimate rejection of work-life balance, they're trying to keep employees jacked in 24/7, minimizing profit hours lost to trivialities like sleep. And should these tests pan out, there's no doubt these spartan habitats will start turning up in even less hospitable locations.

- ▶ Because as long as their minds are in hot-sim, it doesn't matter what you do with their bodies. Now where have we heard that logic before?
- ▶ Borderline

Speaking of inhospitable locations, between Erika's outposts turning up a little too close to their bordering neighbors, and their new subsidiary's skill in moving goods through the area, some suspect that Erika's looking to use West Africa as a backdoor to reach the plugged-in ghouls in Asamando. Of course, any such business plan was likely proposed *before* Asamando's population was decimated by the un-Awakening, and it's anyone's guess if and how Erika will make themselves helpful neighbors in the nation's recovery.

Regardless of whatever Erika's cooking up, if you're running ops on that side of the continent, expect to cross paths with Lagos Endeavors eventually. Every fixer worth their nuyen has a line to Manu, or his second in command, the Vodun priestess Bouche Dorée. Stick around long enough and you'll likely meet Manu himself—he does like to know who he's working with. Just don't take his charms or his unflappable demeanor for granted. Piss him off, and you won't just find an angry corp coming after you, but the entire city.

## CENTURY DYNAMICS

POSTED BY: DR. SPIN

Universal Omnitech is dead. Put the name in the same box as Yamatetsu, Fuchi Industrial Electronics, Blue Ribbon Sports, and for you real classicists, the Marafuku Company. It died an elegant death for many of the same reasons as the aforementioned corporations. In the end, it all came down to rebranding: shining a spotlight on what the company decided it wanted to be, and then relaunching itself into the world in a fevered attempt to shape new perceptions and, hopefully, transcend the atmospheric barrier between AA and AAA.



## CENTURY DYNAMICS

**Corporate Slogan:** “Your Tomorrow Starts Today”

**Corporate Status:** AA, Public Corporation

**World Headquarters:** Vancouver, Salish-Shidhe

**President/CEO:** Thomas Roxborough

**Major Shareholders:**

Thomas Roxborough (41%)

Jonathan Blake (15%)

Miles Lanier (9%)

Minor Shareholders (15%)

Corporations don’t really change. They grow, they shrink, they might sell off parts here and there. They may rebrand at the top level, and some of those changes trickle down to the consumers in the form of an oft-overlooked secondary symbol in the corner of the packaging of the product you actually buy. The Centurion Laser Crescent Axe is still going to be the Centurion Laser Crescent Axe, no matter what the company that owns the manufacturer calls itself. These changes are superficial; a fresh coat of paint thrown up on the same plaster walls. Except, that isn’t what is happening here. Century Dynamics is attempting to change at the molecular level. They are shifting from the traditional *keiretsu* style of multiple companies collaborating under a unifying name, to a more fully integrated, western structure reminiscent of early century Ares Macrotechnology.

Like Ares, rebranding is the key throughline in everything this group is doing. They want the name UO to disappear. They want the name Centurion to disappear. Newly acquired corporations like Winter Systems and Ipiissimus were also quietly renamed and folded into the divisional structures of this new entity. The names are being overwritten everywhere it’s possible. Uniforms are being changed to represent CD over everything else. Now it’s the Centurion Series Laser Crescent Axe, brought to you by Century Dynamics with the CD symbol prominently emblazoned on each new weapon as the only symbol.

This is all part of what is being touted as the *2100 Doctrine*. Century Dynamics is branding itself as a single-source provider of all the items and services a person could need from birth to death under one name, under one roof, and at a price that represents the baseline for mass market affordability. The only hole in this logistical chain is transport—a problem that worsened when Maersk, a company that already handled a great deal of UO distribution, moved closer to a merger with OmniStar. Century Dynamics hasn’t stopped their efforts to obtain a reliable worldwide shipping arm, but they’ve pivoted dramatically. As of now, all CD’s global shipping is handled by Wuxing. That ridiculously large contract has helped Wuxing from plunging too

far into the red amid concerns of unrest during the “so-called” Disian incursion.

- › It happened. How can you sit there like it didn’t?
- › Sunshine
- › I’m not pretending it didn’t happen. I am acknowledging the massive media spin taking place that ensures nobody living knows that it did.
- › Dr. Spin

## HOW IT CAME TO PASS

Lord Thomas Roxborough spent the last few decades floating in space as an amorphous blob living in a vat of nutrients designed to maintain what was left of his chemical bonds. Then one day, he showed up at a UO press conference looking like an extremely fit fifty-year-old version of himself. Nobody believed it was him at first. Few people understand *how* it’s him, but a dozen runners or more have posted over the years about strange high-nuyen runs traced back to Biogene and RIVERS Applied Mimetics. Regardless of how it happened, he was soon spotted on the Grand Tour living life *in extremis*. Hardly a day went by without a headline featuring his latest debauchery and triggering more stock instability. When Roxy was in the box, you could at least predict what he was capable of. The person who emerged from that decades-old prison seemed to be determined to live life to the fullest—stock price be damned.

- › There were people in UO, CEO Grimes included, who were genuinely frustrated by his behavior. A lot of money was made cleaning up Roxy’s little messes. Given the distasteful nature of what made it to the streams, I can only imagine what they managed to keep hidden.
- › KAM

When the tour passed through Paris, he attended a highly secretive auction. I’ve verified this with multiple runner crews independently hired to locate and observe the auction. That night, Roxborough purchased something called the Quorum Network for the kind of money it takes to fund a national corporation. Instead of being given the “keys” to his prize on site, he was transported to another location where Miles Lanier and Jonathan Blake were waiting with the ownership codes for the Quorum Network, and a proposal. I cannot say what happened at that meeting. I know that he met with Lanier and Blake several times over the following month—I also know that at least one of those meetings included Moag Wu.

Just a few months later, Roxborough called another press conference. He applauded the twenty-year tenure of Hamilton Grimes as CEO and announced that Grimes would be transition-



ing to a much-deserved retirement. Roxborough himself was taking back the reins. The crowd was already gasping in surprise when he dropped the other shoe: UO would be merging with Jonathan Blake's corporation and Miles Lanier would be joining them as an investor and director of Security. The company would be renamed Century Dynamics as chosen by the outgoing CEO and his daughter, who was then brought on to the stage and announced as the director of the newly formed Interactive Media Division, and de facto face of the corporation.

The Centurion merger came as a huge surprise. On the one hand, it was hard to fathom that Blake would choose to work for someone other than himself. After fleeing S-K, he invested heavily into Wuxing only to quickly sell his stake in that company upon realizing they wanted his money but not his opinions. Then, there was the fact that his efficacy as a corporate leader was in question. Jonathan Blake's chimera of a corporation continued to change names every few years, like BackRub, to Alphabet, to CapitalG from the old world, using each change to restructure its ever-growing portfolio of acquisitions.

- The constant renaming of Centurion looked sloppy from an outside perspective and argued for Blake's inability to lead a corporation. What corporate insiders came to realize, however, was the constant shifting was simply a crude way of triggering a public restructuring. In essence, with each new acquisition and resulting name change, Blake reset the audit clock on his corporation again and again in order to allow it to constantly challenge for the AA rating he so desperately wanted but never achieved.
- OrkCEO
- The merger announcement came on the heels of a massive string of failures by Lone Star Security Services to protect UO sites. At the time, Lone Star held contracts covering 80 percent of UO facilities. Those facilities saw theft and material loss rates skyrocket 30 percent, creating a PR disaster for the firm. Oddly, the 20 percent of the company guarded by Centurion and Winter Systems respectively saw a dip in crime rates over the same span.
- Stargazer

Lanier's addition to the team was less surprising. Following his recovery from CFD, the corporate security man had been looking for a way to carry out his personal agenda. The two percent of a AAA-rated corporation he'd sold left him flush with cash and nowhere to spend it. By joining with Roxborough and Blake, he'd essentially been handed the keys to a security apparatus that included two rising security corporations in Centurion and Winter Systems and allowed the former soldier to combine them into something entirely his own.

- That's not terrifying at all. In fact, I suspect we should all be feeling rather at ease as shadowrunners now that Lanier's back in control of his mind and back in the security game.
- Plan 9
- I am willing to bet that Lanier thinks something is coming. Ever since being cured of CFD in the late '70s, Lanier has been on a mission. He is an S-Level conspiracy theorist, just like you, and now he has the tools to search for all the things he worries about late at night. He did it with the various corporate monad projects. He did it again, battling the Disians from the cover of darkness and gathering allies to help his cause. What's next—what he's preparing for—is anyone's guess.
- Snopes

## WHERE THINGS ARE HEADED

The merger triggered aggressive expansion within the corporation, thanks in part to how it is being restructured. While the World Headquarters remains located in Vancouver, each division also has its own headquarters. These are located in different cities around the world. Some were repurposed—the Ingersoll and Berkley Tower in Seattle is now known as the Century Dynamics Agricultural Tower. Some divisional headquarters are currently under construction, such as CD's Financial Services HQ under construction in Tokyo. These are not the only changes we've seen. The corporation is being rebuilt on the idea of controlling the entire supply chain, from raw materials to delivery of goods. That means acquiring corporations that fill the holes that presently exist within their supply chain. You will notice a few familiar names from the MCT selloff.

- That's the Jonathan Blake special again. It is what he excelled at during his tenure with S-K. He has a preternatural sense for when a corporation is about to get into a bit of trouble, then he tugs on the right strings to take advantage.
- Kay St. Irregular
- Quite a bit of the time, he's part of the reason they got in trouble in the first place. A myriad of well-timed shadowruns can destabilize a corporation that isn't prepared for the conflict.
- DangerSensei

CD is not done collecting the pieces to this slowly forming puzzle. Blake has taken to picking very public fights with Brackhaven Investments, leveraging the power of the Financial Services arm in what is looking like a budding shadow war. Blake has always wanted Brackhaven Investments as part of his empire. What is interesting is how quickly Roxborough, and especially Lanier, were willing to go along with it.



## ACQUISITIONS AND RESTRUCTURING: CENTURY DYNAMICS

With CD reorganizing and renaming all its sub-corporations into divisions, it may be hard to track where your favorite Mr. or Ms. Johnson ended up. Here's what we know about the key corporations that were absorbed, and where their personnel and services were placed in the chain.

### PROTECTORATE DIVISION ACQUISITIONS

Artemis Industries, Centurion Industries, Centurion Military Systems, Centurion Security, Ironmongers Incorporated, Winter Systems

### FINANCIAL SERVICES ACQUISITIONS

American Family Financial (MCT), Centurion Financial, Bon Vivant Finance (MCT), Centurion Service Group

### ARCANE TECHNOLOGIES ACQUISITIONS

Ipissiumus (MCT), Centurion Applied Magicks

### HEAVY INDUSTRIES ACQUISITIONS

DeBeers, Zen-Marsh Chemicals (MCT), Wiremasters Inc.

### AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGIES ACQUISITIONS

Ingersoll and Berkeley, Universal Foods, American Seeds, AMGen-Gilead, Universal Agritech, Organostyle

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACQUISITIONS

Sonata Data Processing

### MEDICAL ACQUISITIONS

Pacific Cybernetics Incorporated, Blackthorne Medical, Centurion Medical Transports, Guangzhou Biotechnologies, Henderson Genetics, Paladin Medical Technologies, Reactive Meditech, Universal Pharmaceuticals

### INTERACTIVE MEDIA ACQUISITIONS

AA Entertainment (Wuxing), American Art and Culture (MCT), Canadian Art and Culture (MCT), Kelmar Technologies, NanoChic, Tropicaliente Fashion, Universal Fabrics

### MATRIX TECHNOLOGIES ACQUISITIONS

Black Lotus (MCT), Brainwave Inc. (MCT)

### EXPERIMENTAL SCIENCES ACQUISITIONS

Riveros Applied Mimetics, Biogene, BioGenesis Unlimited, Xuanlong Arcane Research (Wuxing)

- The stories coming out about Brackhaven Investment's quiet funding of Disian operatives likely added to the desire to gain control of a wildcard and prevent further threats.
- Winterhawk
- I find your belief in corporate altruism disturbing.
- OrkCEO

## NOTABLE DIVISIONS

Instead of focusing on the people at the top you'll never meet, I'd rather offer a sense of how the corp is laid out, who is hiring you, and who is trying to kill you. All the divisions and the renaming from the top down are part of a design to establish a vertical chain. They view this as the first step to becoming a AAA-rated mega on par with Horizon and Saeder-Krupp. There are twelve divisions within Century Dynamics, but some are more notable than others. Here are a few you can expect to be working for (or against) in the near future.

### PROTECTIVE DIRECTORATE (CDPD)

**Director:** Miles Lanier

**Division Profile:** Corporate Security, Military (weaponized) Med-Tech, Military Security, Military Technology, Personal Security, Public Policing

In addition to taking over the many policing and para-military contracts from the corporations

it absorbed, the CDPD acts as the main security apparatus for Century Dynamics. The Directorate handles internal and external security, separating the two through an organizational structure Lanier personally designed. All military research and hardware are channeled through this division; however, that doesn't mean the work you get from Lanier's division is going to be hardcore military. The director also runs his personal projects through the division, largely through his special projects liaison, Miranda King, or one of her proxies.

### FINANCIAL SERVICES

**Director:** Jonathan Blake

**Division Profile:** Banking, Corporate Finance, Mergers and Acquisitions, Personal Finance

It's worth noting that PacRim, the fourth-largest bank in the world, is not listed as part of Century Dynamics. Most, if not all, the AA-and-below-rated Japanacorp conduct their business through PacRim. By law, only corporations originating in Japan can have voting rights in the PacRim Bank. Roxborough stubbornly refused to move the HQ to Japan, and thus has next to no power over the bank he owns. So, it's not part of the CD organizational structure but remains a partner to the corporation. Even without that official linkage, the business of money is among the largest operational areas in the CD portfolio. The company has financial dealings



with everyone, from nations to rival corporations. If you find yourself working for this branch, you can expect a heavy workload of espionage, surveillance, sabotage, and even wetwork jobs. The finance division is built around the concept of creating leverage, whether to trigger an acquisition, or something minor, such as shifting interest rates a percentage point in a more advantageous direction.

