

THE NEVER-ENDING BATTLE

Caestus Pax stood at the window of the building overlooking the warehouse, his eufiber uniform darkened to blend into the shadows. From the outside, the warehouse didn't look like much, just another dilapidated building on the waterfront in Miami. But if their information was right, it was where the Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate was going to ship millions of dollars worth of drugs out to the rest of the country. But they wouldn't. He would see to that.

Christoph Yannik caught Pax's attention when he stepped out of the shadows in the corner of the room, where no one had been just a moment before. The Shadow Artist was just a blacker silhouette in the darkness for a second before he shifted back to his normal form, smiling his wry half-smile.

"The information was good," he announced in a low voice, with barely a trace of his native Austrian accent. "They're there, but it looks like they have some novas with them."

Pax slammed a fist into his open hand and cracked his knuckles, almost as loud as a gunshot in the small room. "So much the better," he said. "How many?"

"No more than three or four from the quantum signatures I picked up," the Shadow Artist replied.

"That's cutting it kind of close, isn't it?" Geysler said quietly, referring to the Utopia regulation that required members of Team Tomorrow to outnumber their nova opponents two-to-one before engaging them. Utopia didn't want any more deaths like Hiram Goldberg's, at the hands of Totentanz. They also didn't want any public embarrassments. Team Tomorrow was supposed to be invincible, at least in the public's mind.

A cold glance from Pax answered Geysler's concerns. "We're going in," he said. "Stick to the plan. We do this by the numbers." He turned to Ricardo Montoya-Bernal, the team-leader of T2M Americas and Pax's second-in-command for this mission. "Are Gaal and Najarian in place?"



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The green-skinned man nodded. “They should be able to capture everything as it happens.” Utopia hadn’t informed the media of this mission; it would have only tipped off the Megasyndicate and needlessly endangered baseline lives. Gaal and Najarian were novas and some of the best cameramen in the world. They would make sure the team’s triumph was captured for posterity — and for broadcast on every channel of the OpNet before the day was out.

“All right,” Pax said. “Let’s go.” With that, the members of T2M Americas went into action. The Shadow Artist stepped back into the darkness, vanishing from sight. Then Sneak disappeared into thin air with a faint popping sound. Pax knew they would both reappear inside the warehouse almost simultaneously, where Yannik would extend a blanket of shadows to black everything out. Pax turned to the rest of the team.

“Go.”

Ricardo, Ana, Geyser and Skew leapt into action. As they did, Pax felt the kinetic motion of the individual atoms and molecules of his body, a never-ending background buzz to his quantum-enhanced perceptions. With just a thought, he channeled all of that kinetic motion in a single direction, propelling him toward the side of the warehouse with the speed of a missile. A glowing blue field sprang up against him, cool against his skin, soaking up the energy from his passage through the air, absorbing any force directed at him. It flared as he hit the wall of the warehouse at almost Mach one.

Skew’s magnetic field kept most of the debris from going far, and Pax absorbed enough of the impact to keep the entire building from crumbling. But his entrance was spectacular nonetheless. As Shadow Artist’s inky cloud began to clear, the wall exploded inward, revealing Caestus Pax hovering in the midst of the gaping hole, flanked by the members of T2M Americas.

“Holy shit!” somebody shouted, then the air was full of flying lead, as several men opened up on the novas with their guns. Pax dropped to the ground and strode forward through the hail of gunfire like it was nothing more than a summer shower. Bullets struck his skin and dropped to the floor, their kinetic energy gone. He knew that Skew would shield the rest of the team from the gunfire, so he wasn’t worried. It was the gunmen who looked terrified as they watched him walking toward them, shrugging off everything they had. Now were was...?

“Pax, look out!” Sneak called from the other side of the room. A roaring gout of flames slammed into Pax as he turned toward the swarthy man who stepped out from behind a stack of crates, his body shrouded in fire. The flames played around Pax’s glowing form like water from a hose, having about as much effect on the leader of Team Tomorrow.

“Phosphorus, isn’t it?” Pax shouted to the other nova. “Didn’t anyone tell you it’s dangerous to play with fire? I think it’s time to put you out.” He hoped Gaal and Najarian caught that over the noise of the guns and the roar of the flames. It would play well to the public. Phosphorus sneered, but he looked more than a little startled by how casually Pax shrugged off his attack. The leader of T2M leapt into the air and headed straight for the burning nova.

Suddenly, glowing energy leapt off Phosphorus and turned into a figure standing between Pax and his target. He wore black, a close-fitting eufiber suit under a leather jacket, trimmed in red. His face was a hideous mass of scars, making his head look like a skull, but his eyes burned with a reddish light as he looked at Pax and sneered, those burning eyes boring into him. Pax recognized him, a second too late; ScarCrow.

The macabre figure vanished as suddenly as he’d appeared, and Pax started as he felt the other nova flow *into* him, into his body and his mind. Pax focused on the techniques Psyche taught him to deal with mental attack, but he could feel a fog spreading over his thoughts, and he heard a voice laughing in his mind.

“You’re *my* bitch now.”

* * *

Ricardo Montoya-Bernal ricocheted off a gunman and then a wall as he glanced up in time to see ScarCrow vanish in a flash of energy that leapt into Caestus Pax’s body. *Holy mother of God*, he thought, as he flipped to the floor, taking out another two *Mafiyah* gunmen as almost an afterthought.

“Sneak! Go and get Psyche! We need her here, *now!* Go!” The nova teleporter disappeared instantly. It would only take her a few moments to get to Venice and back.

Hovering in the air, Caestus Pax turned slowly toward the sound of Ricardo’s voice, and the field leader of T2M Americas started to pray....



Criminals are essential to the superhero comic books. After all, where would costumed heroes be without criminals to fight? From the Shadow ensuring that “the weed of crime bears bitter fruit” to Superman versus Intergang in the Suicide Slum of Metropolis, heroes have fought against criminals and organized crime. In the world of **Aberrant**, people with super-powers are a reality, so it’s only natural to expect them to fight crime — or is it? The thing is, most novas *aren’t* interested in fighting crime, and those who are may only be creating a new breed of criminal, criminals for the Nova Age.

There’s also something attractive about criminals. They’re romanticized in legends such as that of Robin Hood and in popular entertainment such as movies and television. We’re drawn to their secret society, existing outside the law, outside the rules we know and abide by. We idolize the outlaw, the person who has the guts and the will to take from life and defy the consequences. There’s also a tragic element to the criminal, trapped by his crimes and forced to live with them, that has fascinated us and become the subject of dramas from *Crime & Punishment* to *The Fugitive*.

Aberrant: Underworld looks into the shadowy underworld of the Nova Age and lays bare the syndicates that rule it and the people who rule them. From enemies for brightly clad heroes to fight to dark protagonists struggling to survive in a dangerous world, this book offers the information necessary to explore the many facets of the underworld of **Aberrant**.

How to Use This Book

Aberrant: Underworld looks at the four major syndicates of the world of 2015, their history, their structure, who’s who, how they make their money and who their enemies are. It also offers advice on using these syndicates in an **Aberrant** chronicle.

Chapter One looks at the **Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate**, the most powerful criminal organization in the world, heir to the legacy of the Mafia and the Russian syndicates that merged to form it, led by the most ruthless criminals and willing to go to any lengths to ensure its survival and prosperity.

Chapter Two describes the **Heaven Thunder Triad**, powerful Chinese syndicate with a long history shrouded in mysticism and secrecy. It covers the triad’s influence in Hong Kong and the Far East, the resources at its disposal (including novas) and its conflicts with other syndicates and cultures.

Chapter Three examines the **Nakato Gumi**, the ruling yakuza clan of Japan. It looks at how the Nakato rose to become the most powerful criminals in their homeland, its

ties with the Japanese government and its front company Kuro-Tek, purveyor of technology that Project Utopia has declared too dangerous to fall into the wrong hands, but which already has.

Chapter Four looks at the **Medellín Cartel** of South America, the drug-lords that reigned over their nations like kings before Project Utopia challenged the criminals’ supremacy, only to discover they were more difficult opponents than Utopia thought, particularly since the cartels have novas of their own.

Chapter Five provides **Storytelling** advice on using criminal syndicates in an ongoing **Aberrant** series and offers ideas on running adventures or series based around the underworld of 2015, complete with story ideas and hooks.

The **Appendix** features a couple of **Sample Characters**, useful as on-the-fly antagonists or as examples of criminal characters.

On Ethnicity and Crime

The information in this book, like that in many **Aberrant** books, is a reflection of things from the real world: The real Mafia, yakuza, triads and so forth are the models for the fictional versions presented here. In the course of creating these fictionalized versions, certain liberties have been taken to make them more interesting and better suited to the **Aberrant** setting.

The real-world criminal organizations these fictionalized versions are based upon are rooted in real cultures. The truth is that all cultures have criminals. Italians, Japanese and Latin Americans are no more likely to produce criminals than any other culture in the world. It just so happens that they produced the most organized and successful criminal organizations that are known to us today.

More often than not, these criminal organizations were formed by the outcast elements of their society and grew and prospered outside of their society’s laws and customs. In the United States in the early 20th century, for example, immigrants were often barred from success in legitimate businesses, allowing criminal enterprises to flourish among them. As these criminal syndicates have grown and developed, they have evolved alongside their cultures but also apart from them.

It can be easy to fall into racial and ethnic stereotypes when dealing with these criminal syndicates, but that doesn’t do justice to the organization or to the culture it originated from. Organized crime — like many things in the **Aberrant** world — is far more complicated than it first appears. Storytellers should keep this in mind when using these syndicates in their **Aberrant** games.

THE CAMPARELLI-ZUKHOV MEGASYNDICATE

Press Conference held November 7, 2001:

Caestus Pax: Ladies and gentlemen, as of this morning, at around 10:00 AM, a joint task-force — made up of Team Tomorrow, agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and officers the New York City Police Department — arrested the members of all five “families” of the New York City Mafia...

[tumult of noise erupts as Caestus Pax holds up his hands for quiet]

... These men are in custody, awaiting arraignment for the many crimes they’ve committed against the people of the city and state of New York. Yes?

Cokie Roberts, ABC News: How is this possible? I mean, how has this task force accomplished what authorities have been unable to do for years?

Caestus Pax: Well, we had a small role in that. Although I’m quite pleased with how the members of Team Tomorrow assisted in rounding up these criminals, our most important role came in the gathering of information leading to these arrests. Psyche’s telepathic abilities led us right to the evidence that mob bosses have buried for years to cover up their activities. With that evidence available to us, we were able to secure warrants for the arrest of all the people involved.

Wolf Blitzer, CNN: Are you concerned that evidence gathered using nova abilities might not be admissible in court?

Caestus Pax: I prefer to leave the legal issues to the lawyers, and I’m sure that the District Attorney can give you a better answer on that matter, but I’ve been assured by legal experts that we can, and will, make this stick. As of today, the New York City Mafia is *finished*.

From the case of US vs. Piero Giorie, 2001:

Prosecution: Do you recognize these documents, Mr. Giorie?

Defense: Once again, Your Honor, I renew my objection. This material was illegally obtained, and its source is highly suspect. Mr. Giorie’s civil rights have—

Bench: Your objection has already been heard and overruled, Mr. Gallo. The witness will answer the question.

Prosecution: I’ll repeat the question. Do you recognize these documents, Mr. Giorie?

Giorie: You know damn well that I do.

Prosecution: Your Honor, I present into evidence these ledgers, containing detailed information about funds obtained by Mr. Piero Giorie over the past seven years, funds not reported to the Internal Revenue Service or the State of New York. Mr. Giorie, what was the source of this unreported income?

Giorie: Why don’t you just have one of your Utopia freaks get that from my mind, too, if you haven’t already.

Defense: Your Honor!

Bench: Sit down, Mr. Gallo.

Prosecution:

Mr. Giorie?

Giorie: I don’t have to answer that. I know my rights.

Prosecution: That’s all right, Mr. Giorie, I think the evidence will speak for itself.