The Financial Services division underscores the strangeness of this new corporate structure. For example, Truman Technologies is targeted by both the Interactive Media division and the Matrix Technologies division. Yet, the two are going about things very differently. Grimes-Banerjee has openly met with Melissa Truman and Jonathan Blake to discuss possibilities of a merger. Truman's media presence in France, India, and Africa has CD interested, while their Matrix services could effectively double what CD is able to offer now. Both Blake and Matrix Technologies Director Mekhi Henry, however, tend to favor the stick over the carrot, so expect trouble in Chicago if Truman doesn't agree to being assimilated.

- ▶ Any truth to the rumors that Mekhi Henry is a monad?
- ▶ Baka Dabora
- ▶ There are monads working for their Matrix division, but Director Henry is not one of them. He isn't even a hacker. He's a former Evo acquisitions VP, which argues that this division is leaning heavily into expansion.
- ▶ Plan 10
- ▶ Blake's directorship is about as ceremonial as his Bellevue mayorship. His time and energy are devoted to running the Mergers and Acquisitions Department, and his status as director means he can operate with impunity. The actual business of managing money is conducted by Emi Tanaka, former COO of PacRim and now chief operations officer of the division. Tanaka is a Japanese dwarf whose family is known throughout the rim as being "old money." She is well liked and equally well connected within the banking community, which is part of the reason she continues to be the face of the division.
- ▶ OrkCEO

## HEAVY INDUSTRY

**Director:** Dr. Dola Adesina

**Division Profile:** Chemicals, Mining, Real Estate, Industrial Production

Adesina is a no-nonsense geological engineer who rose through the ranks of DeBeers with a focus on developing more efficient mining strategies. Now in the big chair, he's adapting their strategies throughout the division. If you're working for Heavy Industry, you're likely to deal with extraction work. Adesina's chief priority is reorganization. They've seen the way other corporations are run, recognize the

people who are best suited to doing the job the way they want, and have standing orders to see those individuals folded into the corporation.

- ▶ Prior to the merger, a shell corp started buying up land near Kanaga in the Congo Tribal Lands. I was hired to dig up information on the group, and I traced them back to an office in Lagos. That should have been the end of it, but the client asked me to stay on and run overwatch for a team of runners she was directing to hit the location. It didn't go well. I got into the local system easy as pie, but once the runners hit the facility, things changed. It must've been some kind of trap, but fuck me if I know how. One minute the system is quiet, the next I'm picking up Black IC and a half dozen hackers closing in on me. I got out of there, but the runners weren't so lucky. After, I did some additional background checks, trying to figure out who got the drop on me and how. Turns out, the shell company and the high-end Matrix security were UO. I don't know why they wanted that much land in the middle of nowhere Africa, but they have it.
- ▶ Clockwork

## MEDICAL

**Director:** Dr. Wendy Henderson

**Division Profile:** Armed Medical Response, Consumer Healthcare, Medical Technologies, Pharmaceutical and Biopharmaceutical Research

Already a cornerstone of the company, this division merges cybernetics, nanotech, and red biotech with medical response and patient care. The severing of ties with OmniStar has led the division to institute its own armed medical response division. Notably, this is the only division outside the CDPD that maintains an independent armed response force. Expansion of the division is predicated on understanding the success of its competitors. As a result, lots of espionage and sabotage jobs have gone out against DocWagon and CrashCart.

- ▶ Bringing all the medical operations under one wing allowed them to "lose" medical facilities and personnel. Some of those were quietly shifted to the Experimental Sciences divisions, while several others remained operational but just off-book. This gave the company a large network of black-site clinics across the world, similar to what Aztechnology was able to do with Executive Body Enhancements.
- ▶ Kia

## OMNISTAR

POSTED BY: STARGAZER

This opportunity finally provided a chance to give this newcomer a solid intro, knock down some of the poor information out there, and give the deep, dark, insider info on how this came about.



OmniStar was obviously a big idea to start with and one that most didn't think would or should work, but in the end, only two things truly matter to the corporations of the world: the bottom line and power. When the latter is threatened (or offered), corps do some interesting things, especially when the former has a lot to gain from these offers. Even more so when all of it is threatened in a way none of them could completely grasp.

On the surface, OmniStar came together back in 2078 as three well-known AAs looked to hold tight to their status as the latest megacorporate audit loomed. There was more behind the scenes than just status protection, but none of that was going to convince boards and stockholders to approve the mergers. That makes the origins of OmniStar two separate stories. One known to all, and one known to a few. But I'm counted among the few, and now the members of JackPoint will also join those rarified ranks because it's important to know what is really going on here.

I'll cover the public story first. Malcolm Grant (CEO of Manadyne) and Anderson Gentry (former CEO of DocWagon) ended up at the same table at a fundraiser hosted by the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research (DIMR). The pair got to chatting and hit it off better than one would expect. Several hours of cocktails and tall tales later, and the pair started talking seriously about the megacorporate audit and the problems they'd both been having since its announcement. According to the legend, they both made the same "we should join forces" joke at the same time. Also at the table, though not as friendly, was James Wilson (board chair at Lone Star). He made an off-handed comment, something like, "Well hell, we should all just come together." The joke got real serious, real fast. Add more booze, a penthouse suite in Dee-Cee, and several more hours of more serious talks, and the trio had an idea. Put together an umbrella corp to join up under so they could merge assets and protect their rankings, then see if anyone else wanted in on the party.

The trio took the idea back to their investors and execs with a heavy focus on keeping their ranking, not getting bought or merged in something hostile, and eventually pushing for a third A. Not everyone was on board, but enough pieces came together to make it happen. They also went to Aegis Cognito early on, but Spinrad snagged the info corp, and in the process put OmniStar in the crosshairs of the AAAs. This left them to focus on the three of them coming together under the new umbrella.

OmniStar was born.

There's more to the public story after this, but first I think you all deserve the truth—it's so much stranger.

Since I'm here to be your resource on the new Star, I'm going to set the record straight. Better to

know the truth than to have it come out as something slanderous, or for the conspiracy theories to continue in the shadows. We're about knowledge here. We know there are conspiracies because we often play a part in them.

In 2078, the same folks above—Gentry, Wilson, and Grant—were all quietly approached at that fundraiser by Faolain O'Ryan, a mystic adept following shark—he was better known as K'air'k on the streets. O'Ryan was present as a representative of the DIMR, but it was a sham cover for a run. He was really there as a representative of multiple parties, one being the Seers' Guild, the other we'll mention in a bit, and he was sent to meet with these three—they didn't all end up at the same table by accident.

There was no joking or joviality at all since these three didn't like being at a table together. After waiting until the dinner was done and the speeches were almost complete, O'Ryan revealed his true purpose and invited the trio to a secure penthouse in the hotel. Obviously, they weren't soft targets and O'Ryan was forced to offer the first of the Seers' Guild secrets he had for them. They learned this meeting wasn't being arranged solely at the behest of the Seers' Guild; instead, the endeavor was actually funded by Reina del Mar, the great sea dragon.

Once they were in the penthouse, O'Ryan got down to business and presented the idea of a merger. A necessary merger. He explained that with the aid of a small collection of Sixth World Tarot cards, a diviner had seen a future that needed OmniStar. As you can guess, the trio scoffed at this notion. O'Ryan had expected their reaction and to prove the power of their foretelling, he revealed that the same diviner also painted an art series that predicted a series of seemingly unpredictable events that would occur in the coming week. O'Ryan requested that they meet again the next week to discuss whether the divinations had any merit.

While they all laughed at him that night, they all showed up at the meeting one week later because every prediction in the art series had come to pass, down to the minute—including the eruption of Soufrière on Montserrat in the Carib League. Grant, with his deep respect and understanding of magic, was convinced right away. Gentry was intrigued but not quite convinced because he knew the great sea dragon was involved in this, and making a volcano erupt didn't seem beyond draconian magic. Wilson called bulldrek, but the seeds of curiosity were planted and there was no way he wasn't at least a little invested in these crazy events.

O'Ryan was unfazed as he asked the three executives to open the envelopes they had each been given for safekeeping at the end of the previous meeting. They all complied, and they all found the same image. Inside was a photograph of a painting depicting everyone in the room, where they stood,



what they wore, and even their position and posture at that exact moment. It wasn't perfectly detailed, as it had been quickly painted a week earlier, but it was enough to clip skepticism and at least bring this trio to the table.

O'Ryan offered another week, and while Grant and Gentry needed no more convincing, Wilson had a question he wanted answered before he would agree.

Who made the paintings?

O'Ryan agreed to reveal that after the deals were made so as to protect the diviner. She was already planning to become part of the OmniStar team, but without a deal, O'Ryan wasn't willing to reveal her identity. That proved to be enough for Wilson, and he was on board. It wasn't time to pop the champagne just yet since the trio didn't represent all the power in their respective corps, but the groundwork was set.

Now that the handshakes were made, O'Ryan introduced Evelyn Athwater, who was waiting in the wings for their collective *yes* before revealing herself. She would act as the director of OmniStar's formation, and unlike O'Ryan, Athwater was a corporate shark. She'd come up through the Mississippi Maneuver—Reina del Mar's effort to gain control of the Mississippi through hundreds of shell corps.

Since those momentous events, the Seer's Guild has stepped back, but the diviner who made the paintings has become part of OmniStar. Her name is Emily Llanfrechfa, daughter of Lord Geraint Llanfrechfa of Wales. She first gained attention (and some notoriety) several years back, when the infamous Sixth World Tarot began showing up in its myriad of mysterious ways. About that same time, she also became a target of multiple groups when some of her art pieces began predicting future events.

Amid all this, her father struggled to provide a normal life for her despite her unique abilities and status. Details pertaining to this are still sketchy, but OmniStar reps (more specifically Manadyne) approached Lord Geraint with an offer to become a patron of her artwork. In addition to providing protection for his daughter, they continue to support her work while also gaining direct access to her divinations. And you can be sure they're being delivered or displayed to Reina del Mar as soon as they're completed and secured away. Once Athwater was introduced, she went back to the regular world of corporate politicking and power brokering, something for which she had a serious affinity.

- ▶ Llanfrechfa's artwork is a regular target for jobs, but very little intel is leaked on where it's stored. Things flare up every time one is spotted.
- ▶ Axis Mundi

So there you have it. The deep dark truth behind OmniStar is that another dragon is playing

the corporate game. It's been pointed out before, and should be apparent with the way OmniStar operates, but Reinadelmar is not Lofwyr or Celeldyr. She's not that claws-on.

It's here I need to admit I didn't dig further. The affairs of dragons are beyond my scope of investigation. Her involvement is not overt and is definitely not public knowledge. Much like the mystical start of this rising mega, the truth of her involvement has stayed overshadowed by their growth, innovation, and positive impacts around the globe.

I only place it here, in the hands of the shadows because we are wary and close followers of the street adages, and for good reason. While many here have already made deals with this draconian entity, understanding this is an opportunity for change, wariness is still wise.

Mystical history revealed, let's look at what else transpired to make this union complete, and what has happened since. After that, we can get to taking a look at what's in the pipeline.

- ▶ Please tell me people aren't taking this seriously. Plan 9, 10, Snopes, please tell me someone has *something* to debunk this utter drek.
- ▶ Flash Banger
- ▶ It's worth looking into, but deals have been made under stranger circumstances, and I haven't heard anything thus far to debunk this. That said, I'm hearing a lot more rumors regarding prophecies of late, but that's not my forte.
- ▶ Snopes
- ▶ One cycle has ended, another has begun.
- ▶ Many-Names

Before the final digital ink of their first audit was dry, OmniStar was not just Lone Star, Manadyne, and DocWagon. I had mentioned their efforts with Aegis Cognito earlier, along with the failure to pull them in that got them a bit of AAA heat, but they were able to get a few A-rated corps to join the fold. Those corps, along with the bulk of Reina del Mar's North American holdings (especially those along the Mississippi), were taken under their corporate wings.

It was a great start. And once they were past the audit and out of the spotlight, more alliances were seeded. Athwater talked to Cara Villiers at Novatech, and though she was already engaging elsewhere, initial agreements were put into place, and Villiers offered to come back to the table when her other concerns were handled. In a rather interesting turn, Athwater approached Maersk and Century Dynamics. The former was especially unexpected, considering Reina del Mar's views on the logistics magnate. Some courting of Horizon has also occurred, but all those endeavors are longer stories I'll separate out for later.



Since the inception of the umbrella mega, its subsidiaries have grown well past expectations. New contracts, expanded territories, corporate cross-training, and other intercorporate cooperation bulked up OmniStar's child corporations while showing new potential merger targets what kind of benefits would come beneath the OmniStar umbrella.

Speaking of that umbrella, let me clear up a couple things about OmniStar's operations. The subsidiaries of OmniStar don't operate under its name. In fact, very few things have their name on it—that's part of the OmniStar model. Brands and corporate identities are left independent. Members don't become OmniStar brands, they retain a large amount of independence, and branding anything as OmniStar is limited to intercorporate team projects, like the OmniStar Valkyrie II and IV, which were developed by a team of shared DocWagon and Lone Star personnel.

In fact, while all of us here talk about OmniStar as an up-and-coming mega, the average Joe Citizen wouldn't know OmniStar from Universal Omnitech or any other corp with "omni" or "star" in the name. They aren't trying to be flashy, but here in the shadows it's often very important to know who might be pulling the strings.

Big point number two: OmniStar doesn't pull a whole lot of jobs directly. They haven't been big into extractions (willing or not) to fill their corporate ranks because they're trying to build a positive and cooperative internal environment. That doesn't mean their corps aren't pulling all sorts of shady deals and it doesn't mean OmniStar doesn't touch shadow work, it just means their jobs lean more heavily on the old "white hat" cliché side of the job spectrum.