THE CAMPARELLI-ZUKHOV MEGASYNDICATE

Newark Police Department

For Interdepartmental Use Only**Date and Time:** 6/11/01, 12:14 AM**Location:** 701 E. Sedgwick, Apt. #201**Details of Crime Scene:**

Officers were dispatched to the scene after a call from a Mr. Tyrone Quinn of 701 E. Sedgwick. Mr. Quinn reported a burning smell from Apt. #201. Officers on the scene forced entry into the apartment and found the body of a man identified as Harold Bengotti.

Mr. Bengotti was found tied to a chair with duct tape and gagged with another piece of tape covering his mouth. He suffered severe burns to his chest, apparently from having an electric iron taped to it and turned on. The coroner at the scene tentatively identified the cause of death as third-degree burns, although a full autopsy is being performed (see attached autopsy report).

Mr. Bengotti was not the occupant of Apt. #201. The landlord identified the occupant of the apartment as Ms. Eileen Dunkowski. Ms. Dunkowski has been missing since shortly before Bengotti's death and is wanted for questioning. Witnesses reported Bengotti visiting Dunkowski's apartment on numerous occasions, and one neighbor described hearing loud arguments between the two.

Harold Bengotti's arrest record (see attached) shows a long-time involvement in petty crime, possibly connected to the Camparelli criminal syndicate. Officers found no evidence at the scene to connect Bengotti to any other criminal activities. Fingerprints recovered from the scene showed no positive matches in FBI criminal records, apart from Bengotti's.

From the journal of Hugo Pinella, 04/11/03:

A diary, can you fucking believe it? The doc thinks it'd be a good idea for me to keep a fucking diary! What am I, some 13-year-old girl? Still, Mr. C says he wants me to do what the doc says, so that's what I'll do. The doc says that writing all this shit down might help him figure out what's going on in my head since I erupted. I'm just doing it because it's what Mr. C wants.

Shit, I don't know what I'm supposed to write about. The doc probably wants to hear about my childhood and all that shit. Okay, my childhood sucked. How's that? In fact, my whole life sucked before Mr. C gave me a chance to make something of myself. Now that I'm a nova, I'm going to show him that he won't be disappointed in me. Anyone that fucks with the Family is going to have to deal with me.

Stanford University lecture series**From the Stanford University lecture series "Law in the Nova Age," presented by Prof. Alan Coleman, 10/07/2004:**

The precedents set by the first historic cases involving nova abilities have influenced all others that have come after them. When Team Tomorrow assisted in the arrest of New York City's most powerful organized crime figures, many legal experts called it a symbolic victory at best. They expected that defense attorneys would quickly overturn the arrest and indictment of their clients because the evidence they were based upon was gathered through the use of nova abilities, notably telepathy and other so-called "metasensory" powers.

What they did not consider was that Project Utopia and the District Attorney of New York had anticipated such challenges and prepared their legal arguments long before any arrests were made. When the inevitable challenges came up in court, they were ready. The District Attorney pointed out that private citizens, such as the members of Team Tomorrow, are not bound by the same rules of evidence as police officers and that they are empowered to report or prevent any criminal activities they are aware of. The fact that nova awareness exceeds that of the average citizen should not invalidate the precedent, they argued. The court system agreed, and New York's *mafiosi* were quickly convicted, followed by organized crime figures around the world.

While few can argue that the fall of the great Mafia families was any great loss to society, we must now ask ourselves: Once their "war on crime" has ended, where will Project Utopia's novas turn their all-seeing eyes next?



From the journal of Hugo Pinella, 12/26/09:

What a present to get on Christmas... I thought the Nakatos might try moving in on operations in San Francisco. Silicon Valley is close at hand, and that kind of technology was sure to get K-Tek's attention sooner or later. I'm kind of surprised Zukhov didn't see it coming, or maybe he did, and he's playing his cards really close to his chest. The Russians certainly don't want to show any signs of weakness, especially where their North American operations are concerned. Mr. C is letting Zukhov deal with it himself for now because he hopes the Russian will make a mistake, but Alexi Zukhov isn't the kind of man who makes mistakes, or he wouldn't be where he is now. Still, he *did* let the yakuza get the jump on him in California, so I guess we'll see what happens.

Private Memo

AOR: The Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate

DIRECTIVE FILE: CZ 100

REL: All division heads

IPSP: Standard

ENCRYPTION: Alpha

As their very name arrogantly illustrates, the so-called Megasyndicate is the largest and most powerful criminal organization in the world today. Because the main purpose of the Directive is not the pursuit of baseline criminals — as I've been so recently reminded — I will confine this report to the issue of nova risk factors involving the Megasyndicate.

While surveillance of an organization as paranoid as the *Mafiyah* (as the Megasyndicate is also known) is difficult, field agents have identified a number of novas working for the Megasyndicate. Most of these novas are already known to us as elites, either freelance or hired from an agency such as DeVries. The Megasyndicate may be one of the largest employers of nova elites outside of national governments, and it certainly has the resources to employ nearly any elite it wants.

Our research also indicates a small number of novas directly employed by the Megasyndicate, probably no more than 30 total throughout the organization, but that's still 30 people with the ability to tip the balance in favor of their employers. More importantly, these novas are directly, and often openly, engaged in criminal activity, unlike the majority we have under surveillance. I suggest this makes the Megasyndicate a more pressing concern than, say, the activities of the Protectors.

With the aid of novas, the *Mafiyah* remains just as strong as it was before Project Utopia began its "war on crime," perhaps even stronger. By taking action against the Megasyndicate, we can affirm the role of the Directive in the public's mind and subtly make it clear that we're capable of dealing with problems that Utopia has been unable to solve. In the process, we can eliminate a dire threat to our citizens and to our nations' security.

— Director Ilyanovich



THE CAMPARELLI-ZUKHOV MEGASYNDICATE

From the journal of Hugo Pinella, 07/10/10:

Looking back, it's hard to believe how much I've come to enjoy keeping this journal. Too bad I have to keep it heavily encrypted so that no one other than me will ever see it. Reading through it makes me realize just how far I've come from the man I used to be. I hardly recognize him, the kid from the streets who didn't know Plato, James Joyce or Ernest Hemingway from a hole in the ground. I've learned a lot since then. More than anyone else knows.

* * *

I've just had the most remarkable discussion with Mr. C! He came into the library as I was writing, and we started to talk. I think it was the first time since I've known him that I've ever really talked with him. I mean he's always been good to me, but tonight he talked to me like I was a peer instead of just some dumb bodyguard looking out for him. I think he was as surprised about it as I was, if not more. I've gotten to know more about my employer in the past few hours than I have in the past few years.

He's a troubled man, more troubled than even he knows. He's done right by the Family and built up the business again after Utopia tried to tear it down. He's put everything into it, but I don't think he's happy with the way things have turned out.

OpNet Log

Log of an OpNet call made to Bishop Dionigi Tettamanzi, Prelate-General of Opus Dei, 20/5/2010:

Unknown: Bishop Tettamanzi?

Tettamanzi: Who is this? How did you get this number?

Unknown: That's not important, "Your Eminence." What is important is what I have to say. I suggest that you listen very carefully.

Tettamanzi: Go on.

Unknown: Don't bother trying to trace this call, you won't be able to. This is just a courtesy. We know about the shit that you tried to pull in New York. I'm calling to tell you that if you try *anything* like that again, if you so much as breathe in the direction of any of our operations, somebody's going to kick you in the balls so hard that you'll choke"em. You got that?

Tettamanzi: How dare you! Do you really think you can threaten *me*? Do you have any idea with whom you are dealing?

Unknown: Oh, sure. The question is, do you? If you don't believe us, padre, go ahead and try something. We're just waiting.



THE CAMPARELLI-ZUKHOV MEGASYNDICATE

From the journal of Hugo Pinella, 11/04/14:

I went with Mr. & Mrs. C today to Boston to visit Joseph at Harvard. I like Boston; it's different from the kind of city I grew up in. I especially like the grounds of Harvard. Somehow it manages to cling to the atmosphere of a university from more than a century ago, in a simpler time, even with the kids walking the halls wearing eufiber jackets and chip players. I would like to spend some time there on my own, talking with people and exploring their library.

Mr. C wanted to take Joseph out to a place he knew in the North End, to talk with him about coming home for the holidays. He also had some business to take care of in the city, since numbers coming in from Boston have been down since the regime changed hands. He made it clear to Fitz that things had better start improving real soon or that they might change hands again. He shouldn't even bother waiting. How an idiot like Fitzgerald got to be in charge, I'll never know. It's not like he's running New York or LA. All he's got to deal with the Boston PD and maybe the Patriot, not fucking T2M! I wanted to suggest as much to Mr. C, but I wasn't alone with him while he was meeting with Fitzgerald, and I didn't want to say anything in front of anyone else.

I'm glad to see Joseph is doing well at school, I know that it makes Mr. C proud. But Joey just doesn't have it in him to take on the family business. He's nowhere near tough enough. He's a smart kid, but his parents sheltered him from too much all his life, and college isn't doing much to change that. It's widened his experiences, but I don't think it's preparing him for life with the Family. That's probably a good thing. Mr. C doesn't really want Joey to follow him into the family business, and Joey doesn't really want to, they just don't know how to express it. Hopefully, I can make it clear to Mr. C without hurting his feelings. It'd be better for everyone if Joey and Juli stayed away from the business. Maybe the holidays will offer a chance to set things up.

Project Utopia internal memo:

From: Maria Villareal, Dir. PR

To: Justin Laragione, Dir.

Re: Miami Megasyndicate Bust

Justin,

We've finished going through Gaal and Najarian's footage of T2M's raid on the C-Z warehouse in Miami. There actually turned out to be a lot more useable material than we originally thought. We're fortunate that Psyche's telepathic abilities — and ScarCrow's mental taunts — don't show up on digital recordings.

We've edited the material, keeping the part where ScarCrow takes control of Pax. We feel it shows Pax as vulnerable in a non-threatening way, while emphasizing the threat of novas working for the Megasyndicate. It plays a bit into concerns over metasensory powers in the US and Europe as well.

We cut out the material immediately following, making it look like Pax shook off ScarCrow's influence almost immediately and without any outside help. Naturally, we kept the part where Pax punches ScarCrow through the wall and cut his escape immediately thereafter. (The nova that rescued him, Zulu-Tango, didn't show up very well on the footage anyway.)

Would you like us to run the footage past you (and Pax?) before we release it to the media? There's no great rush. We've got the exclusive on this one, and the networks can wait until we're ready to give it to them.

Regards,
Maria



OpNet Log

Log of an OpNet conversation between Tolkach and Alexi Zukhov, May 30, 2015:

Zukhov: Is the situation in Ibiza under control?

Tolkach: Yes, sir. The fighting has ceased, and the cleanup process has begun. The hotel survived the conflict with only minimal damage.

Zukhov: Thanks to your quick thinking.

Tolkach: Thank you, sir, that is most—

Zukhov: Yes, yes, your efforts have been recognized and will be rewarded. I take it that you saw to it that all of our people were removed from the island as expediently as possible?

Tolkach: Yes, along with a few guests who were willing to pay generously to leave Ibiza as quickly — and discretely — as possible. The money will go toward repairing the damage to the hotel.

Zukhov: Keep the damned money. You earned it. Did you reveal your abilities to these other people?

Tolkach: Yes, but not until Mikhail ensured they were trustworthy — and that their memories would remain blurred afterward. There were no Utopia or Directive plants among them. In fact, I don't think either group took notice of our Ibiza operations. They have too many other things to worry about.

Zukhov: That won't last. If we want to consolidate our holdings in Ibiza, we'll need to move quickly. I've discussed the matter with Camparelli, and he agrees. You'll begin moving additional resources onto the island. The insurance companies will cover some of the damage but not all. There will be people in need of the kind of help we have to offer. I haven't sunk money into the Isla Blanca to see Ibiza's economy go down the toilet. We'll rebuild it, and we'll make sure that we own more of it than before.

Tolkach: Yes, sir. I'll see to all the arrangements. I know of a few parties who will definitely be interested in what we have to offer them.

Zukhov: Good, and Boris...?

Tolkach: Sir?

Zukhov: Stay away from the Phoenix Room. Tempting as it may be to offer to assist Vance in rebuilding, the place is going to be under Utopia's scrutiny for the foreseeable future. We must keep a low profile, so have nothing to do with what goes on there, understood?

Tolkach: Understood, sir.



History

The Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate (also known as the C-Z, the Megasyndicate or simply the *Mafiyah*) can trace its lineage back over 100 years to Italy, particularly Sicily. There, the Mafia was born from gangs hired by local land-owners to protect their property during the Napoleonic War with the French, leading to the popular story that the name

“Mafia” comes from the slogan

Morte alla Francia Italia anela, “Death to the French is Italy’s cry.”

When Napoleon’s forces retreated, the gangs turned on their employers. They extorted protection money from the landowners and terrorized the local peasant folk into supporting the gangs’ authority. Over time, they bought political offices and paid off law enforcement to ignore their criminal enterprises. The gangs expanded their influence and came into conflict with each other in bloody mob wars.

In the early part of the 20th century, Italian and Sicilian authorities began to crack down on the Mafia. Many of the *mafiosi* chose to immigrate to the United States, looking for new opportunities, setting up shop in cities with large immigrant communities and coming into contact with other mobsters and criminals. The Mafia prospered in the United States and, once Prohibition was declared, grew by leaps and bounds by smuggling and selling bootleg liquor. Throughout the 1930s, the mob was known across the country and throughout the world as the largest and most ruthless criminal organization in the United States, a proving ground for a menagerie of infamous figures, including Al Capone and “Lucky” Luciano.

The Mafia controlled the bulk of organized crime in the United States throughout the 20th century. Authorities sometimes managed to score victories against the Mob, putting away powerful crime lords, but the organization continued on, seemingly unstoppable, until the start of the 21st century.

The Russians

In the late 20th century Russia experienced a surge in criminal activity unlike any it had seen before. The collapse of communism combined with the harsh Soviet police state created fertile ground where Russia’s existing criminal gangs took root and grew rapidly. While the new government struggled to switch the economy over to a capitalist system, the Russian *Mafiyah* (or *Organizatsiya*, as it was sometimes known) smuggled billions of dollars worth of goods out of the country, robbing Russia and the Balkan Republics blind. The organization expanded quickly, and some experts point to the depredations of organized crime as part of the reason for the Moscow Crash of early 1999.

Ironically, the Russian *Mafiyah* was the group in Russia least affected by the Crash, since more money poured into

the black market to buy goods no longer available from the legitimate companies that had gone out of business seemingly overnight, and *Mafiyah* investments remained safe from the whims of the stock markets. The difficulties faced by the Russian criminals came from within, as rapid growth led to struggles for supremacy between rival factions. Bloody gang wars erupted in the major Russian cities, with the police barely able to keep them in check.

Utopia’s War on Crime

As part of its efforts to create a better world, Project Utopia turned its newly formed Team Tomorrow loose against organized crime in 2001. Using their nova powers, the members of T2M were able to accomplish what baseline authorities had failed to achieve for decades. They rounded up the major figures of the US Mafia in New York City in a matter of days, using abilities such as Mega-Perception and Telepathy to locate evidence of the mobsters’ crimes. The Mafia was caught completely off guard by the sheer boldness of Utopia’s actions. Before they even knew what was happening, the most powerful families in the nation were in shambles, their leaders in prison.

Mafia attorneys argued to overturn the arrests and convictions, citing long lists of violations of their client’s legal rights and of proper procedure. Although the lawyers appealed up to the US Supreme Court, the arrests were upheld. Since Team Tomorrow was not a law-enforcement organization, but a group of private citizens “doing what they could to help out,” the courts ruled they were not subject to many of the restrictions placed on law officers. The arguments of the Mafia attorneys rang hollow to judges tired of seeing criminals slip from the law’s grasp.

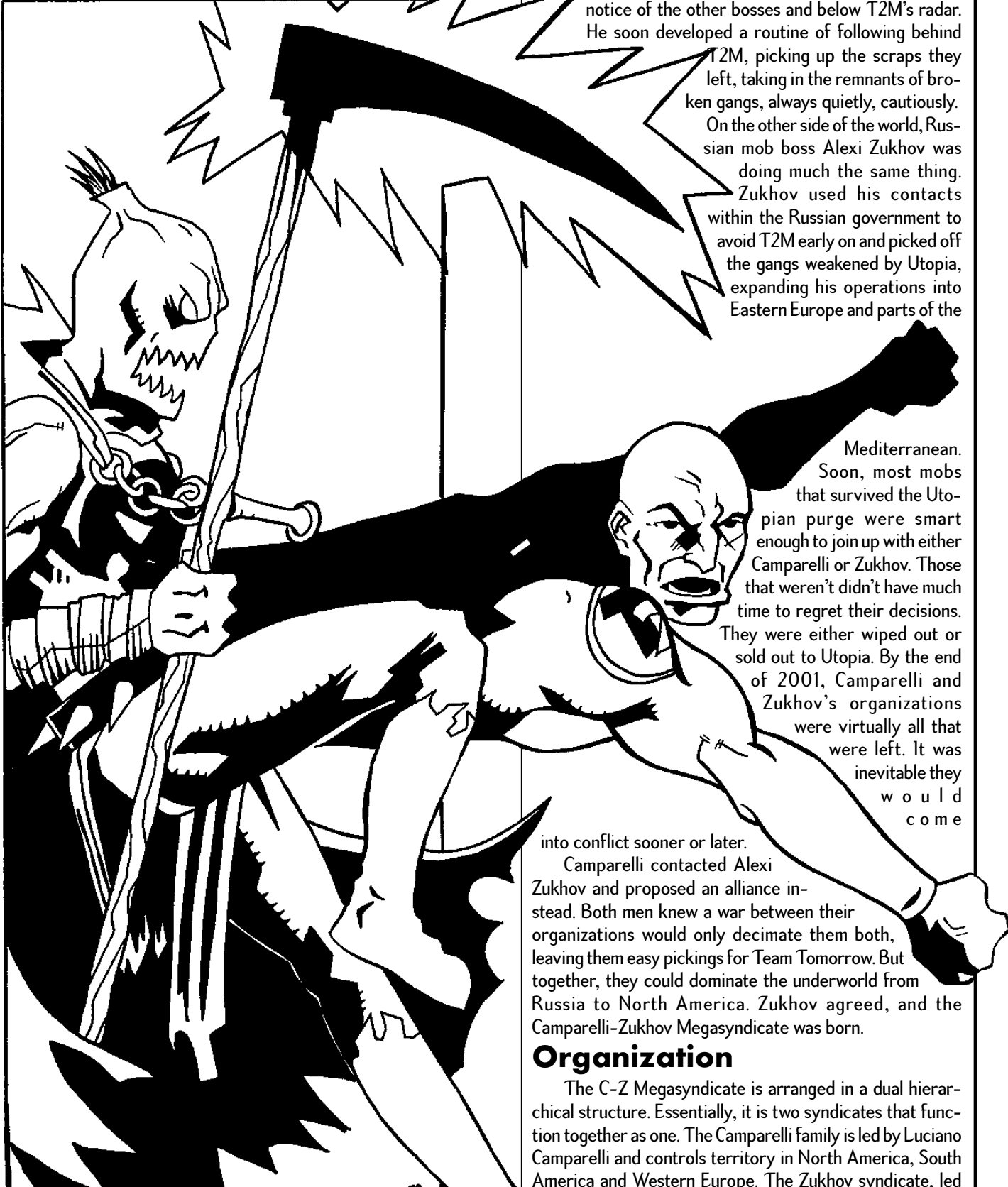
The remaining Mafia families panicked, and most were easily picked off by Team Tomorrow, although they fought back with everything they had. But guns and muscle were no match for the novas’ quantum powers. News footage of novas such as Caestus Pax walking calmly through hails of gunfire to reach the remaining mob bosses played on networks all across the world and sent a message to organized crime everywhere: You’ll no longer be tolerated. Team Tomorrow is coming for you.

The Megasyndicate Alliance

Throughout 2001, Team Tomorrow continued to cut a swath through organized crime, both in the United States as well as in Europe. In less than a year, T2M brought down the major criminal syndicates. It was then that the survivors finally began to regroup and take stock of the situation.

Luciano Camparelli was the don of a mid-level American Mafia family when T2M’s purges began. While other influential Mafia bosses were scrambling to cover their own asses, Camparelli seized the opportunity presented him and moved in on the operations of rivals taken out of the picture by T2M. He even arranged to leak information to Utopia to direct their operations where he wanted them to go.

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He moved carefully, behind the scenes, beneath the notice of the other bosses and below T2M's radar. He soon developed a routine of following behind T2M, picking up the scraps they left, taking in the remnants of broken gangs, always quietly, cautiously.

On the other side of the world, Russian mob boss Alexi Zukhov was doing much the same thing. Zukhov used his contacts within the Russian government to avoid T2M early on and picked off the gangs weakened by Utopia, expanding his operations into Eastern Europe and parts of the

Mediterranean. Soon, most mobs that survived the Utopian purge were smart enough to join up with either Camparelli or Zukhov. Those that weren't didn't have much time to regret their decisions. They were either wiped out or sold out to Utopia. By the end of 2001, Camparelli and Zukhov's organizations were virtually all that were left. It was inevitable they would come

into conflict sooner or later.

Camparelli contacted Alexi Zukhov and proposed an alliance instead. Both men knew a war between their organizations would only decimate them both, leaving them easy pickings for Team Tomorrow. But together, they could dominate the underworld from Russia to North America. Zukhov agreed, and the Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate was born.

Organization

The C-Z Megasyndicate is arranged in a dual hierarchical structure. Essentially, it is two syndicates that function together as one. The Camparelli family is led by Luciano Camparelli and controls territory in North America, South America and Western Europe. The Zukhov syndicate, led

by Alexi Zukhov, claims Northern Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa and parts of western North America as its territory.

Technically, the two syndicates are separate allied organizations, but they have continued to meld increasingly closer in the 15 years since the Megasyndicate was founded. They have a common vocabulary (laced with a number of Russian *Mafiyah* terms and expressions), similar traditions and similar ways of doing business. Lieutenants within each organization answer to their superiors but also defer to superiors from the other syndicate, if only out of respect for their influence.

The Vory

Camparelli and Zukhov each hold the title of vor, the heads of their respective syndicates. They each have other vory under them that run various territories (though some members of the Camparelli syndicate still use the term “don,” it’s falling into disuse). All of these crime lords make up what Megasyndicate members call “the Council” or simply “the Vory,” which oversees the operation of the Megasyndicate as a whole.

Despite appearances, the Council isn’t democratic. Camparelli and Zukhov hold supreme power, and their decisions are final. The Council only exists to keep the two men informed of what’s going on and to ensure that the decisions of the vory are implemented. Generally, Camparelli and Zukhov each run their organization as they see fit. In the event the two of them don’t agree on something, nothing gets done, but both men have learned to work together. In practice, Zukhov has a slight edge over Camparelli when it comes to getting his way, but the Russian knows better than to push his luck by lording it over his partner.

The Regimes

The Megasyndicate is divided up into “regimes” or areas under the control of a particular gang. The largest division is between East and West, roughly cutting through Europe. Everything in the West belongs to Camparelli, while Zukhov controls the East. Individual regimes vary in size, depending on population and the operations going on within the regime. For example, large cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Moscow, Berlin and such are considered regimes unto themselves, while more rural regimes are larger geographically but may actually contain fewer people. On each continent, the Megasyndicate has its strongholds and most valuable operations.

North America is largely Camparelli territory, particularly traditional *Mafiyah* strongholds such as Chicago, New York City, Boston and New Jersey. The northeastern United States has the largest concentration of Megasyndicate operations, although they can be found throughout the country. The West Coast is strongly influenced by Zukhov, and many of the mobsters in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle are Russian. The various Mexican criminal gangs were either incorporated into the Megasyndicate, wiped

out by T2M or too small for either organization to notice. The Megasyndicate treads carefully in Mexico because of Utopia’s influence and the presence of T2M Americas.

South and Central America are heavily influenced by the *narcotrafficante* (drug smuggling) cartels. The Megasyndicate buys a lot of its drugs from the Medellín cartel, and tends to leave its business alone, although Camparelli wouldn’t mind seeing T2M take the cartel down, leaving its business open for the Megasyndicate to snatch up. Smuggling, vice and other criminal enterprises in South America are strongly influenced by the Megasyndicate.