- › Easy on the fanboy naïveté. Every mega has dirty secrets, especially one you've already admitted is backed by a dragon.
- › DangerSensei
- › I'm only one fixer in a big world, but I've noticed a significant uptick in jobs for all these corps that have minimal collateral and unnecessary damage clauses.
- › Cool Hand Duke

The last big points I want to raise about OmniStar before looking ahead are the importance of internal cooperation between subsidiaries and the cultural changes they are promoting across the board. I was able to talk a little bit about Lone Star over in the *Tarnished Star* drop, but it just scratched the surface. Lone Star is going through a huge internal shake-up. They're growing incredibly fast, and OmniStar has had the ability to influence their hiring. They really are bringing in some more forward thinkers and fewer of the jackboot thugs. Internal affairs divisions are getting a lot of budget bumps and resources to weed out problems, and

Manadyne is sharing scads of mindbenders to dig past surface-level sociopaths and see what's really going on behind the scenes in their brains.

- › They're mindbending their own? That's a mixed bag. Sure, they may look like they're weeding out the bad apples, but they could just be sorting them into one cart. It's like a sped-up version of Ares moving folks from K-E to Hard Corps.
- › DangerSensei
- › On a more positive note. I've got connections in prisons all over the world, and the Lone Star Penal operations are getting some interesting programs. A definite focus on rehabilitation over punishment and a lot of quiet releases done via shadow ops with a lot of internal help. Inmates are worked with, shown they're better on the streets doing Lone Star's (OmniStar's) work, then they get a psych evaluation and a physical workup that includes blood, DNA, and a ritual sample before they're extracted by a runner team looking like a prison transport. Arrival at the next facility is scrubbed, and the runners are released back into society.
- › Ma'Fan
- › These releases come with a few other perks and problems. They hand you a new corporate SIN for OmniStar that they ask you to use for legitimate settling. Then they send you to a local forger to get you a phony SIN and remind you they have your ritual samples—and while you are free to operate independently, they would prefer you did not operate in any way that works against the interests of OmniStar and its subsidiaries.
- › Stone
- › At least two runners, Ithaka and Kansas, got released and immediately took up as corporate runners. They tucked in close to the parent corp and now they operate from the inside. Not everyone is willing to sign their souls away, but to each their own.
- › Turbo Bunny
- › They can change the uniform and put out a few memos, but none of that is going to change the Star. Don't forget their job is to go after people like us. The rest is marketing.
- › Borderline

Over at DocWagon, changes are being made to how they handle responses. While contracts are still prioritized by service level, on-the-spot contracts are being broadcast for sale, and gratis triage and aid services are getting delivered on the regular. DW teams are rolling out with two or three extra rookie EMTs to handle this stuff. It gets them training on the street, as well as some good PR for the corp. Alongside that, the DocWagon Health Services division is opening up emergency clinics and public health service offices on the edge of Z-zones around the globe.

- › Knowing what we know about the sea dragon connection, the fact that a lot of these Z-zone clinics are getting built in metros with port access can't be a coincidence.
- › KidCode





- Have you ever studied anthropology? Almost every major metro on the planet has port access, whether it's by the seaside or rivers. It's kind of necessary for human civilization. Now with that said, it is interesting how some recent contracts between OmniStar and Spin-Global are growing, and connections to the Arabian Caliphate (a place with very few water resources) and Gabrielle Spinrad are proving to be more than rumor.
- Kia
- Let's just make sure this isn't another Paladin Health services thing. Megacorps are still beholden to the bottom line, and this kind of "free" service is usually coming with data gathering or illegal research being performed.
- Butch

OmniStar also brings the shared operations of their subsidiaries together. Lone Star is the security corp for all other OmniStar subsidiaries. DocWagon contracts are provided to all OmniStar citizens and employees. Manadyne shares arcane services with their subsidiary siblings. All of this is part of OmniStar keeping their subsidiary brands at the forefront, and their position as umbrella coordinator and asset conglomerate out of the public eye.

Since the initial creation of the corp, several more mergers have been discussed and failed, though a few have come to fruition and a handful more are in the works. Since I already covered the basic history, I'll break the rest of these up into

separate little snippets covering recent history and the exciting future.

- And not one mention of how Lone Star and DocWagon are just about at each other's throats on the streets. Because the fanboy here doesn't want to say it, I will. It was mentioned earlier in the download (hilarious by the way), but there's become a bit of a jurisdictional pissing contest between the two regarding DW clients who are being pursued by the tin stars. The Docs think their contracts come first and that patient care is a priority, while the cowboys think that "justice" takes precedence. I've heard more than a few times about Star patrols having an Aztlan Standoff with a DocWagon HTR team and shots were almost fired. Can't wait until this blows up in OmniStar's face.
- Borderline
- Glad I have stocks in CrashCart.
- Clockwork

## OPERATIONS

As an umbrella covering and guiding the corps within, OmniStar has a different internal setup. There is still a CEO position, though it is currently held by Athwater as an interim officer. According to sources, the permanent CEO spot is being held to offer as a boon for another incoming corp. Based on rumors and from what I've seen, it will likely be offered to the head of the first AAA to join the team.



The powers that currently run the show are the Guidance Board, Advisory Council, and Fellowship. The Guidance Board consists of the CEOs of all AA corps that come into the conglomerate—it's led by the chairman position, and currently filled by Cara Villiers. The Advisory Council consists of the CEOs of the A-rated corps in the conglomerate, and while there is a chairman position, it's currently vacant since the A-rated corp pool is small. Below that is the Fellowship, consisting of representatives from all non-rated corps in the conglomerate. When major moves or decisions are going to be made, all three groups come together to vote. Each group has a single vote, though Athwater has veto rights since she currently represents the major power behind the corp.

- Big moves by DocWagon came on just after Novatech joined the fold, as they appointed a new CEO, Atlas. Yes, the AI. In hopes of staying relevant with the other major players within the OmniStar family, DocWagon thought it needed a little something special in their corner.
- CorpKid
- The Guidance Board is an interesting lot. If they can all work together, they can cover some serious growth potential. That's a big IF. Egos and individual agendas will likely get in the way, even if the public façade remains playing all nicey-nice.
- Netcat

There hasn't been a lot of disagreement or work to make trouble for other members as of yet, but it will come. Right now, most of the votes are about whether to allow other corps in. There's a lot of chatter among them about the upcoming offers to Colt, Maersk, and CD. Bad blood in the mix might mean all the deals they've put out to them may go unrewarded when the *no* votes start rolling in.

## AEGIS INTERRUPTIS

This one is short. The failure of the initial Aegis Cognito merger was a harsh setback. Having Spinrad Global get their hands on the infocorp was a major initial blow that stalled the growth of OmniStar and pushed them into the crosshairs of the other AAAs. It also prevented them from gaining a major resource. I personally think it helped them stay focused on the internal growth, but I'm sure there's a reason the force behind OmniStar wanted the infocorp.

Now, there are rumors of talks between Athwater and Spinrad. Whether these are talks about a potential merger since Spinrad will eventually lose access to a golden ticket that provides them with their spot in the AAAs, or maybe a deal to move Aegis, no clear answer has emerged. As much as I know about OmniStar, I don't know much more about this and I haven't dug in much deeper. Yet,

as these conversations with SG are more recent, I have plenty of other stuff to keep track of.

- It's interesting to consider what OmniStar could be doing, as well as what it could achieve if it made merger connections with all the corps they're talking to. SG, Novatech, Maersk, U-O, and Horizon ... madness!
- Electric Blue
- Don't get ahead of yourself.
- Bull

## SUPERNOVA

Novatech has had its fair share of ups and downs. Get big, join NeoNET. NeoNET collapses, lose big. Start to rise again with big St. Louis gains. Struggle with issues in Europe. OmniStar approached them and even helped back them while Novatech was doing big things in St. Louis, but despite some cooperation at the time to give OmniStar's internal assets a little tech boost, they weren't able to come to the table for a merger into OmniStar.

That's all in the past now. Novatech finally joined OmniStar earlier this year. They brought huge boosts to the Matrix assets of all the member corps while gaining the security forces of Lone Star, the magical resources of Manadyne, and access to the full array of DocWagon operations in both response and health services.

Culturally, Novatech is being influenced by OmniStar to stop using black IC systems and harmful biofeedback programs. Their own internal security forces are getting cross-training in all aspects, physical, arcane, and Matrix, while loaning out their top Matrix assets and techs over to their fellow OS corps.

Internally, Cara Villiers is both the CEO of Novatech and the chairman of the Guidance Board. The position came as part of the deal to bring in Novatech, knowing that down the line she could also bring the golden ticket currently on loan from her father to Spinrad.

The divisions and subsidiaries of Novatech haven't been as cooperative as some of the initial corps to join, leading to quite a bit of internal squabbling, which is good for the shadows. A lot of those issues were already present as Villiers's deal to lease out the golden ticket from JRJ to someone other than family was highly unexpected. Villiers has definitely laid the groundwork to make sure she gets control of her family's rights when the time comes. Joining OmniStar is good for getting them resources and access, but it's also an arena to fight with the other big leaguers when it comes time to slug it out for that golden ticket.

Even though the deal is finally done, there's quite a bit of opposition still playing out. Both



of their former NeoNET allies, Transys Neuronet and Erika, never wanted this merger to make it through. TN's opposition wasn't driven by Cele-dyr, but rather from the offices of Derek Gilhard, an upper-level executive who had some personal beef with Cara Villiers. He's still trying to damage Novatech, but it seems their joining of OS has just expanded the number of his targets. He's pulling jobs to damage the bottom line of Lone Star and DocWagon, and making sure they all know this is part of having Novatech and Villiers in the fold.

Erika's moves have been dual-purposed with their efforts focused mostly on the African continent, softening Novatech's operations there and opening positions for them to slide in and improve their share of the African market. You can check in with Ndoge Buntaklu in Lagos if you're looking for work. He's almost always got something going.

## MAERSK MATING

I don't know exactly how to classify their efforts with Maersk. I just know that in the end, the damage done to Maersk is looking to be a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions. Separate from the formation of OS (or maybe as one of the million threads she wove to make it happen), Reina del Mar waged a shadow war that seriously weakened Maersk and embarrassed their in-house security corp, Tyr. Whether it was more threads or just a shadowy peace offering, the contracts offered by OmniStar were a decent stabilizer. The discount-rate contracts that put Lone Star in place as Maersk's primary security provider outside of Europe helped shore up security issues at their docks, warehouses, and on the bulk of their freighters. A sudden decrease in attacks by sea dragons certainly helped the matter as well.

When it came time to make an official offer for merger, Maersk, a.k.a. Lars Gyldendal, seemed ready for a chance to settle things down, but a flurry of shadow ops staggered Maersk again. Apparently, flirting with OS led to a collection of problems with other Eurocorps, specifically S-K and Proteus, that did not want Maersk to lose its independence. Several aren't even happy they're contracting out security, but the benefits to Maersk's bottom line are no joke.

Now, it looks like Wuxing and KondOrchid are also joining in on the attack. OmniStar is still the security contractor for Maersk on a wide scale, but they can't do anything about boardroom backstabbing and financial shenanigans, especially since much of it goes on within the borders of Europe; Tyr's territory. They do appear to be doing something about KondOrchid, but I'll save that bit for later.

OmniStar isn't sitting the fight out or just leaving it to the security services of Lone Star. Shadow ops and back-room deals are playing out to help Maersk and get Gyldendal to agree to the merger,

which will allow the full might of all OmniStar's members to come to their aid.

Besides the Eurocorp problems that Maersk is having, Maersk and OmniStar are getting hit in the shadows by Wuxing to keep this merger from happening. Attacks on their logistics pipelines are well protected, but Wuxing knows a lot of the logistics game is about protecting information on shipments. The runs they are contracting are focused on finding what is really being shipped and by whom, especially black- and grey-market items. A lot of powerful people are not pleased that their quiet shipping enterprises are getting disrupted.

## STUMBLE OF THE CENTURY

Everybody has a plan for how they're going to fight until they get punched in the face. Century Dynamics gave OmniStar that shot to the face, and they haven't been very graceful in dealing with their first real merger opposition.

This move looks like it's going to flop.

OmniStar set up a great deal with CD through Lone Star, one very similar to Maersk. The law enforcement provider has CD contracts across the globe. The rates are sweet, and the move looked like a solid first step in bringing CD under the OmniStar umbrella. The problem is, Lone Star is getting pummeled at CD sites across the globe. Costs are through the roof as their equipment is stolen or bricked, personnel are being poisoned or killed, and every loss CD takes is getting passed along as part of the contract. Every bit of it looks like an inside job, but CD had no reason to poison the deal they were losing too.

This got me digging, and I think I've just scratched the surface of the truth, and it doesn't look good for OmniStar. I'm going to need to gather more intel, but that's what this data haven is all about, right? Take what I've got as a start and let's make some money.

It took me a bit to find, and I have a feeling it didn't come up in OmniStar's early assessments of CD, but there is a pretty deep connection with Proteus and they're not going to allow OmniStar to pull them in. Proteus is coming after them like a cornered mother bear protecting her cub. Jobs are storming all over the globe as Proteus puts nuyen into hitting CD operations, focusing mainly on collateral damage and busting up security. There's very little paydata is coming out of the jobs.

This is definitely going to make OmniStar a little skittish on future connections. I'm not sure how Reina del Mar didn't know about the connection between CD and Proteus, especially since she has wreaked havoc on so many of the latter's operations. Aquablocks have literally been turned to scrap metal, but in all those assaults, I guess she was doing more defending of her turf than digging into their corporate connections.