Europe is roughly divided between Camparelli and Zukhov. Neither has much influence in insular England, although they’ve made some inroads simply because England’s refusal to cooperate with Project Utopia makes it a safer place for the *Mafiyah* to operate. Some of the Megasyndicate’s personnel in England have been compromised by British nova Arthur Anningsley, although the organization remains unaware of it (see **Aberrant Worldwide — Phase II** for details). Camparelli controls gangs throughout Western Europe, including Spain, France, Belgium and Italy. Zukhov controls criminal activity in Eastern Europe, including the Balkan states, Greece, Turkey and Poland. The two have roughly equal influence in Germany, with the Russians slightly more powerful.

The Russian Confederation is, of course, firmly under the control of Zukhov’s half of the Megasyndicate. No criminal operation in Russia happens without Zukhov’s notice and implied permission. The Russians have extended their reach down into parts of India, controlling the very lucrative Indian vice trade, as well as parts of Africa and the Middle East, but they face stiff opposition from local criminal gangs there. They’ve had more success in Australia but face off against the triads in China, the Nakato Gumi in Japan and both organizations throughout Southeast Asia. This makes Zukhov’s territory more heavily embattled than Camparelli’s, which is comparatively secure. But Zukhov actually prefers it that way. For one thing, he enjoys the challenge, plus it also keeps his men combat-ready and ambitious. Camparelli is comfortable with that arrangement because it keeps his partner occupied and away from his holdings in the West.

Culture and Traditions

The Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate incorporates criminal gangs from many different nations and cultures, making it the most “multicultural” criminal organization in the world. As a result, the syndicate has abandoned or lost much of the cultural tradition belonging to the Italian-descended Mafia. Unlike the triads or the yakuza, both of which are steeped in tradition, the Megasyndicate is more like a business. Its traditions are few and simple.

The first and most important rule of the Megasyndicate is secrecy. The *Mafiyah* is a world unto itself, what the

Russians call *vorovskoi mir*, the thieves' world. Members of the organization are sworn not to reveal anything about it to outsiders on pain of death, and the *Mafiyah* takes that oath *very* seriously. The majority of executions carried out by the syndicate are of their own people who have violated their rules. Authorities can rarely find syndicate members (or even people associated with the syndicate) willing to testify in court because they know cooperating with the authorities means signing their own death warrants.

A tradition that has arisen around the *Mafiyah* code of silence is the "need to know." One of the downfalls of the old syndicates was Team Tomorrow's use of nova powers such as telepathy to gather information about the mobs and their operations.

The Megasyndicate protects against this danger in several ways. First, since it keeps its operations secret, it offers spies few opportunities to pursue information. Second, the Megasyndicate provides its members with only information that is vital to the fulfillment of their duties. Subordinates are often kept in the dark about exactly what they're doing and why, the rationale being that they can't betray information they don't know. (In time, this practice may prove a weakness in the organization, allowing middlemen to subvert the orders of their superiors, but it has worked well enough so far.) Third, the Megasyndicate has taken to using technology to thwart nova attempts at gathering information. One example is a drug known on the street as "brain burn" that ensures syndicate members won't reveal anything even if they are interrogated by a nova. Camparelli personnel often call the use of brain burn "the *omerta* treatment," referring to the old Mafia "code of silence."

Operations

It is simpler to talk about what criminal activities the Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate does *not* control than to cover the vast extent of the syndicate's influence in the criminal underworld. In general, the Megasyndicate avoids things such as protection rackets, small-time gambling and other operations it considers "penny ante." It leaves those to the small-time criminals (sometimes taking a cut of their profits as "tribute") and concentrates on more profitable enterprises.

Assassination

The Megasyndicate does perform murder for hire, although the vast majority of killings carried out by the Megasyndicate involves disciplining its own people rather than hired hits. Still, there's a brisk demand for hired killers that the *Mafiyah* is more than happy to fill. Thanks to Alexi Zukhov's KGB training, Megasyndicate assassins are quite competent. Their weapon of choice is usually a firearm — a silenced high-powered rifle from some distance away, for example. But they'll use whatever method fits the client's

Brain Burn

"Brain burn" is the street name for neurophyzine, a chemical that bonds with human neuroreceptors. It must be injected to have an effect. It's a mild sedative and analgesic, but it has a particular property when quantum energies (such as those associated with the powers of Telepathy and Domination) interact with the subject's brain chemistry. Telepathic interrogation triggers the chemical to cause a complete and rapid breakdown of the user's synapses, effectively destroying his brain. This process occurs as soon as a nova contacts the subject using a power affected by Psychic Shield (scoring one or more successes against the subject). The following turn, the subject has a seizure and suffers 10 levels of unsoakable lethal damage, typically meaning instant death for baselines. A nova telepath in contact with the subject's mind can make a Telepathy roll at +5 difficulty to retrieve a single memory or piece of information before the target's mind collapses entirely. The drug remains in the user's system for 8 hours before being metabolized and excreted and is only detectable with a blood test that specifically looks for it.

Syndicate members are often dosed with brain burn before engaging in operations where they might meet nova resistance, making it less likely for them to reveal anything if interrogated. The Megasyndicate often combines brain burn with drugs such as mite and Red 7 to make effective soldiers, blaming their deaths on the novas involved (it's difficult for a baseline to tell the difference between a telepathic scan and a lethal mind blast, after all).

Neurophyzine has no effect on novas; the emissions of the M-R node prevent the chemical from bonding with nova neurons and rapidly break it down into harmless chemical byproducts that are removed from the nova's system. The *Mafiyah* (along with the Directive, Kuro-Tek and a few other organizations) are working on a form of brain burn effective against novas, since it would seriously inhibit their powers, but, so far, with no success.

needs and gets the job done. Even most novas are vulnerable to a high-powered round to the head or a powerful contact poison, placed where they're sure to handle it.

Most *Mafiyah* hits are carried out against baseline targets. The Megasyndicate is reluctant to hit a nova — too high profile, too much potential for reprisal, in addition to whatever difficulties the nova's powers might pose. The cost for a nova hit is a great deal higher, often into seven figures, usually because the syndicate has to use a nova to get at a nova, especially a powerful one. Of course, there are also some novas the Megasyndicate won't go after for *any* amount of money; if you want Caestus Pax hit, you need to go somewhere else.

Mafiyah Lexicon

anasha: Hashish.

baklany: Punks.

bespredel: Disorder, crime. Literally, “without limits.”

bolshy: From the Russian *bolshoyeh*, meaning “great” or “big.” Refers to both size and quality.

capice: Italian for “understand,” used as a rhetorical: “Understand?” Currently falling out of use.

Council, the: The leadership of the C-Z Megasyndicate.

kaif: High on drugs.

La Cosa Nostra: “This thing of ours.” Sicilian reference to the Mafia. Falling out of use, except with the old guard of the Camparelli family.

Mafiyah: general term for the Megasyndicate.

minshy: From the Russian *menshyeh*, meaning “small.” Usually means something small-time or second-rate.

oo'zhas: Terrible, used similar to “too bad”. *Kakoy' oo'zhas:* “That’s terrible” or “that’s too bad.”

Organizatsiya: Organization, another name for a gang or syndicate. Old name for the Russian *Mafiyah*.

panama: A dummy corporation, usually set up to launder funds.

pitsani: Young men — the street-level members of gangs. From the Italian *pisan* and the Russian *patsani*.

shalit: Making trouble.

sportsmeny: Literally, “sportsmen,” former athletes or jocks (often bodybuilders using mite) who acted as enforcers and bodyguards. Currently refers to Russian novas working for the Megasyndicate.

stoh?: “Really?” A common interjection.

suki: Traitors, turncoats. Literally “bitches.”

torpedo: Contract killer.

vor: (pl. vory) Crime lord, head of a *Mafiyah* family.

vorovskoi mir: The “thieves world,” the underworld.

The Megasyndicate uses assassination (in conjunction with other intimidation tactics) to get what it wants from other organizations, including governments. More than a few uncooperative government officials have been eliminated by syndicate assassins, providing an example to anyone else who might decide to get in the Megasyndicate’s way.

Extortion

The C-Z Megasyndicate rarely uses extortion as a moneymaking scheme these days. Its members prefer to use such leverage to ensure cooperation from people who might give them trouble. The syndicate believes that everyone has something to hide, and it’s usually right. Find out what that something is, and you have control over that person, so long as what you ask of them isn’t worse than having the truth come out.

The *Mafiyah* has refined extortion to a fine art over the years. Its members know just how far they can push someone, just how much they can ask before it becomes too much. Sometimes they guess wrong, but most people are willing to do what it takes to keep their lives from being ruined, even if it means selling out to the mob. Of course, once you’ve done one “small favor” for the Megasyndicate, the slide down the slippery slope to *Mafiyah* control becomes that much faster.

Again, the Megasyndicate is very careful about blackmailing novas, simply because there’s usually more a nova can do about the problem. Still, novas have as many skeletons in their closets as baselines, if not more, and the *Mafiyah* doesn’t pass up a golden opportunity when it sees one.

Loansharking and Money Laundering

The Megasyndicate lends money to people in need, often those unable to obtain legitimate sources of credit. Although loansharking is a moneymaking operation (and syndicate interest rates are usurious), it’s primarily another form of extortion. Once someone takes money from the syndicate, he’s indebted forever, even if he manages to pay off the loan. All the syndicate has to do is threaten to reveal the source of his “sudden income.” The *Mafiyah* does much the same with other favors; it offers to help in exchange for an unspecified payment in the future. Even after the favor is paid back the victim still “owes” the syndicate because it could come out that the organization helped him.

The C-Z Megasyndicate is also involved in a large number of legitimate businesses, ranging from construction and transportation to OpNet startups, high-tech research and entertainment. Its legitimate businesses offer a means of “laundering” money acquired from other operations, via various banks and financial institutions. The syndicate passes funds through a series of complex financial transactions to hide the data-trail connecting the money to its source. With online banking via the OpNet and numerous international financial institutions willing to keep customer information strictly confidential, it’s not overly difficult for the Megasyndicate to “wash” its dirty money clean.

Once it’s “washed,” the money can then be “dried” by investing it in some legitimate business or other financial activity. Real estate is a popular investment for the C-Z Megasyndicate. It owns huge chunks of land around the world, from beachfront property in Miami and LA to mansions in Europe, skyscrapers in New York and even old military bases in Russia and elsewhere.

Another resource the Megasyndicate has for laundering money is the Catholic Church. Since the Vatican is accorded special diplomatic status, its financial records are not open to outside scrutiny, and its funds are controlled directly by the Pope. He has the authority to create special monetary funds for any project of the Church, including

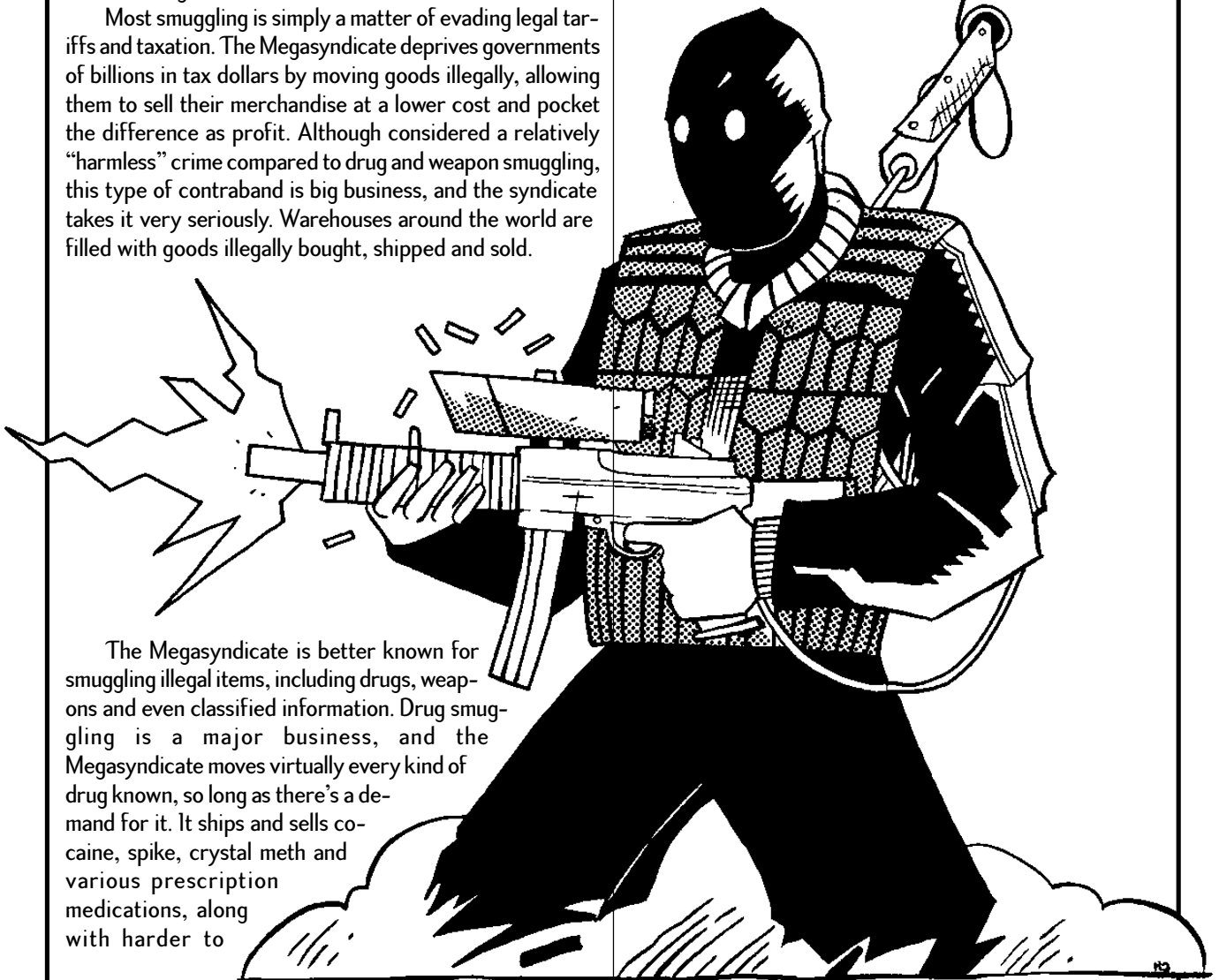
charitable works. Money can then be paid out to front companies owned by the Megasyndicate. Dirty money flows into the Church, disappears behind a wall of secrecy and re-emerges later as fees paid to syndicate-owned businesses, usually for work that never gets done. The Megasyndicate's primary difficulty with this approach has been avoiding banks controlled by the Opus Dei order, which is opposed to both the *Mafiyah* and the current Pope (see "Relations" for more information on the Megasyndicate's relations with the Vatican and Opus Dei).

Smuggling

The *Mafiyah*'s largest moneymaking operation is the smuggling of goods across national boundaries and selling them, either on the international black market or through legitimate businesses controlled by the syndicate. The C-Z Megasyndicate moves billions of dollars worth of merchandise annually. It smuggles everything from electronics and cigarettes to drugs, raw materials, precious minerals and other trade goods.

Most smuggling is simply a matter of evading legal tariffs and taxation. The Megasyndicate deprives governments of billions in tax dollars by moving goods illegally, allowing them to sell their merchandise at a lower cost and pocket the difference as profit. Although considered a relatively "harmless" crime compared to drug and weapon smuggling, this type of contraband is big business, and the syndicate takes it very seriously. Warehouses around the world are filled with goods illegally bought, shipped and sold.

The Megasyndicate is better known for smuggling illegal items, including drugs, weapons and even classified information. Drug smuggling is a major business, and the Megasyndicate moves virtually every kind of drug known, so long as there's a demand for it. It ships and sells cocaine, spike, crystal meth and various prescription medications, along with harder to



find drugs such as adrenocilin, mite, mox, Red 7, brain burn and eclipsodol. The Heaven Thunder Triad controls the opium trade, the Nakato Gumi controls drug smuggling in and out of Japan, and the cartels control the cocaine trade, but the rest belongs to the Megasyndicate.

Arms sales include Soviet-era weapons smuggled out of Russia, along with other military-surplus equipment bought up (or stolen) by the *Mafiyah* and sold to customers all over the world looking for a little extra firepower. Syndicate arms-dealing focuses on quantity over quality. If you want the latest in high-tech weapons, you buy from Kuro-Tek. If you want a dozen crates of assault rifles to supply a guerilla army, you buy from the Megasyndicate. Although the equipment is somewhat “dated” (typically 1980s and 90s vintage), it still gets the job done and can include things like rocket launchers, grenades and even military vehicles (although tanks are a bit hard to get ahold of without at least a week or two’s notice). There are even rumors that the Megasyndicate has slipped a few “misplaced” nuclear warheads out of Russia. If so, they haven’t turned up yet, although the source of the nuke used in the Sao Paulo bombing still hasn’t been found....

Vice

A major source of income for the Megasyndicate is the vice market, which it has reinforced its hold over in the past 15 years. The *Mafiyah* controls vice operations throughout its territory, raking in huge amounts of money. Although “vice” technically includes the sale of drugs, in this case, it refers almost exclusively to the sex industry.

The *Mafiyah* produces and sells pornography, both legal and illegal, for sale worldwide. It’s invested in legally recognized porn studios and publishers, and it pays for the production of “specialty” products such as child pornography, snuff films and other kinks. Mafiosi talk about the “skin bribes” they exchange with the Nakato Gumi, buying technology and information with porn, which the Nakato can resell in Japan for a substantial profit.

The Megasyndicate also controls the illegal (and much of the legal) sex trade in the world. It’s been most successful with prostitution rings and flesh trade in South America, Asia and Africa. India, in particular, is home to a booming sex industry. The *Mafiyah*’s affiliated gangs can barely keep up with the demand for pliable young women (and, occasionally, boys) in the new entertainment capitol of the world, and the prostitutes have been getting younger and younger. Women and girls in India are regularly sold into virtual slavery to brothels and sex clubs, as are girls and boys in Thailand. Project Utopia and United Nations reports estimate approximately 1.3 million minors (under the age of 18) work in the sex industries of India, Thailand and the Philippines alone, to say nothing of the adults.

The *Mafiyah* also has a brisk international slavery market, where people (usually children from third-world

countries) are bought and sold, mostly to pornographers or sex businesses in other nations. Nepalese women and girls remain popular in India; Caucasian women are in demand in Japan and parts of Southeast Asia. Some of these women are entrapped by offers to relocate to other nations to become “actresses” or “models,” but most are simply abducted or sold by their families.

The vice industry also provides considerable leverage for the Megasyndicate. A carefully placed digital camera can provide the Vory with the means to control someone of influence, and people addicted to the pleasures the *Mafiyah* has to offer rarely refuse it the occasional favor. With their often-voracious libidos, more than a few novas have fallen prey to this scheme.

Personnel

The Megasyndicate has over a million people working for it worldwide, although most of them are barely aware of the organization they serve. They are small time criminals and gangs that owe their loyalty to a Megasyndicate higher-up and pay “tribute” for the privilege of doing business unmolested. Those who fail to pay usually end up dead as an example to educate others.

Soldiers

The *Mafiyah* rarely uses the old term *soldatos* any more to refer to its strong-arms. The Megasyndicate’s muscle is referred to as *pitsani*, or “young men.”

Pitsani are the lowest-level Megasyndicate enforcers, little more than street thugs or punks working with the *Mafiyah*’s blessing. They’re viewed as cannon fodder — and are likely to be sacrificed to the police if necessary. Since they hardly ever know anything about syndicate operations, they’re a loss the *Mafiyah* can afford. There’s always more where they came from.

Some *pitsani* manage to survive the shark-tank of Megasyndicate service, earning the respect of their superiors. They’re the true professional leg-breakers and enforcers of the mob, and many of them take mite to bulk up, making them huge and amazingly tough (for baselines). Their line of work and their mite use tend to give them a fairly short life expectancy, however, and they’re still seen as expendable by *Mafiyah* higher-ups.

Made Men

The managers and middle managers of the Megasyndicate, the so-called “made men,” either rise through the ranks or (more rarely) inherit their positions. They usually maintain the fiction that they are “legitimate businessmen,” involved in running one or more of the Megasyndicate’s many front companies and money laundries. Behind the scenes, they help direct the business of the *Mafiyah* and carry out the orders of their superiors.

Made men placed in charge of a regime by Camparelli or Zukhov are called by the title vor and have complete control

over (and responsibility for) their territory. They answer to one of the two heads of the Megasyndicate, and occasionally, a vor comes to a very unpleasant end to remind the rest that neither man tolerates failure or insubordination.

Nova Enforcers

The C-Z Megasyndicate uses more nova agents and enforcers than any other criminal organization, although most novas working for the *Mafiyah* are not actual members of the organization. The Megasyndicate generally employs nova elites to handle matters requiring quantum-powered intervention. Agencies such as DeVries and Janissaries do a brisk business with the Megasyndicate, which also employs freelance novas through various fronts and shell companies. For more information on mercenary novas in general, consult **Aberrant: Elites**.

The novas working directly for the Megasyndicate do so for various reasons. In a few cases, they belonged to the Mafia before they erupted. Other novas owe the Megasyndicate in some way, either for help out of a particularly difficult situation or for access to vices such as gambling, rough sex or soma addiction. The underworld is, relatively speaking, a haven for novas hideously twisted by taint. The Megasyndicate doesn't care what its hired muscle looks like, and it pays well. The *Mafiyah* controls some novas through blackmail and extortion, but that's a dangerous game, and it certainly doesn't rely on such novas for sensitive missions.

Finally, there are some novas who work for the *Mafiyah* simply because they enjoy it. It either fulfills a particular sociopathic kick, or it allows them to indulge their aberrations, particularly mental aberrations that get them barred from "decent" society.

The Russians refer to the novas working for the syndicate as "*sportsmen*," a name formerly used for baseline enforcers and strongmen. The term spread to the Camparelli family, and many of its members also refer to mob novas as "sportsmen."

For examples of novas working for the C-Z Megasyndicate, check out **Aberrant Worldwide — Phase II**. ScarCrow, Phosphorus, Spook and Zulu-Tango (pp. 37-39) are regular Camparelli family enforcers, and Mikhail "Torpedo" Khairedinov (pp. 145-146) is a telepath working for the Zukhov syndicate. Two other Megasyndicate novas are detailed at the end of this chapter.

Relations

The Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate has few allies, but those it does have are powerful. The syndicate's influence is far reaching, but the *Mafiyah's* enemies are just as powerful as it is, if not more so.

The Russian Confederation

Officially, the government of the Russian Confederation is opposed to the Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate and all that it represents: loss of tax revenue and legitimate trade,

the spread of drug addiction and prostitution and the use of violence against honest citizens. The reality is that the relationship between the government and the Megasyndicate is much more complex. Zukhov knew Confederation president Andrei Srebrianski from their days together in the KGB. He used his connections with Srebrianski to help his syndicate grow in the early days and his knowledge of how Srebrianski thought in later years. What Zukhov didn't count on was Vladimir Sierka's eruption.

Strangely enough, the brilliant nova's involvement in Russian Confederation policy doesn't seem to have affected the Megasyndicate all that much. That's because, unknown to Zukhov, the syndicate figures in Sierka's plans for the future of the Confederation — at least for now. The existence of the *Mafiyah* and the black market it controls is part of the delicate "ecology" of Confederation economics. It plays a part in making the whole system work, provided that it does not grow out of control like a cancer, threatening the rest of the body. Sierka has helped quietly steer problems away from the Megasyndicate, while he considers how best to deal with it. In so doing, he may be underestimating the cleverness of a man such as Zukhov and his ability to influence events. By the time Sierka is ready to deal with the Megasyndicate, it may have already come up with a way to deal with him.