- > Long story short, Proteus and CD have one of those great shadow connections where CD needs shady spots to do research, and Proteus has some of the most remote research stations on the planet.
- > Icarus
- > As I'm sure this connection will reach the sea dragon, I have a feeling Proteus is about to have some more struggles at their aquablocks.
- > Frosty
- > Not so easy to do with Proteus. They're one of the few megacorps that have held their own in the fight with the sea dragon for aquatic turf.
- > Sounder
- > They held their own when it was the Sea Dragon, singular—not Reinadelmar (or however its spelled) and her legion of leviathan lackeys. You can expect that war to heat back up, and you can be sure a lot of disposable assets will be hired to do some nasty drek to soften up the defenses on Proteus's aquablocks.
- > Ecotope
- > Just be wary when taking these contracts. Softening a target for a leviathan to take down could very well be a one-way trip if you don't have a well-planned egress.
- > Ire

What I am most interested in here is what the aftermath will be. The OmniStar/CD contract has several months still on it, and unless OmniStar wants to pay some healthy fines and lose a lot of face, they're going to need to sustain it. What they are doing to mitigate it in the interim should be interesting for us, along with what they do in retaliation after this is all said and done. CD had to know they were never going to get under the OmniStar umbrella, yet they walked out into the rain anyway.

## LASSOING A COLT

Colt has held onto its independence for over two centuries. Maintaining that brand independence while gaining a massive support system is right in their wheelhouse. When Athwater first encountered current Colt CEO Aislynn Zaegler, they hit it off over drinks and dancing on a night off in Dante's Inferno. Two execs on the town in Seattle that somehow both got booked in the same private room of the club.

Obviously, this was set up by Athwater, but the night off and the option to party with some new people at one of the hottest clubs in Seattle was too alluring to pass up, especially with Athwater's reputation. While it started as a club night, discussions afterward turned to Colt joining OmniStar. Colt didn't need the move, they've done fine for centuries, but they liked the idea and it was one of

the smoothest internal mergers thus far. Externally, others caused their fair share of problems.

Colt isn't going to become the sole supplier of arms and accessories for OmniStar. They don't have the production capacity or array of arms to do it. But they'll have no problem getting sufficient contracts to match current and future growth production for the next century with these connections to OmniStar. They also get Lone Star and DocWagon armed response teams to field-test new equipment.

After all this sunshine-and-roses stuff, we should move on to more interesting topics for us runner types, like the problems that have made (and will continue to make) us a lot of nuyen.

First, there's the Ares team that was watching Zaegler. The moment they IDed Athwater, they knew what was coming. Ares Arms went full scorned ex: teams hit Colt production, runs to gather blackmail on Colt execs to keep the move from getting voted through, database runs aimed at scrambling financials and implanting false personnel data to make the match look like a bad move on OmniStar's part, Ares's media division slapping Colt on every firearm used in a crime they reported, along with setting up runners who heavily used Colt products, their various security corps issued directives that their officers weren't allowed to use Colt-branded firearms while off-duty, while at the same time they demanded using Colt weapons as dump guns and plants on all the criminals they busted. They waged a war in the shadows and media that didn't stop the merger, but it did smudge Colt's rep.

The moves actually had an impact across corporate lines as Lone Star and DocWagon put out memos to their personnel about using Colts while on the job. Things are going smoothly now that the merger is done, but there's recovery needed.

According to sources close to Zaegler, there is also revenge on the docket. She's not one to forgive and forget, and Ares's attacks on her corp were harsh. An insulting buyout offer was included in there somewhere that pushed her over the edge. Jobs are coming down to the streets to hit Ares Arms below the belt. Wetwork and large-scale factory damage gigs have already hit the fixers, and until Zaegler feels she has her pound of flesh, they'll be coming on the regular.

## PICKING A FLOWER

With so many issues coming on the heels of the Maersk deal, OmniStar is pivoting and looking elsewhere. They originally steered clear of KondOrchid because of their drug cartel connections and history with tempo smuggling back in the day. Now that Maersk isn't coming in (as a whole), KondOrchid is getting a second look. They aren't holding a huge market share, but they can



grow and they're currently in danger. Direct action against this corp isn't looking like a favorable option right now, especially after a healthy show of power through four leviathans rolling up the Rio Guayas and popping up into the port of Gyaquil to meet with Anibal Casimiro Pereira, CEO of KondOrchid.

Maersk is also getting targeted by KondOrchid, as they're buying anything Maersk needs to sell and taking some things they don't want to sell. This kind of infighting is exactly the opposite of what OmniStar wants, but neither corp is under the umbrella yet, so they're pulling out all the dirty tricks before they slide into safety.

Athwater has made several trips to Gyaquil to visit with Pereira after the leviathans visited. The deal should be considered almost assured, but the problems that are coming along thanks to previous relations and dealing, as well as the extended courting time for this job, are going to lead to plenty of jobs down Ecuador way.

## ON A ROLL: SELECTIVE ACQUISITION

As if controlling much of the Mississippi wasn't enough transportation power, OS has bought several former Mitsuhamas assets in the overland-shipping arena of North America. OmniStar has stayed away from picking at the severed limbs of MCT to avoid picking up any unwanted accessories (like former Dis conspirators), but these acquisitions are coming with some intense scrutiny, much of which is going on in the shadows. Employees are getting spied on, disappeared, and even kidnapped and interrogated to make sure OmniStar doesn't get wrapped up in the trickling aftermath of the Disian Shadow War.

This move is on the smaller side of their acquisitions, and technically the assets are mostly moving to Novatech. UCASRail, Amtrak Incorporated, California Free State Rapid Transit, Mississippi Motion, and Norfolk Southern have all joined Novatech NorthAm. Front Range Transit International also came under OmniStar, but they belong to Leviathan Logistics, one of Reina del Mar's more direct holdings, probably as some kind of draconic backroom deal with Ghostwalker, but maybe not.

- ▶ The Disians tested the system, and now OmniStar owns it. They have one of the best covert movement pipelines in North America.
- ▶ Rigger X
- ▶ On the plus side for us, OmniStar's system has several major fixers already connected with it across NorthAm. You want to get cross-country quietly while still packing your less-than-legal equipment? They can do it for a decent price.
- ▶ Fianchetto

- ▶ Tracks hit most major metros and slide through some remote locations for illicit drops or city-to-city transport. This includes Denver. The FRFZ may be Ghostwalker's domain, but this smuggling line gets in on the regular.
- ▶ Turbo Bunny
- ▶ Be sure no one on the team is on GW's dreklist, or you'll all end up in his drekpile. He manages to run dossiers on every group that loads up. He doesn't want certain elements in Denver and is ruthless about keeping them out.
- ▶ Frosty

## ON THE HORIZON

The biggest news for OmniStar is their PR campaign and courting of Horizon. Horizon coming into OS would mean an instant third A. It would also mean Horizon won't just bump up a spot or two, but instead launch from the AAA basement.

To date, Cove Morgan and Rael Whiteoak of Horizon and Athwater at OmniStar have had numerous meetings both public and private. Data is being shared on the effects of Lone Star's new street looks and positive culture interventions. Overall, it looks good. Inside the corp, the biggest issues are currently assuring continued change, potential name changes, and the vast amount of newer Horizon assets that didn't approach OmniStar for an abundance of reasons, and now they're getting pulled in.

Based on memos and assessments on the schedule, change is still rolling along. Internal hiring policies are changing. Courses on empathy and assessment of maximum- and minimum-care identification, along with assignments to get field time based on student EMT standings. Score high, you get the tough cases; score low and you're on band-aids and bed pans. Across the companies there is still a divide of old-schoolers and the new ranks. The most stress comes on the middlemen who can see all sides and just need to keep the opposite halves from sounding insane and rabid in their beliefs. As dangerous as it is with picking the wrong runners or not knowing a corp mate well, these jobs are getting tossed out as easy intimidation gigs to convince the other side in the right way.

- ▶ Horizon's connection to the Defender network is a big boon. They have good runners with good reps and solid morals to show that shadowrunners aren't all psychotic terrorists. Hard part is no one from Horizon can mention how the Defenders played a huge role in saving the world from Dis because they're trying to erase Dis from history.
- ▶ Snopes

Internal politics and focus groups are starting to assess the value of Horizon-OmniStar, Horizon-Star, OmniHorizon, OmniStar-Horizon, or just keeping the status quo with OmniStar holding the



umbrella but everyone else enjoying the independence and brand identity.

It may seem like a little thing, but for Horizon it's huge. They don't want to look lesser, but they aren't comfortable taking on the baggage of another corp on their rep. Internal battles are waging and runners are playing the pawns.

Personally, I think the biggest struggle coming out of Horizon is from the assets they recently picked up that chose them over OmniStar now that they could all be rolled into one. Some were personal, with family and friends abused and falsely accused by Lone Star. Others had bad DocWagon experiences.

All of this is creating a lot more internal dissidence than OmniStar wants, but there is hope that Horizon's PR strength can smooth everything back over.

For us, the greatest issue is Horizon's strong connection to the Defenders' network now joining corps with some bad reputations. Maybe the PR stunts they're pulling, and the new hiring practices they've implemented, create a Horizon environment friendly to "white hat" runners, but most of us don't build our teams. Fixers pick favorites and often leave teams to deal with an amoral sociopath and a warrior trying to atone by refusing to kill.

If you thought that there was a lot coming at them from the inside, the outside is even hotter.

OmniStar is already a solid mix of forces that aren't currently cannibalizing themselves from the inside. That's a threat to a lot of competing corps. At the top is Ares, since they have to deal with Colt and Lone Star challenging Ares Arms and Knight Errant. While the work with Maersk is not as smooth as they want, Wuxing is not keen on letting OmniStar get their hands on any solid logistics operations. KondOrchid is whipping Wuxing as well. But between the losses there and whatever damaged bits of Maersk they manage to pull over, it could turn out good for them—but for now it's runs, murders, and terrorism.

Evo is taking shots to slow DocWagon and steal tech for CrashCart, but DW is getting close to pulling gravtech into the majority of their response vehicles. They're superior in almost every aspect other than top speed. Runs on this market are double-edged swords. You're the one making money, but you are not only risking the lives of the DW teams, but also the contract holders. Tread carefully and try to make sure you bust up a gravride hauling another drekbag executive instead of some innocent corp kid caught in the crossfire.

Sometimes, supporters come from the strangest places, and OmniStar is getting support from two Japanacorps that want to see them succeed at grabbing that third A. Monobe and Yakashima have plenty of issues of their own, but they know they can eliminate some of those issues if OmniStar and Horizon can come together and get that third A pinned on OmniStar's chest. Runs are trying to

keep that bad press from hitting the news circuits, while their media sections pump positive messages out for Horizon and OmniStar to come together and bring a new voice to the Corporate Court.

## WHAT'S AT THE GOAL LINE?

Another A and a spot on the court. Why? What does Reina del Mar want with this? What was the dark vision of the future those men saw that needed OmniStar? Was it all even real or was all of it orchestrated by Reina del Mar for some other purpose? This is the kind of drek we're leaving floating out there. Nothing's for certain but thus far, OmniStar is making moves to empower citizens, runners, and have a positive effect on anyone they possibly can.

## NOT A WARM LIGHT: IRONMONGERS INC

BY MR. BONDS

- Not too long ago, I received a message through JackPoint. The message contained links to three news articles and a single sentence: "the destiny of Charlatans and Snakes." All three links went to stories about gruesome deaths, two in the UK and one in Quebec, that looked like executions meant to send a message. Given that the message came from who I believe to be the same Unknown User from the Excalibur Division write-up in the *Tarnished Star* download, and who one of the victims was, I asked Mr. Bonds to investigate it.
- Glitch

There are many mysteries in the murky realm of corporate ownership, with a great many shares in unknown hands to this day, even for some triple-A corporations. And we've all witnessed the fallout firsthand—the plethora of highly lucrative job opportunities, of corporations merging and splitting, and the whole golden ticket merry-go-round. But this one seems to be deeper than many initially thought, and surprising in its scope.

Normally, the ownership of a single A-rated corporation is not something which would be difficult to ascertain and wouldn't usually result in gangland-style executions on two continents. But the ownership of Ironmongers Inc. has caused all that mayhem, and confounded both me and several other investigators. I'll get on to the deaths shortly—but I think we need to look at who IRM is first.

## CUSTOMER BASE

The first time I ever heard of a corporation going by the name of Ironmongers Inc. (IRM) was





in the *Morocco* download in the mid-2070s. This was just when Ares started to have significant troubles, the fallout of several failed products and other scandals combining to tarnish their reputation enough that several national militaries and law enforcement agencies stopped buying their products, not to mention several contracts for Knight Errant and Hard Corps not being renewed.

The Moroccan government decided to end their exclusive arrangement with Ares, who up until then had been the exclusive supplier of their entire military. Despite overtures from Onotari Arms and Shiawase Arms, Ironmongers Inc. were chosen as the primary suppliers of small arms and infantry armor, including what was, back then, bleeding-edge armor for their Royal Guard.

- ▶ The RMAF is selling off their Ares equipment, and getting great prices, to fund the switch to IRM arms and armor. Most of it is good quality and comes equipped with the basic bells and whistles most corps make optional extras—like a smartgun system or shock pad.
- ▶ Red Anya
- ▶ The weapons purchased from IRM are highly regarded by every branch of the military and DST. The generals of the Royal Army also very much appreciated IRM sending their Solution

Specialists to help with the swap. They were very well organized and coordinated, the opposite to how it was under Ares.

- ▶ Hazma the Lion

Around the same time, Celedyr's famous meeting with Queen Caroline happened, and not long after it was announced that IRM would be supplying arms and armor for the newly formed Excalibur Division. We know from news drone footage that every firearm and melee weapon ever taken into the field by an XD warden has the distinctive IRM logo on it, as does their Agincourt combat armor. I don't think anyone can dispute that all that footage is great advertising for IRM.

- ▶ The Solution Specialists are remarkable. They understand the Mission and the Blade that lies within our souls. Everything is tailored to our needs and reliable enough that we will happily wield the weapons made by the Ironmongers as we carry out our duties.
- ▶ Keeper Smith

In addition to the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and the Excalibur Division, several mercenary units have received delivery of Ironmongers Inc. weapons, though my understanding is that they are purchasing weapons at the larger end of the small-arms scale, and in smaller quantities.