Project Utopia

Project Utopia considers the Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate a threat to public safety and to the Project's goals. On the more cynical side of things, Utopia also finds the *Mafiyah* a useful "bad guy" that plays well to the media. Having Team Tomorrow break up a Megasyndicate operation guarantees a rise in approval ratings, no matter how slight — and with incidents of tainted novas becoming increasingly widespread, such spin control is not to be taken lightly. Still, dealing with the Megasyndicate is not high on Utopia's list of priorities, and the Project has discovered that eliminating organized crime is more difficult than it first suspected (see "The Weed of Crime Has Deep Roots").

For its part, the Megasyndicate tries to stay out of Utopia's way and not attract attention. Both Camparelli and Zukhov are confident that there will always be a need for the goods and services their organization provides, no matter how much Utopia "improves" the world, and so far, they appear to be right. Camparelli is more worried about Utopia than Zukhov simply because he's more exposed to Utopian intervention than his Russian partner. Camparelli still remembers Utopia's major offensive against the families and doesn't want to see his organization meet a similar fate, so he prepares as much "insurance" as he can against that day.

The *Mafiyah* cultivates influence within Utopia when possible, using old-fashioned techniques such as blackmail. But opportunities are rare to "hook" someone high-placed

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enough in Utopia to be useful but low-level enough not to provoke an investigation (and possible reprisals). Still, that doesn't keep the syndicate from trying.

The Directive

The Megasyndicate has an adversarial relationship with the Directive for a number of reasons. First, Directive founder and Russian Director Petr Ilyanovich knows Zukhov from their KGB days, and Ilyanovich worked as a commander for SOBRE, the Russian elite police unit created specifically to fight the *Mafiyah*. Ilyanovich has lost friends and colleagues to Zukhov's syndicate, and he's seen first-hand the kind of brutality Zukhov and his people are capable of. Ilyanovich would like nothing more than to see Zukhov publicly tried and executed for his numerous crimes, and the Director's frustrated by the fact that Zukhov has managed to evade justice for so long.

Fortunately for Zukhov and the Megasyndicate, Ilyanovich's fellow directors aren't about to let him use the organization for carry out a personal vendetta. Still, Ilyanovich finds ways to turn the Directive against the Megasyndicate from time to time. A major opportunity is provided by the *Mafiyah*'s use of nova agents and mercenaries, something of grave concern to the Directive.

Directive agents have conducted surveillance and "sting" operations against the Megasyndicate worldwide, but there are simply too few field agents for the Directive to wage all-out war against the *Mafiyah* with any chance of success.

The Catholic Church

The *Mafiyah*'s relationship with the Catholic Church is a complex one, to say the least. The original Sicilian founders of the American Mafia came from a strong Catholic background and maintained ties with associates back home in Sicily. During World War II, the American Mafia cooperated with its Sicilian brethren to facilitate the American invasion of Sicily and to bring down Mussolini. It also worked with elements of the Catholic Church to safeguard church people and property and to secure finances for the Church via Catholic-run banks.

One of the most influential factions within the Church in this area is Opus Dei ("God's Work"). It is a small Catholic order founded by Josemarie Escriva in 1928. Its mandate is to expand the influence of conservative Catholicism across the world. It recruits from the affluent and well educated and has people in positions of influence in governments and businesses throughout the world, in Europe and South America particularly.



The Weed of Crime Has Deep Roots

Although its initial anti-crime program was stunningly successful, Project Utopia has found the elimination of organized crime a much more difficult task than it expected. The simple truth of the matter is that, while Team Tomorrow and other nova agents managed to bring down some of the most powerful criminal figures in the world and close down their operations, others, such as Luciano Camparelli and Alexi Zukhov, have simply stepped into the vacuum. Their organization is just as powerful and wealthy as the Mafia that came before it, if not more so. In fact, by “pruning” the less cautious criminals, Utopia has ensured that only the smartest and most ruthless crime lords still operate in 2015.

So long as there is a demand for the kind of goods and services organized crime has to offer, groups such as the C-Z Megasyndicate (and the Nakato Gumi, the Heaven Thunder Triad, etc.) will continue to exist to take advantage of them. Utopia has done a great deal to fight crime but not as much when it comes to addressing the root causes of crime itself — and the criminal syndicates have very deep roots indeed. Pulling them up may not be a task Utopia can complete even in a single generation.

When Albino Luciani was elected Pope John Paul I, there was considerable speculation that he was planning to clean up financial intrigue within the Vatican, including dismissing a number of priests with ties to the Mafia. Thirty-three days after his election, John Paul I died of a heart attack in his bed, and soon after, Karol Wojtyla was elected Pope John Paul II. The new Pontiff prayed before Escriva’s tomb before his elevation and made it clear that he favored Opus Dei.

John Paul II denounced the Mafia publicly, while, at the same time, the Vatican moved millions of dollars through Catholic banking institutions into the Solidarity Trade Union in Poland (a personal project of the Pope’s). In 1982, the mysterious death of Roberto Calvi, chairman and managing director of the Banco Ambrosiano in Milan, was linked to ties between the Vatican and the Mafia’s money-laundering operations. The Vatican’s political autonomy effectively ended any investigation into the matter, and Calvi’s death was ruled a suicide. That same year, the Pope made the Opus Dei order *Autocephalous*, a personal prelature not tied to any diocese and answerable only to the Pope himself.

Mafia involvement in Vatican affairs appeared to end when Project Utopia brought down the most powerful Mafia families. Not long thereafter, John Paul II passed away after years of poor health. Just before he died, the Pope elevated Opus Dei Archbishop Juan Luis Cipliani to cardinal, and many believed Cipliani was destined for the Throne of St. Peter. But that was not to be. It turned out that while the Opus Dei thought the Vatican’s ties with organized crime

were severed by the fall of the major crime families, not all connections were lost. Luciano Camparelli pulled strings, called in favors and threatened to expose secrets to ensure that Mario Bardi became the next Prelate of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI.

Benedict’s liberal attitudes antagonized Opus Dei but won him friends elsewhere, including the nova community when he issued *Ad Dei Lucem*, declaring that novas have souls and are capable of salvation through Christ. Such behavior put Benedict above reproach and made him an ally of organizations such as Utopia. He also serves as “insurance” for the Megasyndicate. If Utopia wants to take Camparelli-Zukhov down, it risks exposing ties between the mob and the Vatican and erasing all the good work Pope Benedict XVI has done for baseline/nova relations, to say nothing of handing the Papacy over to the nova-hating, fanatical Opus Dei.

Ironically, Opus Dei attempted to deal with Benedict by framing him as a *Mafiyah* collaborator, the very same threat the Megasyndicate held out. The plan failed and brought the order to the attention of Luciano Camparelli. The conflict between them has become a shadow war, with both sides struggling for control of the Papacy but neither willing to risk exposure of their complicity in other criminal schemes, nor willing to risk endangering papal prestige and legitimacy.

For more information on Opus Dei, its plans and its nova agents, see the **Aberrant Storytellers Screen** (pp. 18–21) and “The Pope of Babylon” in **Aberrant Worldwide: Phase II**.

Other Syndicates

Now that it has achieved a measure of stability, the Megasyndicate has turned its attention toward territories occupied by rival syndicates.

The Medellín Cartel

The cartel is the least of the Megasyndicate’s concerns. The cartels is smart enough to restrict its activity to what it does best, namely grow and sell illegal drugs, mainly cocaine. Since it’s also attracted a great deal of Project Utopia’s crime-fighting attention, the cartel helps to serve as a “smoke screen” for the Megasyndicate. While Utopian novas are busy struggling with the cartel (and its hired nova enforcers), the Megasyndicate can go about its business of selling the drugs purchased from the cartel. There’s some concern that the cartel’s close association with some novas might lead to it actually making a move against the Megasyndicate, but with Utopia’s attention focused on the organization, it seems unlikely.

The Heaven Thunder Triad

The Heaven Thunder Triad is one of the Megasyndicate’s chief rivals in the Far East, particularly China and parts of Southeast Asia. It controls smuggling and vice in the Golden Triangle, lucrative businesses the *Mafiyah* would like to have. Zukhov has proposed an alliance with the triad rather than fighting a war against it, but the Heaven Thunder has shown

no interest whatsoever in cooperating with a Western criminal syndicate. If Camparelli-Zukhov wants to get its hands on triad operations, it'll have to pay for the opportunity in blood, something the Megasyndicate has never shied away from in the past.

The Nakato Gumi

The Nakato Gumi is the Megasyndicate's closest rival. The two organizations are, in many respects, quite similar: They are both forward thinking and understand the importance of alliances and outside ties to preserve them against enemies such as Utopia. They're both interested in advances in technology, although the Nakato has taken greater advantage of them through Kuro-Tek. The Megasyndicate controls more operations worldwide, but the Nakato Gumi's corner on the black technology market makes it a force to be reckoned with. All in all, the two syndicates are well matched, but the *Mafiyah* isn't going to let that keep them from bringing the yakuza down.

The Megasyndicate's efforts to weaken the Nakato Gumi are primarily indirect. The *Mafiyah* supports high-tech development behind the scenes to shrink Kuro-Tek's market for illegal technology. Unfortunately, the Nakato Gumi turns around and steals developments paid for by the *Mafiyah*. The Megasyndicate quietly backs Utopia's struggle against Kuro-Tek, but the reliance of the Directive on Kuro-Tek equipment makes this position a difficult one for Zukhov to maintain. The C-Z Megasyndicate squeezes Nakato drug shipments headed for Japan and strikes back fiercely at any attempt by the yakuza to move into Megasyndicate territory, causing trouble in Pacific Rim areas such as California and Eastern Russia. The two syndicates have also clashed in Australia, where the Megasyndicate has the edge over the xenophobic yakuza.

Dramatis Personae

Alexi Zukhov

Background: Alexi Zukhov grew up under the rule of communism but quickly learned the ideal of a perfectly equal society didn't really exist in the Soviet Union. He enlisted in the army to escape a dreary home life and performed well in his duties. His skills as a soldier, including marksmanship and a certain "moral flexibility" came to the attention of the KGB. It offered Zukhov a job, and he took it without hesitation. It trained him as an assassin and spy, and he served well, although not of out any real sense of patriotism or national pride. He did so because it meant rising to the top of "egalitarian" Soviet society.

In the late 1980s, Zukhov saw the writing on the wall and left the KGB before the collapse of the Soviet Union. He used his considerable contacts and skills to move into the Russian underworld, taking control of a number of criminal operations based out of Moscow. His foresight served him again during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the



formation of the Russian Confederation, when he increased the size of his organization by taking over smaller gangs and smuggling goods into and out of Russia. His leadership abilities and reputation for sheer ruthlessness have made Zukhov one of the most feared men in Russia.

He quickly saw the potential in an alliance between his organization and the Camparelli syndicate but allowed Camparelli to contact him to save face and ensure that he was interested. With their alliance in place, Zukhov has become one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the world, a position he feels suits him.

Image: Zukhov is still quite fit in his late 50s, with salt-and-pepper hair and a full beard and moustache. He dresses well, in expensive suits, and has a fondness for the finest vodka and Cuban cigars. His voice is a deep bass, and he speaks English with only the slightest trace of a Russian accent. He speaks slowly and clips his sentences when he's angry but smiles and laughs easily at other times.

Roleplaying Hints: You know that nothing in this life is free. If you want something, you have to go out and take it. If someone tries to take it away from you, you kill him. That's how the game works, and you play it exceedingly well. About the only thing the Soviets got right was that they knew there is no God. This life is all anyone gets, so you're going to make yours enjoyable, knowing there's no punishment awaiting you in any sort of hereafter. Conscience and sin, these are things lesser men cling to and hope for something better. You know the truth, and that sets you free.

Gear: Cell phone/PDA combo, Makarov automatic pistol, gold cigarette lighter

ABERRANT

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Determined), Perception 3, Intelligence 4 (Calculating), Wits 5 (Cunning), Appearance 3, Manipulation 4 (Devious), Charisma 5 (Magnetic)

Abilities: Academics 2, Athletics 3, Biz 3, Bureaucracy 4, Command 4 (Discipline), Computer 1, Drive 3, Endurance 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 5 (Targeting), Interrogation 4 (Torture), Intrusion 3, Investigation 4, Linguistics 3 (Native: Russian; English, German, Spanish), Martial Arts 3, Melee 2, Might 1, Resistance 5 (Resist Interrogation), Stealth 2, Streetwise 5 (Black Market), Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Backing 5, Cipher 4, Contacts 5, Followers 5, Influence 4, Resources 5

Willpower 9

Luciano “Luc” Camparelli

Background: If he had been born into any other family, Luc Camparelli would probably be CEO of a major multinational corporation. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, Camparelli was born a third-generation *mafioso*; his father and grandfather were both involved in the “family business”; therefore, so was he.

Luciano was always expected to succeed his father in running things, he just ended up doing so sooner than he thought. His father died of a stroke when Luc was in his late 20s, and he took over the business at a comparatively young age. That may have been one of the things that made Camparelli such a progressive leader and gave him the insight to seize the opportunity Project Utopia gave him when they brought down the New York families. Certainly, none of the older Mafia dons expected Camparelli to move against them. It was a serious risk, but it paid off — in spades.

Within a year, Camparelli was in control of what was left of the Mafia in the Americas and much of Europe. He was on top of his game, but he wasn't willing to take on Alexi Zukhov's syndicate in Russia. Instead, he proposed an alliance to Zukhov, turning his greatest potential enemy into his strongest ally and ensuring the success of the new Megasyndicate. Since then, Camparelli's guided the growth of the syndicate, although he still keeps a careful eye on Zukhov. Even after 15 years, Camparelli doesn't trust the Russian one bit.

Luciano Camparelli has been married to his wife Angela for over 20 years, and they have two children. His son Joseph is a student at Harvard University, while his daughter Julianna attends a private Catholic high school for girls. Camparelli does his best to shield his family from his “business life,” and it has constant protection provided by the Megasyndicate.

Image: A tall, thin, hawk-faced man, with dark hair going gray at the temples, combed straight back from a high forehead, Camparelli wears dark suits most of the time and



sunglasses when he's outside during the day. The glasses convert to regular bifocals with a tap to the frames and also have a tiny data display built into them that can relay information from his wireless PDA. He frequently takes the glasses off and massages the bridge of his nose when he's feeling fatigued (which is more and more often, these days). His eyes, when they're visible, are an icy blue, and he has an unflinching stare.

Roleplaying Hints: You're successful beyond even your father's greatest hopes for you, but somehow, you're not as satisfied as you expected to be. You feel distant from your family, a situation you acknowledge you brought upon yourself. You've cheated on your wife with other women, but she remains loyal to you regardless. Your children respect you, but you're not sure it's fair to expect them to follow in your footsteps — or that they'll be willing to. Your elderly mother gets the best 24-hour care, but on the rare occasions when you can visit her, she barely remembers you. You still don't trust your business partner of 15 years, knowing he could stab you in the back without a second thought. Perhaps the only person you can trust is your bodyguard, Hugo. You often find yourself thinking of your father, who died around your age. You've got it all: health, wealth, power and respect; but somehow, it's not quite what you hoped it would be.

Gear: Zeiss data-display glasses, PDA, Glock semi-automatic pistol (rarely carried, usually left in a desk or dresser drawer)

Nature: Survivor

Allegiance: Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3,

Intelligence 4 (Organized), Wits 4 (Quick-thinking), Appearance 3, Manipulation 4 (Authoritative), Charisma 4 (Genial)
Abilities: Academics 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3 (Spot Ambush), Biz 4, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 3 (Administration), Command 3 (Leadership), Computer 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Interrogation 2 (Threats), Intimidation 4, Investigation 4 (Analysis), Rapport 2, Resistance 3, Style 3, Streetwise 5 (Customs), Subterfuge 3 (Con)
Backgrounds: Allies 4, Backing 5, Cipher 2, Contacts 5, Followers 5, Influence 4, Resources 5
 Willpower 7

Hugo “the Bouncer” Pinnela

Background: Hugo Pinnela was never particularly bright, but he was big and tough, so life as a bouncer came naturally to him. He worked at a place owned by Luciano Camparelli until a rival gang tried to trash the place. They beat Pinnela to within an inch of his life, causing his M-R node to erupt. Camparelli had the place torched rather than explain what tore apart the men who broke into it. Pinnela was taken care of and immediately promoted to work directly for Mr. Camparelli. The bouncer was grateful to the family for taking care of him — and more than happy with the money and prestige it offered him.

Pinnela started out working as Camparelli’s bodyguard: perfect work for a man with bulletproof skin. Pinnela paid close attention to how his boss worked, and although he always pretended not to be listening, Hugo the Bouncer paid attention to everything Camparelli said. Pinnela admired the way Camparelli handled people and ran the business. More importantly, Camparelli treated Pinnela well.

After a while, Pinnela began to realize that he understood a great deal more than he did before he erupted. Things just seemed so much more obvious than before. It wasn’t just his senses that were far greater than any baseline, it was also his ability to interpret what he saw and heard. Pinnela started reading more in his off time and, before he knew it, he’d consumed every book in Mr. Camparelli’s substantial personal library.

It was when Camparelli noticed Pinnela reading one night that they first really talked, and Pinnela found that he had important things to say, things his boss was *interested* in. They talked more and more often, and Pinnela became something of an advisor and even confidante for his boss. His bodyguard’s intellect and insight continue to amaze Camparelli — and even Pinnela himself. With his abilities, there’s no way of knowing how far he might go in the organization, a thought that keeps some of Camparelli’s lieutenants up at night.

Image: A big (6’6”), broad shouldered guy with a wide face, square jaw and short, dark hair, Hugo Pinnela wears dark suits and sunglasses most of the time, even at night. He doesn’t actually need the shades (and they don’t interfere with his vision), he just likes how they look. They also help cover up the fact that Pinnela’s pupils reflect light, similar to a cat’s.



Roleplaying Hints: Your eruption has triggered something in you, more than just making you strong and tough. It’s like your eyes have been opened up to a whole world of ideas you never knew existed. Your life as a dumb bouncer seems so far behind you now, and you know so much more than you did then. You care for Mr. Camparelli like a father and do your best to help him out.

But lately, you’ve had to be careful not to make him feel stupid around you. It’s just the things you notice seem so *obvious*. Mr. Camparelli isn’t really happy with his life. His son doesn’t really want to take on the family business, and Zukhov is just waiting for the right opportunity to take control of the whole operation. What Mr. Camparelli needs is a way he can step down gracefully and let someone else take over, someone who can handle a man such as Zukhov....

Gear: Sunglasses, automatic pistol (mostly for show), PDA with a dozen new books on chip

Nature: Conniver

Allegiance: Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate

Attributes: Strength 5 (Brutish), Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Unflagging), Perception 5 (Insightful), Intelligence 5 (Widely Read), Wits 3, Appearance 3, Manipulation 5, Charisma 2

Abilities: Academics 5, Athletics 1, Awareness 5, Biz 4, Brawl 5, Computer 4, Endurance 5, Intimidation 5, Might 5, Rapport 4, Resistance 5, Streetwise 4, Style 3, Subterfuge 4

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Backing 4, Followers 2, Node 2, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 8, Taint 4 (Aberrant Eyes)

ABERRANT

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength •••• (Crush, Lifter, Thunderclap), Mega-Stamina •••• (Durability, Resilience), Mega-Perception ••• (Electromagnetic Vision, Ultraperipheral Perception), Mega-Intelligence •• (Eidetic Memory, Speed Reading)

Quantum Powers: Armor •••, Premonition ••••

Boris "Tolkach" Sladivgorod

Background: Boris Sladivgorod was born to a poor family in his native Russia, one of several children his parents were not able to provide for as they wanted. Sladivgorod decided when he was very young that he would one day be a wealthy man and leave poverty behind him forever. Since he wasn't a particularly clever or talented lad, he found his way to wealth working for the Russian *Mafiyah* as a *sportsmeny*, an enforcer. Joining the syndicate during the difficult times in Russia after the economy collapsed, Sladivgorod saw that money was passed on to his family, and it never asked where the money came from.

In time, Alexi Zukhov consolidated the Russian gangs under his leadership — and Sladivgorod along with them. Sladivgorod was impressed with Zukhov and followed his lead willingly. Still, there were many gang wars to quell in Russia and abroad, and Sladivgorod did his job well. But not long after, Zukhov forged his alliance with Luciano Camparelli, Sladivgorod was sent to meet with a gang in Eastern Europe that Zukhov wanted brought into the fold. It responded to the offer by shooting down Sladivgorod's plane. As it plunged toward the Earth, Sladivgorod erupted, and an escape route opened before his eyes. He and one other man were able to escape before the plane crashed.

With the gang thinking them dead, the two men were able to reach its headquarters, where Sladivgorod used his newfound abilities to drop their leader to the ground from the height of a few hundred meters — a "suicide" never solved by the police. Sladivgorod received the praise of Alexi Zukhov and an immediate promotion. Zukhov saw the potential in Sladivgorod's nova abilities and rewarded him with money and influence: all that he'd ever wanted.

Zukhov placed Sladivgorod in charge of moving people and goods, particularly illegal drugs, throughout Europe. He quickly became known as "Tolkach" or "the Fixer" because of his power to move things from place to place. Over the past several years, Tolkach has operated primarily out of Ibiza: The island is a location where he can reach all of Europe and northern Africa with his warps, and there's enough nova activity there to cover anything Tolkach might do. From that hub, the Fixer controls one of the largest contraband networks in the world.

Image: Tolkach is in his late 30s, although he could pass for a man in his mid-20s. He has blond hair and ice blue eyes from his Ukraine heritage. He's fitter than ever and favors clothes suited for life on Ibiza, usually lightweight summer suits in the latest styles. He wears sunglasses when outdoors and a gold Rolex on his wrist. He speaks with only a slight trace of a Russian accent.

Roleplaying Hints: You can hardly believe your good fortune some days. From nothing, you've become an important man that Alexi Zukhov relies upon. Men in the Megasyndicate respect you, and women are easily available to a man in your position. You respect Zukhov more than any other man alive, and you're proud to work for him. The rest of the world is your playground, to do in as you please, but you like to make sure that everything is running smoothly before you enjoy yourself.

Gear: Cell phone, Russian-made 9mm pistol

Nature: Traditionalist

Allegiance: Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4 (Athletic), Stamina 4 (Tireless), Perception 5 (Sharp-eyed), Intelligence 2, Wits 4 (Organized), Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Biz 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 3 (Customs), Command 2, Drive 2, Endurance 4, Firearms 3, Intimidation 3, Intrusion 2, Investigation 4, Linguistics 3 (Native: Russian; English, French, Spanish), Might 3, Pilot 2, Rapport 1, Resistance 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4 (Smuggling), Style 3, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Attunement 5, Backing 4 (Megasyndicate), Cipher 2, Contacts 4, Node 3, Resources 4, Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina •• (Regeneration), Mega-Wits • (Multitasking)

Quantum Powers: ESP •• (Distant Scan), Force Field ••••, Warp •••



People smuggling is the organized, illegal movement of groups or individuals from one country to another; it most commonly occurs when there is a lack of economic opportunity, a

**Excerpt from
Australian
Department of
Immigration and
Multicultural
Affairs Fact Sheet**

reduced availability for legitimate migration, the lure of a better lifestyle or an indentured servitude in the foreign country. Since the early 1990s, trafficking in unauthorized entrants to Australia has risen dramatically to become a lucrative business; we believe that this

activity has recently been taken over from small, independent smugglers by sophisticated criminal syndicates. Between December 1, 2012 and January 3, 2014, 119 boats were intercepted north and northwest of Australia, carrying 17,796 people; all but 17 of the boats have been tied to Chinese triads, and all unauthorized entrants have been of Asian extraction. Because the smuggling of people is prohibited in virtually every civilized country, those persons buying passage with a smuggler try to preserve their hope for a new life by concealing their route and the organization responsible

for their travel, even to the point of vehemently protecting the smugglers. Primary smuggling routes are known to exist from Hong Kong, Bangkok, Phnom Penh and Taiwan to Manila and then to Australia. The crews of smuggler vessels frequently alternate their departure points to hinder detection. As with all forms of clandestine activity, the true extent of illegal entry is difficult to determine, and the figures referenced above are only an estimate of minimum activity levels. Let us now move to the means by which detection of smuggling is most effectively interdicted...