- > IRM's heavy weapons are all clip fed and a pain to convert to belt feed for use on drones. It's doable but takes a little longer than machine guns that are designed to have a convertible feed. Thankfully, the plans for the parts you need to fabricate are available on the Matrix.
- > Paladin
- > With that homemade conversion kit, the Sabretooth becomes a great drone weapon. It's a little heavy on the recoil compared to a Panther, but it's an autocannon so that's to be expected—I don't recommend putting it on anything smaller than a medium-weight drone.
- > Clockwork
- > Some of the stock intended for mercenary use is making its way into the shadows. I know of several runner teams who have managed to get hold of some of this grey-market stock.
- > Red Anya

## THE PAPER TRAIL

A few years ago, within Carol K's write-up on Britain within the *Needle's Eye* download, it was noted that Ironmongers Inc. used to be known as Integrated Weapons Systems (IWS)—a British arms manufacturer who came upon hard times after a failed Ares takeover. At the time, this was the rumor being spread throughout the British establishment, and that the CEO of Ironmongers Inc. was an ork by the name of Theodore Pennington, who made his way out of Lambeth and into parliament. The rumors were very convincing, and there was even some supposed evidence floating around the Matrix supporting Jonathan Blake's involvement with saving IWS and rebranding them.

Unfortunately, this was revealed to be a very well-orchestrated fake. I don't know how big a part Jonathan Blake had in this scheme, but it appears to have been a PR grab on behalf of a floundering corporation whose CEO was a member of Parliament and thus had some inside access.

- > Isn't Theodore Pennington under investigation by the Parliamentary Complaints Committee for not disclosing the extent of his involvement with Integrated Weapon Systems?
- > eRic
- > Technically, yes, but keep reading. It gets better!
- > Sunshine

From what I can piece together, even with Blake's support, IWS were still struggling to reorganize and make themselves profitable. They suffered multiple breakdowns in their factories, key design and manufacturing personnel resigned and went to work for other companies, and the head of logistics—supposedly appointed by Pennington himself—turned out to be incapable of handling his department. Pennington and the board

hatched a plan to “rebrand” and try to cash in on the free advertising and PR the XD provides IRM. This did seem to win IWS, now “trading as Ironmongers Inc,” some contracts; and by flagrantly ignoring employment and human rights laws in Britain, they managed to deliver upon those contracts.

The trouble started when IWS added the “As used by the Excalibur Division” tagline to one of their advertising campaigns in North Africa. This attracted the attention of the XD themselves, but also the RMAF. While the XD obtained samples of the weapons they supposedly used and investigated the ads claims, the RMAF went straight to lawsuits filed in Moroccan and British courts. It's at this point it gets a little murky, but I can confirm that the entire board of IWS attempted to flee the country and the corporation's bank accounts suddenly emptied in a matter of seconds.

## THE MESSAGE

The message sent to Glitch that sparked this investigation contains three Matrix links: one to the article in the Times about the murder of Theodore Pennington MP in a Kensington apartment, one to the article in the Manchester Evening News regarding the murder of an inter-city motorcycle courier by the name of Dwayne Harding, and one in the Québec Chronicle-Telegraph about the murder of a barista named Sabrina Valentine.

All three were killed one day apart, Pennington first, then Harding, then Valentine. All three were reported as having been flayed alive, and at all three scenes, there was no magical, physical, or electronic forensic evidence found. All three were brutal yet meticulous, carried out with an exceptional level of skill that has left law enforcement at a dead end.

While I know that Glitch, along with several other resident technomancers and hackers, believes this message—sent from an unknown user within JackPoint's own system—came from the Excalibur Division, I'm not so sure. I can find no evidence of anything other than a failed gambit to ride IRM's coattails. I appreciate Ironmongers Inc. have gone to great pains to hide much of the information about themselves—the only things I can find are tax records in both the UK and Morocco—but I just don't see the need for this sort of message in this case.

- > A threat was identified. The threat was eliminated, and a trail followed.
- > #!ERROR!# Unknown User
- > Have you gotten to the end of the trail? Or should I expect more messages?
- > Glitch



- > Time will tell.
- > #!ERROR!# Unknown User

- > I'd say that was a definitive "Yes."
- > Sunshine

- > So, Pennington was indeed a Seraphim?
- > Espion

- > He was. Your assistance has been noted. A Keeper will be in contact to discuss your reward for contributing to the safety of the realm.
- > #!ERROR!# Unknown User

- > Ah, shit.
- > Espion

## SEA STATE 6: VERY ROUGH

POSTED BY: BUBBLES

- > With all the talk about corps, especially those in the shipping industry post-Disian Shadow War, I reached out to Bubbles to give us a quick update on a matter that keeps literally popping back up and causing some issues on the high seas.
- > Bull

Things in the world's oceans are calming down, as much as they ever do, after the disruptions caused by the Disian Shadow War. I really have to say this was the ideal time for me to be laid up here in this Maersk clinic at sea, because I've been hearing some concerning things from my friends and colleagues who are still out there working.

The first thing I should touch on is the Disian war. I know there has been major disruption around the globe due to everything that happened—and it will probably be a while before all the ramifications fully reveal themselves. I don't know why, but there seems to be minimal disruption to the maritime freight industry due to the conflict. Sure, there were some lost vessels and lost cargoes, and I've heard of a few small cargo terminals being shut down for repairs, but I'm happy the powers that be didn't decide to do what metahuman war planners would have done—disrupt their enemy's logistics by blockading ports and/or sinking ships.

That's not to say that things are calming down, far from it in fact. In the last month alone, I have heard of no fewer than seventeen attacks on cargo vessels by whales. But whoever is behind this is escalating their attacks and broadening their targets to include cargo submarines and undersea facilities.

## WHITE TURNED BLACK

Before they were the aquacology and arkoblock powerhouse they are today, Proteus AG started as a heavy industry and chemical company out of Germany. One of their first endeavors, according to my own admittedly limited research, was the creation of undersea oil wells in the Arctic circle. It is my understanding that these oil wells are now largely automated, but there is a small subsurface station sat close by that houses repair personnel, using both submersibles and divers to complete their repairs, as well as security and maintenance drones. The station, which I believe to be dubbed Polar Prime, is not self-sufficient, and so on their way to loading up with the oil extracted from the seabed, tanker submarines would stop by and deliver the necessary supplies to Polar Prime, as well as dropping off or picking up personnel as needed.

Well, as of three weeks ago, a contact of mine who works in those waters has informed me that Polar Prime has dropped off the Proteus AG network. This was initially assumed to be a pirate raid, but a security submarine that was sent to reestablish contact with Polar Prime reported that not only was the station gone, but several of the oil wells had been attacked and breached. Currently, oil is leaking out of several wells in low quantities. And due to the difficulties in getting to them such as zero visibility in that area, repair efforts have stalled. Thankfully, the failsafe seems to have worked properly, and that well has shut down, but the entire area is still clogged with oil. It may well be weeks, perhaps months, before Proteus are able to repair the existing wells, replace Polar Prime, and get things back to normal.

According to my contacts, Proteus isn't the only corporation whose activities on the sea floor inside the Arctic Circle have been attacked—AG Chemie has their own oil fields in that part of the world, though thankfully their wells are not as deep and weren't as extensively damaged. I would estimate, based on what I've been able to ascertain about the state of the AG Chemie wells, that it will take between six and twelve weeks to resume full production.

- > We have already seen the global price of oil rise. Due to most vehicles within cities being powered by electricity, and that electricity mainly being provided by GridLink from geothermal or fusion power plants, the massive outcry at the four nuyen increase per barrel we would have expected to see as recently as ten years ago hasn't happened.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > The interstate trucking industry is still largely gasoline (well, diesel) powered even today. You just can't get the range needed any other way. My friend has a cyberarm with tactile sensitivity



almost identical to her old meat arm, yet we haven't cracked super cells for large vehicles yet?

> Turbo Bunny

> At sea it's better or worse, depending on your power plant. Most of my ships use integrated electric propulsion of one form or another, but we still burn marine diesel to generate that electricity. Four nuyen per barrel is a hefty increase, but we are still lucky it's only that much given the state of things right now.

> Kane

> And even when things are better, the fragging corps will keep the prices high so they can gouge more money out of everyone! This is not the time to be worried about soy paste prices going up!

> Chainmaker

## RED SUN TURNED BLUE

In the early 2060s, when Yamatetsu was moving their HQ to Vladivostok and rebranding themselves as Evo, the corporation consolidated their under-sea assets in the Sea of Japan into a single aquacology. It was tough sledding for many years as the other Japanacorps took out their rage at Yamatetsu's apparent betrayal on this new aquacology.

The facility, for which I cannot find any other name beyond the East Sea Site, was one of the focal centers for Evo's research into all things aquatic—ranging from new implants of all kinds and the effects of pressure on individuals with certain changeling characteristics to new drone propulsion and ways for technomancers to use underwater drones more effectively—for the entirety of the 2070s.

Unfortunately, according to a rumor I've heard from a chummer who works on cargo submarines out of Vladivostok, the East Sea Site has been destroyed. Word is a routine cargo sub approached the last known location of the aquacology only to find a massive debris field all over the sea floor. Only two of the support struts for the facility are still in place, but there's no trace of anything else. One whisper I've heard is the facility was scooped up, but I feel confident dismissing that idea as the corpse of a sperm whale was found on the sea floor a few dozen kilometers away. The whale's corpse apparently had a lot of wounds that could only have been caused by the security systems used by the East Sea Site.

> From what I've heard, there was a lot of metal debris found in and around the whale corpse.

> Sounder

> On the contrary, it appears this specimen was augmented.

> Deep Six

> Well that's not good—crazy augmented whales!

> Slamm-O!

## TURTLE SOUP

Over the years, metahumanity has come up with all sorts of reasons to place a facility at sea. The security arrangements are a real son of a slitch to work out, but if you've the personnel (almost always complemented by drones) to handle the situation, there are not many places more secure. I guess Antarctica could compete, but not many other locations could.

One of those secure sites is the Red Wheel Engineering Maximum Security Prison off the coast of Kenya. For years it has been a reliable way to incarcerate some very dangerous individuals, knowing that even if they were to escape from their cells, they'd die at sea without significant external support.

For now, though, those days are over. A friend of mine is working as a second mate on a cargo ship that works those waters, and he told me that a little over a week ago, the so-called Terrapin Prison went belly up. Red Wheel Engineering and the Kenyan authorities, as well as many vessels responding to their mayday call, were able to evacuate all the staff and inmates from the prison; however, they weren't able to secure and retrieve the secure data storage nodes that are part of the prison's funding model.

> From what I've heard, it'll take months to evaluate the prison to see if it's even worth salvaging, let alone repairing and putting back into service.

> Sounder

> And in the meantime, what are they going to do with all those prisoners? I've heard of the sorts of people who get sent to the Terrapin Prison, and they are really not the kind you want anywhere near you!

> Hard Exit

> What about the secure data nodes? Are they still even secure? I smell a payday!

> /dev/grll

> Despite being on extended medical leave, I still got sent an invitation to apply for a job as first mate on a submarine that's intending to try and exploit that current weakness. I imagine the security will be tight, so it will be hazardous duty, but if it works out it will indeed be a hell of a payday!

> Bubbles





# THE PLEBIAN PERSPECTIVE

POSTED BY: WINDY STORMS

- › With something as varied and diverse as how communities see corporations and how they affect them, I wanted to make sure we got as many contributors as possible. You'll see some familiar faces, as well as some new ones. To kick it off, I asked Windy Storms to give us an intro since Motor City is still pretty fresh in my mind regarding corporate malfeasance.
- › Glitch

Discussion about megacorporations dominates JackPoint and many of the other data havens out there. It's little wonder why—they're an immovably large part of our world, and you can see their tendrils in everything you do. They make the food you eat. They make the bedding you sleep on. They make the cardboard box you use to keep the rain off your head. It doesn't matter what circle of society you're in, the corps have some influence.

Even if we ignore the Big Ten, the AA-rated and A-rated corporations in the next tiers are immense. We might get hired to steal the marketing plans for

Quick Lift coffee's newest soykaf kiosks, but it's not going to make a dent in their bottom line. It's a lot of work and a lot of risk to be the pawns for a bunch of suits fighting over who's top dog.

Being born in old Detroit, I had a front-row seat to see how megacorporate movements impacted the city. The suits didn't even notice (or care about) the ripple effect on the streets. The fight between Ares and Cross Applied Technologies comes to mind—Cross' Seraphim would often target Ares labs and research for info-theft and sabotage. This led to more patrols and checkpoints through the city, which just made sure that people wasted parts of their lives waiting for some Ares corpsec to allow them through. Ares even managed to convince people that shadowrunners and CATCo were to blame.

The shadow war had other knock-on effects, like where Ares funneled their nuyen. Ares could have spent massive cred on their employees or their facilities, all of which would have brought more money in. Instead, they invested in security and additional runners of their own, most of them out-of-towners.



Yeah, old Detroit looked like a perfect city, but there was rot underneath that shine.

And even if it's not caused by some battle between corporations, people still get sacrificed on the altar of capitalism. Do you think that every test market for some foodstuff is actually safe? Or the data they collect on you is safe from hackers? All that matters is the consistent up-and-to-the-right movement on the shareholders' return on investment. So what if a few folks accidentally die when the corporation markets its new wonder weight loss drug? Or they decide it's not worth updating the pipes that supply water? It's null sheen because it was a net positive to their bottom line.

New products and restoring infrastructure aren't the only ways they bend us over. The constant search for asset acquisition means that anything of value gets snatched up. Do you think Ares just bought up old office buildings in Atlanta when they moved in? Maybe some of the locations were old or empty, but not all of them. And it wasn't just office buildings. Small mom-and-pop shops are still getting snatched up because the location is perfect for whatever they want. And if you've got the skills they want, they can put incredible pressure on you to work for them.

And let's not forget about the birth of Motor City and Bug City II: Electric Bug-aloo. And while your friendly local corporations aren't likely dabbling in bug spirits (that we know of), they're probably working in geneware, nanotech, petrochem research, or any number of things that can wreak havoc on the environment if it all goes sideways. We're not going to sit and let them do that here. Atlanta can fragging have Ares because we don't want their kind anymore. Let that be a warning if you want to set up shop in our city—we're watching.

And we know it's an uphill fight. It requires capital and people, and not everyone is up for that type of action. Ultimately, people still need to make a living and find what little happiness they can. My girls and I were happy to take the Ares corp scrip while they were in town. With them gone, we need to find new customers, and if we're lucky, the UCAS dollar won't tank on us. And in the trenches, it's not the corporations or the governments that are going to bail you out; it's going to be your chummers. When grabbing your next run, think about whether you're just helping the oppressor or if you can do a little to make our communities a better place.

## THE JOB MARKET'S HOT

POSTED BY: AM-MUT

The last year has been rough in the shadows. My file for active runners in a standard year

typically sees a high turnover rate. The things I need teams for end up being pretty dangerous, and I pay for that. But any time a cold war goes hot, shadowrunners are usually the ones fighting the battles from which no one comes back home. Now that things have cooled back down, my peers and I need to rebuild our list of trusted assets. In short, the Dis crisis reduced the amount of active runners in the shadows.

I talked to Glitch about writing this post and making sure it goes further than just JackPoint. We're going to have a bunch of new runners, and we need to provide them with a crash course on how to survive. So, let's call this a crash course in picking and choosing jobs, especially when they deal with corporations.

- › Really, Am-Mut doesn't want to rebuild her network so often, so she expects us to play babysitter.
- › Ethernaut
- › Yes, and how is this a problem? Hopefully, you get to deal with a lot fewer drekheads because of this.
- › Am-Mut
- › The problem with new runners is they think they know better than you or that your methods are old-fashioned. I can lead a horse to water, but I can't make it drink.
- › DangerSensei
- › But you can drown it!
- › Slamm-O!

Now, I'm not going to spend a bunch of time on the basics. There are plenty of those in other downloads. Instead, I want to use a few jobs that have come across my commlink recently with the associated warning signs. Plus, you veterans can see what jobs are coming through. I also want to mention that most of these jobs have been sitting out there for a few weeks because we just can't field enough teams to handle the workflow.

- › What about the rush jobs?
- › Flash Banger
- › They're still out there. In most cases, I send a few messages back and forth with the requester to explain the situation. Typically, these are paying above the previous premium we're used to.
- › Am-Mut
- › I've definitely seen an increase in initial offers. I'm not missing all the competition.
- › Clockwork
- › Wait ... does that mean I'm going to be targeted by runners just so there are fewer of us working?
- › Knucklebuster





- It's possible, but if someone targets you, let me know. We're fed a line of drek to do some job that no one else wants to do. The least you can expect is that others in the business treat you as they'd want to be treated. Even Kane made sure to cut a little slack to the other pirates he hit. The short of it is that if one of us starts hunting runners just to thin out the herd, they'll find themselves being chased by the rest of us.
- /dev/grrl

So, I was trying to assemble a team on job number one. This one's a bit of a heart-tugger because it looks like an uncle is trying to hire a team to find his niece who went missing in one of the magical dead zones after one of those massive manastorms that wiped away kilometers of infrastructure. The job has been in the queue for about six weeks. Why is no one taking it? The pay's pretty low, and there's no travel covered. I've contacted the employer a few times, letting him know that we haven't had any luck finding a team, but he always reassures me that when the right team comes around, he'll be waiting.

- They're called "mana voids." Can't people do one iota of research?
- eX-Professor
- Call them whatever you want. What disgusts me is how, even in the face of natural disasters, that if you're not corp, you're not wanted. And don't give me any bulldrek about "not having enough supplies" for everyone. I've seen the abundance the corps provide to keep their chattel ... I mean their **citizens** alive.
- Borderline

Now, I see this as a considerable amount of risk. Those magical dead zones are no joke; some of the things runners have seen in them will turn your hair white. So, there's already a good chance that Mr. Johnson already knows that his niece is probably dead. The second part of this is that there are probably some valuable things he wants to be salvaged out of the dead zone. You could profit from it, but I really expect this to be one of those runs you don't come back from.

Job number two was one of those rush jobs. They were offering up over 100,000 nuyen for a team, so you know it has corporate backing written all over it. It had a list of people who needed to have accidents all in a single city. It was also hyper-specific that they shouldn't be killed and that it all needed to happen within a four-hour window. They didn't even care what window the team picked other than it needed to be done in the next three days.

First, you're looking at something that will probably bring some heat on you. You can't hurt that many people without drawing that type of attention. Second, this smells of some brewing battle between Lone Star, DocWagon, and another competitor. They named the people, but they aren't all



wealthy. Putting them in danger means you are straining a service that the rich primarily use. I've set up one team for the meet and collected my finder's fee, but that's all I know about that one.

I haven't heard from the team in about two weeks.

- > That's not a rush job. A rush job is when they need something done tonight. You don't have any time to do legwork, and you're hanging on by your fingertips the whole time.
- > Stone
- > There were two dozen targets and only three days, so yeah, it's a rush job. You're going to be going in cold on a couple of them.
- > Am-Mut
- > That's a big stretch to guess that DocWagon was the real target. It really could be anything.
- > Snopes
- > I'm sure it's DocWagon. Am-Mut, I'm pretty sure your team is sitting in a Lone Star holding facility right now. Seems that DocWagon issued a job contract through Lone Star's irregular assets.
- > Hard Exit
- > Fraggin' hell.
- > Am-Mut

The last job I wanted to share was one from a Ms. Johnson who was looking for a team interested in stealing a crate from a medical storage facility. Now, the pay wasn't super-hot, but they were offering some alternative compensation. They told me that I could pick from the compensation list to better incentivize the teams I contacted. Now, as a fixer, I really appreciate that type of flexibility since I try to know the teams I regularly work with. Give them too many choices, and a team will get lost in the weeds.

This job could have been any number of things. It could be an ID manufacturer looking to make some biological samples disappear as part of their work. It could be some sort of corporate hit the Johnson's trying to hide behind low pay, and I could just pass along the risk to the teams I try to put together. The key is to ask about some of the specifics of the pay and the job details. You become good at asking questions that don't tell you something you shouldn't need to know and instead focus on what will put a team at risk. In this case, I asked about timelines on delivery or any special vehicles needed for transport. When they said they needed a truck that could be outfitted with a cooler and be inconspicuous in the barrens, I was pretty sure we were looking at a community looking to pick up some medicine.

## THINK TANKS AND RESEARCH LABS

POSTED BY: LANYAP

An interesting thing I've been seeing in the streets lately is the rise of more think tanks. The basic idea isn't new; even one of the current Big Ten started as one. The thing that's changed is twofold. First, there are a lot of corporate executives who've found themselves on the outside in the last few years. Each of them probably sees themselves as setting up the next Horizon. The second is these companies are frequently acquired, but with corporate eyes turned toward the fighting each other, some have gotten the chance to flourish.

A lot of the original think tanks of the late twentieth century were built around changing the face of politics. This hasn't changed except that corporations are the new government, and those politics are just as important in controlling public opinion. Horizon figured this out, and that type of success breeds copycats. I'll highlight three up-and-comers you should keep your eye on, and mysterious ties to a fourth.

### PROSPECTUS

Let's start with the basics of Prospectus. According to their Matrix profile, Prospectus is an economic consulting firm with a proven record of enabling partner teams to take over legacy markets through task-driven write-offs and cost-essential market analysis. This is just a long-winded way of saying that they help companies with economic research. The company is staffed by a core leadership team of twelve individuals and a few hundred consultants in the field.

- > That corpspeak bulldrek just hurt my head. Why can't they just speak in plain words?
- > Borderline
- > Either they believe it makes them more intelligent than everyone else to use big words, or they know they're taking the piss.
- > Canis

The part I want to highlight with this group is that they've been extremely accurate in their work. They're absolutely killing it in their field. And just so the rest of you don't have to dig through all their staffers, there's no reason for them to be this good. The consultants are savvy, but none were considered top of their field.

The CEO is a dwarf woman named Ester Wiitala. She's forty-two years old and previously worked for Erika as a drone pilot in the Scandinavian Union armed forces. None of this really screams



brilliant economist, does it? But the reports are that she's cutthroat and sharp. Every new contract opportunity rolls up to her desk and ends with a full debate among the leadership team.

- Prospectus doesn't agree to consult with all companies who come calling. Some of the companies that have been turned down have been acquired in the following six months by—surprise—companies represented by Prospectus. The company either has top-notch field researchers or is stealing secrets, but which is it?
- OrkCEO
- They definitely aren't stealing the information. One of those companies hired a team that went digging for what could have leaked between the two. Basically, one of the middle managers was pissed because he was getting screwed over in the acquisition and wanted to know who leaked it to get some revenge. But there was nothing there. The team returned saying that the reports to acquire, partner, or avoid came from some automated reporting tool.
- Kay St. Irregular
- Smells like the Kechibi code is popping its head up.
- Jimmy No
- You're not the only one thinking that. From the research I've been doing, coincidences just seem to keep coming up.
- Lanyap

Their corporate headquarters is located in Helsinki, but they have offices worldwide. Typically, they consist of a small team working with local and national companies. Sometimes, they don't have a physical office and will work on-site for their partners. They consult on decision-making and offer courses on global expansion. Surprisingly, there's only been one unwilling Prospectus employee extraction. Otherwise, the individuals appear to be guarded or well-trained in self-defense.

- They acquired Studio Aalto and have been using this as their headquarters.
- Traveler Jones

Prospectus is a good source of income if you can get on their list of approved external assets. Those sorts of decisions also need to float up to the top dogs. The work they offer is typically against the client's rivals. In all likelihood, however, you won't even know you're working for them. They're experts at using local fixers and independent Mr. or Ms. Johnsons to distribute work.

One of their primary Ms. Johnsons is Sylvia Leblanc. While she prefers to operate in Paris, the company has shipped her all over the world to wheel and deal. She's a thirty-seven-year-old elf woman with black hair in a pixie cut and sports a

fully chromed-out right arm. She also travels with a team of top-tier security specialists.

She's been effective for Prospectus in terms of job success rate. On the flip side, she's been popular with runners I've talked to. Silvia offers up good data for the jobs even when the pay is average. And even if the job is a bust, she still treats the team with respect. One run in particular came up multiple times while I was investigating her. The team was hired to sabotage a brand-new facility for manufacturing breakfast cereals. The problem was that her info was bad, and the target had packed the location with hired guns. When the runner team needed to beat feet, she was the one organizing an ex-fil and footing the bill.

- I know the team that was on this run. They're led by a pair of runners named Meshumad and Mangrove. The cereal site was a full-on bust. They didn't get paid for the run, but the Ms. Johnson did the team a solid by getting them far from the island and a place to lie low.
- Glasswalker
- So, how'd she know that her info was glitched?
- Mika
- She was still digging into the job. I don't know why, but she keeps digging and doesn't take much at face value. That goes for the team as well. Don't try to hide your dirt, because either she already knows or she's going to find out. And she doesn't hold it against you ... just wants the job to be successful.
- Glasswalker

## MARTINEZ, WALKER, AND OLIVIER

The law firm of Martinez, Walker, and Olivier is the brainchild of two successful lawyers and a retired neuroscientist. The group started its practice in Atlanta about eight years ago and has successfully expanded over the intervening years to a little over one thousand employees across North America, South America, and Europe. It aims to influence the policy and ethics of medical care, as well as the research in government and corporate governing bodies.

Influencing policymakers can be quite challenging since there are several factors at play. Finding the goals and essential issues for the factions and individuals in power relies on timely and thorough research. Being responsive to changes in leadership or critical stakeholders means having a plan for various potential candidates. Finally, the policies themselves need to be crafted in a way that both meets their needs but also furthers your agenda.

That's the optimistic view of what the group is doing, but they wouldn't have achieved what they have if it wasn't for some shadow work. Instead of



determining how to align with factions, why not find influential people, dig up some dirt, and apply a little pressure and leverage? In lieu of preparing for leadership changes, influencing the local election or corporate intrigue can be cheaper and more dependable. Then, the organization can focus primarily on crafting policies.

Rafael Martinez and Marcus Walker previously worked together as legal consultants for government offices. Initially, they provided guidance on how to safely work through extraterritoriality in terms of lawsuits. Most of their legal advice focused on property law and criminal extradition, rather than medical or research—until they added renowned, retired neurosurgeon Nina Olivier.

- > This seems like a pretty abrupt change, and it's also limiting. You've moved from a broad view of legal options to just focusing on the medical profession.
- > Kia
- > They moved from focusing on CAS and local governments to a wider client base. You see this as limiting, but this is a really bold move that has been shown to pay off.
- > Lanyap
- > There's the other weird bit about how a retired medical professional was able to change the lawyers' minds.
- > Kia
- > Dr. Olivier is a force of nature. As far as the story went, she met the lawyers at a conference and hit it off. They had dinner at Martinez and Walker's place, and before the evening was done, they had hatched a plan to rake in money together.
- > Butch
- > It also helps that Nina has some deep shadow connections and sees an avenue to do better work with the proper use of force. Her connections to the Maison de Saint-Joseph definitely play a part in her thinking.
- > Sim-Eon

Martinez and Walker still have their office and the bulk of their staff in Atlanta. Dr. Olivier's office is located in Paris, France, but she splits her time between Paris and Cairo, where her husband's family lives. Her staff is split between the two locations, although the think tank will frequently fly staff around the world so they can more effectively work with local groups.

The current big push has been setting up protections for researchers aligned with clients. You'd think this would be terrible for the big corps that extract who they want. The big carrot they're offering, however, is a registration factor for advanced research that provides some protection within the corporate courts for the people involved and their area of study.

- > Are they successful so far? I haven't really heard anything about it.
- > Electric Blue
- > No. Most of the law firm's smaller bills have been successful, but they've only been between specific governments and one or two corporate entities. Their big win last year was a deal between the Pueblo Corporate Council (PCC) and CrashCart. Customers can now sue for limited damages but are restricted from class-action lawsuits. In addition, the corporation can keep the body of the deceased. The politicians have been able to spin this as a win for their constituents.
- > Sim-Eon
- > I thought there was going to be more algorithm-fraggrery.
- > Kia
- > I didn't include it as part of the main write-up. Still, this company has hired shadow assets beyond the straightforward goal of gaining leverage. They've been sending resources to initiate legal challenges, which queue up on their agenda. They've also triggered the extraction of some researchers to push the corporations around. It's been the right move each time to manipulate things to their benefit. This just feels like a change of pace from the last three years.
- > Lanyap
- > What do you think their algorithm will do when it has a registry of researchers and their active projects? Even if the corporations obfuscate most of it, that's some valuable data.
- > Cosmo
- > One note regarding this law firm's maneuvers in Europe: Dr. Olivier has invited her friends to the Old Continent on numerous occasions, especially during the Tour, trying to lobby major players in the New European Economic Community (NEEC). They are positioning themselves as the ones to call to influence Europe's politics. Of course, this isn't really appreciated by the infamous law firm Stark, Thiessen, and Van Der Mar, especially senior partner Marie Boucher from Paris, who considers the NEEC her personal plaything ...
- > Sim-Eon

## FINAL FORM

Influencing policy around militaries is tricky. No entity is going to trust your think tank to provide unbiased guidance. Either you're lining your accounts with manufacturer kickbacks or setting the groups up for a fall to whomever your favorite is. So Final Form came as a bit of a surprise to me, but this makes a lot more sense since they've been attempting to influence the International Mercenary Association (IMA).

Some of the most recent conflicts tied several mercenary companies up in red tape. It was so much more effective to use their own rules against them, and it nearly was the end of us, except for a few of them doing an end-run around the maneu-



ver. This brings us to Final Form, led by General Al Hawsa, which is trying to improve some of those bylaws that nearly hamstrung us.

- › Al Hawsa? As in Major Al Hawsa from the Spinrad Global Desert Wars team?
- › Moharik
- › The very same. I hear he's still with the same squad, so this must be above and beyond what the team's been doing.
- › Hard Exit
- › He's just a really solid leader, and I believe he's the right person to fix some of the issues we've seen recently.
- › Wicket
- › And the corporate coffers of Spinrad Global don't hurt either, do they?
- › Rigger X

The general has been working with several mercenary groups to develop a plan and address some of the legal constraints imposed during recent conflicts. Those legal challenges are important to world health, though. Without them, we could see some conflicts plunge deep into chaos when third parties disrupt existing contracts or use the conflicts to their advantage.

- › Because, of course, someone paid by Spinrad Global will be working for the rest of us.
- › Butch

It looks like the majority of what they've been proposing concerns how much a mercenary force can be held responsible for as part of a legal challenge, and the types of roles such a force can play. One such change is the use of mercenaries in a defensive position should have fewer restrictions under a new IMA regulation. In the past, the mercenary company would need to remove themselves from the field of combat on a legal challenge.

Another new change is how much of a force is required to stop fighting at any given point in the conflict, meaning that a legal challenge doesn't just leave a vacuum of power behind them. The details on this one are still being hammered out, but the number of troops and assets is part of some complicated equation.

Where this fits in with shadow work is that the newly minted general has been working a lot of different angles. A lot of the discussions have happened out in the open, but we all know this isn't always where deals happen. Corporate types use the golf green, which is no different. Runners just help facilitate some of that by providing security and working as a go-between. They also serve as couriers of data and physical goods to help IMA leadership think about the future.

- › Um, where did you get your bulldrek paydata? What you described is **not** how warfare utilizing independent military providers ever worked. If that was the case, there wouldn't **be** any conflicts. Al Hawsa is trying to sell something that frankly stinks.
- › Colonel Cobra

## COLLABORATIVE INTELLIGENCE INC.

Behind all three of these, I also found links to this research company. Sometimes, those links were tenuous, as this company doesn't have much of a footprint, but there was still a data trail between them. They're registered in the Carib League in Borinquen, and their CEO is José Casanova.

I found out about them after hitting the hosts of the three think tanks listed above. If it weren't for the fact I was doing research on Final Form, Prospectus, and MWO, I wouldn't have known this company existed. Each of those companies had substantial payments being made to Mr. Casanova and CI Inc. Payments were in a variety of different scrips, but the most common were doubloons and nuyen.

The other common element I turned up was business plans. The naming schemes on these were all extremely similar and read like a very dry, step-by-step instruction manual. For instance, one included plans to acquire a hell hound training company. It involved everything down to the minute, the dates of when to extract the lead trainer, the location, and the exact time the trainer could be found. That was followed up with the exact stock package to be offered to which board member.

I'm really hoping that the comments can help me regarding this slag or the company.

- › The funny thing is there are about thirty José Casanovas in Borinquen. Either someone isn't creative, or this is a smoke screen. And there's a storefront in San Juan with the name Collaborative Intelligence Inc. spray-painted across the top.
- › /dev/grrl
- › If you find anything out, I'd love to have it in my files. Nuyen for solid data per the usual fee.
- › Snopes
- › I didn't find a business host, which is weird.
- › Electric Blue
- › Not really. They're either renting space on someone else's host, hijacking some computation time, or purchasing it under a different name. Given the state of things, I'm betting on the latter. Everything screams "front" or series of shell companies. Alright, Lanyap, you got me. I'm officially curious.
- › /dev/grrl
- › Wasn't my intention. Okay, maybe a little bit.
- › Lanyap



- > I dug up something interesting. It's definitely a loose connection, but we should keep an eye on it. A year ago, a bunch of posts from a Matrix handle calling themselves Heartbreaker was asking about getting a copy of the Kechibi code. Few days later, they said everything was good, and they didn't need it anymore since it was a giant hoax. But a couple of other handles tie back to Heartbreaker's commcode around the same time period. Some are looking to lease host time to run some "simple programs for analytics." A few days later, they're asking for a bigger host. The last message I could find from that commcode or any of the handles says they "have seen god in all its glory, and it's like a cool pool in the middle of the desert," and that's it. It kinda gives me the chills.
- > T3chK1d
- > Dead gods should absolutely not rise again.
- > Plan 9
- > I don't like the sounds of that. Lanyap, you mentioned there were loose connections. What were you seeing?
- > /dev/grrl
- > Money trails. There are references to shared data depots that turned up empty. There are more money trails. Either the company burned all its assets on hosts, or it's been rolling in cred. I traced the money going into CI. Those trails were easy to follow while anything leaving the company was absent, hard to find, or some combination of the two. Everything about CI is a ghost.
- > Lanyap
- > If you have data to share, I'd appreciate it. I might be able to work some connections and see what hosts were rented. I'm not optimistic, however, that people have learned from past mistakes.
- > Icarus
- > I want to go back to what T3chK1d said about the Kechibi Code. I don't think CI is done with it. I saw some posts on one of the public boards in Lisbon from a user going by **Destruidor de Corações** asking about some data repositories in and around the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the questions involved "dead" Foundation hosts located out in the wilder parts of the Matrix.
- > Perri
- > Dead hosts?
- > Red Anya
- > It was a very specific list of hosts that were formerly used by Spinrad Global, Novatech, and others. Those hosts don't really exist anymore, though in a conventional sense. They aren't hanging in the sky about the Matrix and don't seem to have an address anymore. They existed at one point, but when a lot of the companies started moving some of their computing needs to Framework hosts, these were abandoned.
- > Perri
- > If these are abandoned, what's the chance you're going to run into Null Sect in those hosts?
- > Electric Blue
- > Chances are pretty good. I have no idea if the two things are related, though. It might be a coincidence that someone going by Heartbreaker in Portuguese is asking about hosts that are defunct, and that the Null tends to occupy old Foundation hosts. But assuming it's a coincidence could get you killed, and this warrants a follow-up. Something about this makes me itch.
- > Puck
- > I saw the post as well. I went looking for one of them that I had visited in the past. The location was crawling with e-critters—and not the friendly ones. I was able to access the host briefly, and it looks like a lot of the data is still there. The host was in a permanent state of alert as the IC started attacking Yantra. I opted to remove myself before things became too dangerous.
- > Respec
- > All that juicy data and you bolted?
- > Electric Blue
- > It was an abandoned Erika host. I'm sure some of it had value, but their market is moving so fast that most of this paydata was going to be stale. I did sell the location to Mr. Heartbreaker, so it wasn't all a loss.
- > Respec

## ARTIFACT HUNTS: THE REDUX

POSTED BY: AM-MUT

A few of us remember the artifact hunts from the 2060s and 2070s. The amount of nuyen funneling from corporate interests and research companies into the hands of shadowrunners made it an incredible time to be alive. The search for more powerful foci and reagents from the past captured hearts and even multiple trid shows. But eventually, the money started to dry up, and we were all sure those days were done for good.

The Un-Awakening was a wakeup call to a lot of normal people trying to live their lives. While the majority of the population doesn't know how or why this occurred, we know what really went down. Now as part of the re-Awakening, corporations have been sponsoring new artifact hunts, claiming that this mana shift would spontaneously cause new items to appear. But whether they want us to look for a pixiu bracelet or find broken parts from a Harvester, the nuyen spends the same.

Working as an independent Ms. Johnson has some benefits. I've had a front row seat for a num-



ber of corporations setting up runs to scoop up the remnants of the Disian Shadow War. Pieces of weaponry, Faustian crystal remnants, mana batteries; these groups are interested to see just what they can build based on the tech they find. Personally, I believe they're playing with fire on this one. The last thing I want to see is our metaplane get turned into some magical wasteland because someone has syphoned off its magic.

Not all the nuyen for these hunts is coming from the big corporations. Some of the older groups, like the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research (DIMR), Astral Space Preservation Society (ASPS), and others have been offering payment to snatch this broken tech up or destroy it before the corporations can get their greedy paws on it. That's not to say these groups don't pay as well as the corporations, but you can sleep a little better at night knowing you aren't the reason the planet is going to hell in a handbasket.

- I thought ASPS was dead, since a lot of it sided with the Disians during the shadow war.
- Electric Blue
- Not quite. There was some infiltration, but mostly to take the group off the board. However, significant numbers of ASPS survived and have (mostly) reconciled with the DIMR, along with others. Safety in numbers after all.
- Silk
- They're a shell of what they once were. After those events, I found some people I used to work with. They were absolutely gutted after being duped. The after-effect of the Un-Awakening was brutal on all of us, but especially the ASPS members. Some saw it as a personal failing and have completely left the organization. The ones still there are trying to recover and fight the good fight. They may not have a lot in terms of nuyen, but they can trade favors.
- Old Crow
- The Apep Consortium and the Draco Foundation also have standing bounties for any such artifacts. Both have been careful to keep under the corporate radar. If you're going to do some work or cash in on a bounty, I've found that Apep has been good at honoring their bargains.
- Am-Mut
- The Apep Consortium has always been a challenge to work with. Their recent acquisition by Renraku hasn't changed that for the better. While I appreciate that they worked well with runners in the past, the megacorp doesn't have the same reputation. I'd watch your six when working with them.
- Mika
- I said it before, and I'll say it again. Something shady is going on with Apep and the Atlantean Foundation. And I haven't seen anything to change my mind. You might as well just comm the

Black Lodge and see if they're interested in them. The Iwa have told me to destroy these artifacts, and I intend to honor their wishes.

- Cover
- And when we're talking about magical artifacts, we're really talking about the live hand grenades from the Disian conflict.
- Winterhawk

Beyond hiring runners to track down these magical goods, they've put out public service announcements on the trid and Matrix telling people that if they find unusual artifacts, they should contact their local corporate representatives to turn it in for a reward. Given most wageslaves aren't making it outside their enclave, this is probably a waste of nuyen.

- Some of the magical societies have latched onto this as a means to intercept these magical goods.
- Elijah

There's another class of artifact that researchers are drooling over. There've been some rare sightings of reagents that were changed during the Un-Awakening. While I can't see why they'd want them, I do know that those types of goods are in high demand and fetch a premium. Talking with Elijah, these are exceptionally rare, since most magical items were restored once the mana levels became consistent again. He described them as having some sort of polarity to them.

What we're looking at is a wide range of jobs in Cairo right now. We know that magic has been illegal in Egypt since the government took a hard-line view in matters regarding how Islam looks upon the practice. Those practices have changed over the years, but sometimes the street rules and some of the districts have upheld the ban. That prejudice against magic over the years has meant that even with years of pillaging by tomb raiders, there are still magical items and lore to be found in the region.

There've been lucrative runs in the past to snag magical artifacts in the region. The presence of ley lines in the area drew the attention of some extraplanar enemies. There are now runs heading into the valley of the kings, the pyramids, and any location where someone's got solid paydata regarding the presence of these changed artifacts. The Johnsons I've met with have ranged from corporate entities without a presence in the area, such as Manadyne, to local researchers. The type of run takes on a very different feel based on who's doing the hiring.

Manadyne, for their part, doesn't seem to care whether the artifact has changed from the recent flux, they just want the item returned to them and their labs. If you read between the lines, though, it's pretty easy to see they're looking for those spe-



cial few. Local researchers are completely different. There's a focus on protecting the sites, investigating the items and surrounding area, and then only bringing something to them when confirmed.

- > I'll just say what I'm thinking. It felt like a magnet in a compass. I don't know how to harness it yet, but I am very interested in following where it leads. And that's not the only effect that is being reported. Some have seen items that act as a very small mana void, pulling all cast magic within two meters into the object. Either way, this is a fascinating new set of research that we can explore.
- > Elijah
- > So what happened to the one that you saw?
- > Bifrost
- > I am not keen to talk about it. Suffice it to say that it was stolen.
- > Elijah
- > The mana black hole sounds awesome to me. Imagine having what is effectively a shield to prevent spellcasters or spirits from hurting you.
- > Clarion
- > The person holding it was mundane, but its effects on the person weren't pleasant. They began to age rapidly. Magic, even during the low times, is still a main part of life.
- > Elijah
- > When the veil is lifted and the spell breaks, the world stands naked, dull, and fractured. The rivers, once murmuring secrets, run dry. Hearts turn to stone, and the whispers of possibility fall silent, leaving only the stark truth of shadows in a world stripped of wonder.
- > Many-Names

The fact is, we don't have runners here in Cairo, and I could honestly use more to help with the backlog. These are just a sample of the types of runs that I can put you to work on. Besides, you can get a front-row seat to Desert Wars while you're in this part of the world. Some of the jobs even come with travel if you're sent to remote areas.

- > Am-Mut laying it on thick pulling runners to her territory. I always thought that we were supposed to keep it to specific paydata, but you're just moving over because you're low on talent.
- > Cosmo
- > If we're recruiting new runners, Wuxing has been putting out a lot of jobs looking for teams to test out new procedures. As far as I've been able to determine, it's using geomantic principles to study the new manasphere.
- > Lei Kung
- > While it's still early since our re-Awakening, I've seen some wiz new items start to hit some of the research posts. They're being

secretive about it, which means it has to be good. One of the items acts as a device to take drain so you don't have to. I am stoked about this. Overcasting, here I come!

- > River Fish
- > If that's true, it could prove to be very useful in working advanced magic. But overcasting will still come with its own risks.
- > Neon Fireball

## SERIOUS STREET TECH

POSTED BY: RIKKI

Recent conflicts in the shadows have pushed the boundaries of cybertechnology. Its interplay with magic incentivized corporate research to allocate their budgets into those parts of their business. The aggressive schedules, big budgets, and high expectations caused many of these research facilities to cut short many of the testing and safety checks. Some of the new tech is half-baked and dangerous, but some of it's pretty stellar 'ware that can give you the edge you need.

We're seeing two major types of 'ware hitting the streets. The first is more of a salvage operation in which street docs recover chrome from those who don't need it anymore, then repurpose them. The fighting over the last year has been pretty intense in places, and we've seen this market grow substantially. The second market is the dumping ground of tech from corporations. Some of this 'ware is downright dangerous to users, while other pieces are the result of corps clearing out some of the experimental goods.

The salvage operations have been hottest where the fights were. The razor teams that were put in the field often had some real cutting-edge gear. One such location was Bismarck, which was in the magical blast radius of Delta-041. While the area is still toxic to life, some enterprising individuals were able to use drones to pull out some of the equipment and bodies. My contacts there have said they weren't able to recover all of it and lost a few drones.

While not every one of these sites ended up as a magical wasteland, there are multiple locations around the world where the combat was very heavy—they provide the best areas for available reclaimed gear. Many of the locations on the Divine Map are remote and could still have Harvesters, or what's left of them. But many of our big cities are located on ley lines and were the sites of some of the heaviest fighting. Budapest, San Antonio, Neo-Tokyo, Cairo, and more were all locations where we're seeing some advanced tech making it into the hands of gangers and new runners.

The reclaimed 'ware market for this 'epylon-ware' is limited in supply. I've heard of mul-



tiple Johnsons in these marketplaces hiring teams to head to some of the more remote locations to recover as much as they can. The pay I've seen on these runs has ranged from some high-nuyen offers to being able to select one of the pieces for installation. The high pay is nice, but those remote locations can often be dangerous and unstable.

Many of the corporations have a bunch of 'ware that's found its way to the streets. Evo, for one, was stepping up their manufacturing of some of this advanced tech, and they likely aren't the only ones. Those initial runs didn't meet the quality bar, but any smart wageslave or enterprising manager is going to find a way to recoup their costs to make the budget look a little better. Enter black-market pipelines. For Evo, one of their major pipelines is the Metal Angels. During the conflict, this pipeline helped fund the group in two key markets: Seattle and Vladivostok.

- Evo is what you think about when you think cyberware, but Spinrad Global has significant manufacturing capability. And whatever SG had in their pipelines has been finding its way into the hands of the Arab syndicate, Al-Akhirab Aswad Miyad. Cairo's market for experimental gear has created some intense battles between the different gangs who are fighting for control of the streets.
- Goat Foot
- For those who don't know who Al-Akhirab Aswad Mayid are, they're a criminal syndicate that controls drug operations in and around the Mediterranean Sea. They aren't limited to drugs, though it's a major source of their nuyen. If they are starting to control more of the cyberware black market pipelines, that can raise their profile on the world stage.
- Am-Mut

This cybertechnology doesn't just land in the streets. It relies on skilled cyber docs who are able to install and maintain this gear. The corps aren't going to let this research opportunity go to waste. If you look deep enough into the connections, training, and backing for the doctors, you're going to find at least one corporation there. The plus side is that you'll get better care because of it, though the cost is all your gear's wear-and-tear reports are going to find their way into some corporate database.

- This is another huge opportunity in the shadows. These reports have some serious value to those smaller research firms that have popped up. They may not have the deep pockets that the top hundred corporations have, but if you like sticking it to corps, then this is a good way to do that and make a little cred. I'd contact Doctor Olivier. She's got deep connections throughout the medical world and her funding doesn't seem to roll through the corps.
- Butch

The reclaimed 'ware is going to be the better of the two. It's the stuff that has the most testing

and is of a high enough quality to actually stick into someone. The dumping ground materials are a real high-risk opportunity. Sure, they don't have the ick-factor of having been installed into someone previously, but these are also the goods that weren't deemed valuable enough to either keep or install into warriors.

Besides these two pipelines for cyberware, there's a third type of 'ware out there that's extraordinarily rare. A lot of the gear has been more traditional in nature, just more advanced. There has been a bunch of work building off the Grey Brothers technology and new gear that has an impact on local manaspheres. Much of it was used to fight some metaplanar threats and doesn't have a lot of widespread availability. Some of the tech never even made it out of the labs.

A lot of Mr. Johnsons are paying serious nuyen to hit classified facilities to recover physical items or paydata about this type of research. The sites used for this research are all over the globe, and none of them rely just on their obscurity to protect themselves. One such site was located in the Takla Makan Desert. A team went to hit this location on a tip from Mr. Johnson, who we believed was working for Wuxing. From what little we've been able to glean, the site no longer exists due to some sort of catastrophic explosion in the area. The team is MIA.

- The team's either lying low or was taken out by defenses. What Rikki isn't saying was that the lab was owned by Evo. There's definitely a lot more going on behind the scenes on this one.
- Lei Kung
- Some highly sensitive people have been able to detect their locations based on the impact to mana flows in the region, which has resulted in locating research sites that aren't near any ley lines. Extraplanar defense technology often has a negative impact on the local manasphere.
- Elijah
- The other thing to note is that a lot of this research results in some pretty high body counts and is pretty damning in the view of the public. Animals, metahumans, toxic waste—it's all going to be messy, and the corps are going to want to keep all that far away from any prying eyes.
- Gramius
- The other big source of jobs we're seeing in Cairo is related to moving cyberware. In Cairo, a lot of that cyberware is coming from Spinrad Global and Evo. While most of the folks just see this as the corps dumping rejected 'ware or dangerous goods to the streets, this can radically shift the power structure in the neighborhoods. A lot of the jobs we've got are about controlling how these are getting distributed to the streets. We've seen some work to move this into the hands of street docs instead of moving it through the local gangs. I know a





few of those jobs have flowed through my portfolio. The gangs aren't taking this well and have stepped up their defenses and initiated some hits against the docs. Doesn't seem like the best thing to do since they're the ones installing this in you while you're unconscious. Next time you wake up, it might be with a kink bomb.

► Am-Mut

## STREET IMPACT

POSTED BY: SUNSHINE

Most of the time, the corps aren't going to have a direct impact on the streets. The obvious impact is from the products they shill, whether those are law enforcement products or the latest krill-patties. The next biggest impact is going to be the employees they pay for everything from janitorial services to management. They see you both as a customer and as a product. They sell to you, then they sell you out.

While these things haven't changed, any disruption to the status quo impacts everyone. What you quickly learn is that while a trickle-down economy is a load of drek, when things go bad, drek rolls downhill hard. We saw it front and center in Det-ro ... Motor City, and it's not going to be the last time a corporation picks up its toys and runs away rather than do something honestly good.

What's happening now with all the turmoil in the big economic centers will depend on where there are investments. While my normal reporting territory is Los Angeles, I pulled together some reports from my peers in other cities and locations.

Los Angeles has seen an increase in tension between PCC and Horizon. The increased landmass caused by the Un-Awakening and the disruption of the astral lens has created a land rush. Some of the damage done to the various seawalls constructed to protect individual mega-buildings has required an enormous expenditure to deal with that damage, which fell hard on Horizon since they owned most of those blocks.

A lot of that flooded land used to be home to some of the most violent gangs in LA. The formation of the alchera was compared to a biblical flood washing away the sinners. With the property now exposed, PCC has gone on a binge of asserting ownership over a vast portion of central LA, setting up security forces at critical checkpoints to "ensure the population is kept safe from damaged infrastructure."

- The infrastructure is damaged, but by the time the corporations have finished spending nuyen to rebuild, people will feel like they've been treated well. I fully expect corporate enclaves to spring up throughout central LA. I remember reading stories about people who lived there, and now it seems that it's just going to get snatched up by the corps.
- Borderline
- That's why some of the communities have started to hire some legal help, so they don't just sell out to the corps. And some of those law firms aren't squeamish about bringing in shadowrunners to help resolve some conflicts. If you're interested in this, you should head down and help out.
- Old Crow



Horizon hasn't ignored any of this. They've hired multiple runner teams to cause problems for the NAN corporate government. They've also sent teams to snatch up some property from under the nose of the PCC by falsifying ownership records or even purchasing property rights from individuals who were still alive in the intervening years.

But not all corporate money comes from the AA- and AAA-rated corporations. We've seen some construction companies in the area step up their efforts to rebuild parts of LA. These companies aren't hurting for cash, and they've been spending it on runners to disrupt their competitors. That's just a sample of all the places the city has been trying to rebuild and recover from the last thirty years.

The nearby city of San Diego had a very different story. Many of us in the shadows felt like Aztechnology's connection with Disian forces was going to doom the corp in the eyes of the populace. We forgot to factor in the power of the Azzies' media arm. They've completely buried the references to Dis and all their work to help them destroy the world.

- They've had lots of practice covering up the Azzies' bad behavior.
- Pyramid Watcher
- While it's not showing up in Aztlan, Horizon's been showcasing a number of pieces about brutality down in San Diego. It's been a boon for the media cycle.
- Sunshine

There's been some work to gather the people to do marches and shine a light on their transgressions against metahumanity. Corpsec came down hard on those folks and then buried the evidence. It wasn't long before the Aztlan security forces rolled in ... and helped Corpsec clamp down.

There was a lot of nuyen flowing in from outside entities to hire runners to set up those marches, record assaults, and disrupt the security forces. This made a great distraction for other teams that went in and sabotaged facilities, extracted key resources, and stole everything not nailed down. I expect that pattern to continue, but it won't work nearly as well.

- Normally, Mr. Johnson looks unfavorably on us if we steal something while on a run. In this case, the team was actually contracted to steal **this**. They wanted to do as much damage as possible to Aztechnology.
- High Road

Cairo is the other city I want to discuss. Isidora Nabil is a journalist and friend of mine who lives and works in the city. She's someone you'll want to look up if you're ever in town, and honestly, it feels like there's a lot of opportunity there.

The first big thing was the Un-Awakening. The practice of magic is banned in Egypt, at least in the law books. Some exceptions have been made

regarding Desert Wars and hunting evil magical entities. Because there are so few magicians, it's believed that there are a considerable number of magical artifacts just waiting to be found. When magic stopped, the population saw it as a sign that the return of God to their lives was at hand. No more need to allow heathens to practice their foul rites because the evil entities were destroyed.

It all seemed so happy until a couple weeks later when things flowed back in, and Egypt was awash in more magic than ever. While it's difficult to confirm because being a mage is still considered problematic, there are reports that some of the magical artifacts in the city have begun to exhibit odd effects. In one case, the statues in one of the museums moved from a standing position to being bowed before a pharaoh. Pretty eerie stuff.

- This is one place where an associate said there were magical items that were changed by the shifts in magic. It's definitely a place to keep an eye on.
- Elijah
- In the cocoon's silent shadow, forms twist and unravel, shedding the past in whispers. The unseen dance of change veils a future not yet born, where the mundane becomes the miraculous, and the known fades into the mystery of becoming.
- Many-Names

It's not all about magic. We have seen a sudden influx of money from anonymous third parties. While we haven't confirmed where it's coming from, exactly, we do know it's been invested in property, both convincing people to sell and falsifying records. My guess is someone rich is planning on moving in, but that money is definitely hitting the community. And those property fights have turned nasty.

The only source of true news continues to be the independent journalists, and even those aren't all that trustworthy of late. The disinformation campaign around the corps has been strong in Cairo, as they've been tossing nuyen at the feet of some of these journalists to sway the public. Sometimes it involves trying to get people out of a particular district using reports of toxic spills. Other times, it's just selling how great the corps are for the city. And for those journalists who refuse to suck from the corporate teat, the Big Ten has never been squeamish about removing those people from the gene pool.

So, if you are looking for Isidora, it might take some work. I know she's gone underground. But where you find her, you're going to find the resistance fighters who refuse to believe the bulldrek the likes of Spinrad Global and Saeder-Krupp have been saying. They've been banding communities together and striking back. Don't expect a big payout, but these jobs come with their own sweet rewards.

Just remember that the streets need your skills as much as the rich. Don't be one of the drekheads stomping on the misfortuned.









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