HEAVEN THUNDER TRIAD

Excerpt from debriefing of Benny Wa, suspected member of the Big Circle Boys

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Inspector Chu: ...so I'm turning the tape recorder on now, Benny, all right?

Benny Wa: Yes, sir.

Inspector Chu: You understand that we'll be taping this interview, correct?

Wa: Yes, sir.

Inspector Chu: You've surrendered yourself here at the station, and you're agreeing to talk with us voluntarily and without your barrister present, correct?

Wa: Yes, sir.

Inspector Chu: And why have you surrendered, Benny?

Wa: I want police protection, and I want clean record so I can go some other place. The *sze kau* have spread rumors, and the *tiandi hui* wants my death.

Inspector Chu: None of us understand Chinese, Benny, and I know your English is very good, so don't play games with us. Speak English, Benny.

Wa: The commoners in our group, our triad, say untrue things about me, and so, the triad wants me to die. They say I have betrayed them. So, I come to you for help. I have nowhere else to go.

Inspector Chu: All the serious charges against you will be dropped, Benny, and we'll work with you and your barrister on cleaning up some of your past record. I think that everything can be worked out just fine. You're just going to have to tell us everything you know.

Wa: Okay.

Inspector Chu: I'm going to start toward the beginning, then, OK? Are you a member of a Chinese triad called the Big Circle Boys, Benny?

Wa: Yes, sir, in Vancouver.

Inspector Chu: And are the Big Circle Boys in Vancouver affiliated with any other Asian gang?

Wa: Yes, sir; the Boys are the biggest single branch of the Heaven Thunder Triad in Hong Kong. Heaven Thunder has maybe 50 branches all over the world, but not many people know that some of Heaven Thunder's branches have different names. That's kept quiet.

Inspector Chu: And what's your role in the Big Circle Boys?

Wa: I'm the *cho hai*, or grass sandal; I work with other branches of the Big Circle Boys, with the Heaven Thunder Triad in Hong Kong and with other gangs. I'm not the most

important, but I'm the communications director for the Vancouver Big City Boys, and I'm responsible to coordinate things with other gangs.

RCMP Inspector Lee: I know that you've been involved with the Big Circle Boys for most of your life, Benny, but how long has the gang been around? Is the Heaven Thunder Triad old?

Wa: Ha, ha, ha! Oh, Inspector, the Chinese got an early start on things. We invented seismographs and compasses before birth of Christ; when Homer wrote *The Iliad*, we'd already been celebrating our heroes for 1,300 years; when the Celts and Brits were still painting themselves blue and fighting with sharp sticks, China had the most sophisticated imperial court that world has ever known. We invented fire-arms, printing, paper, gunpowder, matches, suspension bridges; our Great Wall was built with enough stone to circle the world and was constructed more than 200 years before there ever was a Christ. The triads were around for 300 years before there was Mafia, and the Heaven Thunder Triad is one of the oldest of the old. Rumors have it that Heaven Thunder was a secret society within the Foochow monastery before the Manchus ever wiped out the Shaolin monks there.

Inspector Lee: Do all the members know so much about triad history? A few of the guys that we've picked act like they'd love to tell us something, but they just don't seem to know a damned thing about the triads.

Wa: No, sir. Nowadays, new guys don't really give shit. There used to be initiation rituals, oaths, passwords and blood ceremonies — all serious shit, you know? Now, no one wants to know, and even if you tell them, they think you're pain in the ass; they don't pay attention. They all want to know what's happening today, right now, this minute — not something that happened hundreds of years ago. They all want to be next triad nova star, but they're not.

Inspector Lee: They're just guys, eh?

Wa: I wouldn't call them "just guys." They may look pretty trashy and scrawny, and they have no nova powers, but they have grown up on the streets, and they know how to survive. Most have been practicing martial arts since they were three or four, and they know their shit; it's their means of survival. You'll look at them and think that they're muscles may not look real big, but they're some of the toughest killers you ever see. I've seen guys fighting that have been half destroyed. It doesn't matter how badly they hurt or what's broken, only how much they



hurt the other guy — if they've got an arm and leg broken, they fight to break both the other guy's arms and legs; if they can't see out of one eye, they fight to take out both of the other guy's eyes. That's the only way to win. Triad guys aren't puffing up or fighting for pomp and circumstance; they fight until they've won — until the other guy's dead. The triad rituals are part of it; if you quit fighting, you're traitor. If you traitor, you die.

Inspector Lee: So the triads are more public now because the tradition of secrecy is dead?

Wa: Oh, no, sir; that's not it at all. I'd say that the real triads are more of a secret now than they've ever been.

Inspector Chu: But they're all over the papers!

Wa: There are *stories* about them all the time, yes, sir. There are stories about aliens all the time, too, but how much do we know about them? How much do we know about star children, yeti or shit like that? How many news stories about the triads do you suppose are true? How much has been set up as a public relations gig by triads? You can be

so stupid! You hear strange names and language that you don't understand, and so, you just ignore us; you bury yourselves in Colombian cartels or Russian Mafia or Sicilians, and you pretend that triads are a bunch of street thugs shaking down restaurant owners and selling a few drugs here and there. At the same time, though, you trace back to the triads \$200 billion US of heroin income each year; that ain't half of it though. Triads move hundreds of billions every year through an underground banking system that doesn't leave a single electronic or paper trace anywhere; you act like you don't even know that it exists. It's a totally closed system. You don't know how to fight us because you're *gwailo*; you can't get inside to see what's going on. You can't understand that the triads have spent their existence perfecting the arts of misinformation and infiltration. We've been around for hundreds of years, and we've used centuries to spread tentacles throughout entire world — one person at a time. You remember in the 1990s when Lau Wing Kui wrote articles about the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood that



HEAVEN THUNDER TRIAD

everyone decided were a giant hoax? All right, you want to believe Lau was a member of Kung Lok Triad and planned thousands of crimes that got chalked up to a fictitious Chiu-Chao Brotherhood. Damn, you're dumb. Chiu-Chao Brotherhood *is* real — it's the Chiu-Chao and Heaven Thunder are the same thing. The *real* hoax was that Lau managed to convince the world's law-enforcement community that the Heaven Thunder Triad doesn't really exist. All the investigations that you shelved and all the witnesses that you let off the hook — they were all for real, but Lau gave you enough evidence to throw it all away. Heaven Thunder is everywhere, and it's into everything. How much do you think you can really do when it's the Heaven Thunder Triad that floats around behind the scenes as the secret society controlling all the secret societies?

Inspector Lee: They can't be into everything, Benny. You're making them into some sort of impossible bogey that's bigger than life.

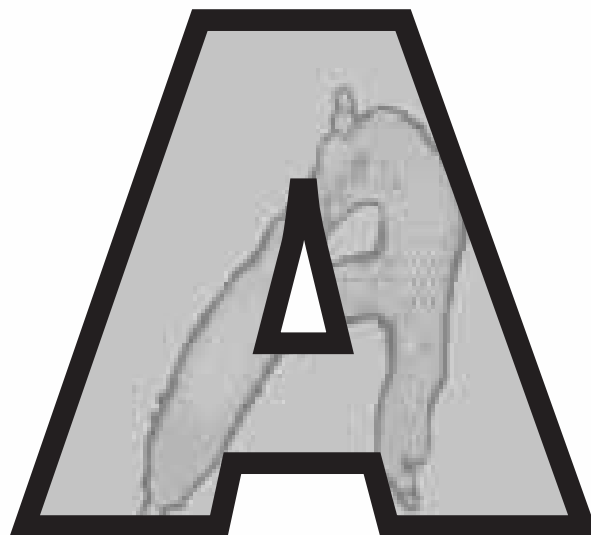
Wa: Sir, the triads have more than 10 million members worldwide. There are triad members in every industry imaginable. They see or control papers and documents in every

state of almost every country, and triad members are the worker bees who make sure government and industry run smoothly. The triads don't fight if they can avoid it; they quit that centuries ago. Now, they infiltrate, they misdirect, and they work together because the pie's big enough for all of them. The 36 oaths of every triad society are designed to tie members together into a goal of helping one another and achieving the goals of their triad. And when every member is loyal to his triad before anything else, and every triad is loyal to Heaven Thunder, then *everyone* works for Heaven Thunder.

Inspector Lee: You've been reading too many spy novels, Benny. All the cloak and dagger nonsense has gotten to your brain. I just don't buy all this conspiracy bullshit. You can go ahead and think that the triads control God, the universe and everything, but I still think your outlook is a little — off.

Inspector Chu: I think you're right, Benny. Heaven's Thunder *is* everywhere.

Inspector Lee: What?





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Ottawa Citizen Online (4/28/2014)

Inspector Murdered by Triad Suspect

Today, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police mourn the death of Inspector Mei Hsien Lee (29), who was killed on Saturday, April 25, 2009 during the interrogation of suspect Benny Wa. Wa has been positively identified by authorities as the leader of Vancouver's "Kung Lok Triad." Wa was also killed from injuries sustained during his assault on RCMP Inspectors Lee and Brian Chu, who is still recovering from injuries sustained during the attack. Earlier in the week, Vancouver police captured Wa and eight other leaders of the Kung Lok Triad, also seizing a shipment of heroin and nova-derived street pharmaceuticals having an estimated black-market value of more than \$20 million US. Vancouver Mayor Joanna Kong hailed the arrest and capture as one of the most important in Vancouver's history. "Benny Wa had been the leader of an organized crime gang in Vancouver for far too long," Kong said in a press conference Friday afternoon. "And, although he'd been known to us for some time, our city's police spent years building an airtight evidentiary case against Mr. Wa and his criminal cohorts. Although it cost the lives of many Kung Lok gang members and Mr. Wa himself, the arrest has devastated the Kung Lok Triad and yielded valuable information to police regarding other criminal activity being conducted in Vancouver." Police Chief Brown expects that the 30 or 40 remaining members of the Kung Lok Triad will be apprehended within the next week, saying, "While I sincerely mourn the death of Inspector Lee and pray for the recovery of Inspector Chu, I commend my men on their perfect arrest of Mr. Wa and their efforts to take back Vancouver's streets from the trash that are infiltrating our community!"

Sydney Morning Messenger (12/10/15)

Triad Espionage in Sydney P.D.

Sydney police today discovered a triple agent in their own midst. Inspector Bart Chun — known to the police force as a double agent for Chinese triads operating out of Sydney — was discovered to be working not only for the triads against the police and then for the police against the triads but, finally, for the triads against the police again! Sydney police believe that Inspector Chun — with four years on the force — may have been what they call a "multiple agent" for many years. "There's really no way to determine the multiple layers of deception that bally blighter has perpetrate here. We knew that he was a double agent, but everything suggests that it all goes so much deeper than that. We now think that he was really just playing us against the triads and vice versa." Although he was apprehended almost immediately upon discovery, Inspector Chun has since escaped police custody, spawning suspicions of other traitors within the Sydney police.

\\01.16.2008.18.57.51
\\Message-ID: <BD65D430E88AD21\$A2B00060\$8BF9F19F5971F@OpNet.TSB>
\\Access Request from Individual Brian Chu
\\Authority: RCMP-408
\\Encryption Code: Lee Yeung 1647T-Ming4
\\Authorization Approved



Administrator: Officer Brian Chu of the Vancouver RCMP is joining the conversation.

terHaar@brill.op: So, you think it isn't so much about where the triads operate as much as it's about where they don't operate?

posner@opamerica: i think so, yeah. defeating the triads is ultimately going to come down to getting a secure foothold somewhere. that's been the problem all along because it's hard to do when the triads are moving around under every rock we step on. it's almost impossible to take them by surprise when we can only make moves that they've already learned about and slipped away from — we really only capture what they give us.

terHaar@brill.op: So they're everywhere? You really think they're that widespread?

posner@opamerica: well, just look at even the stuff that your department is getting from the directive. they're estimating that there are more than 5 million triad members worldwide, but if you look at the numbers closely, you'll notice that fewer than 250,000 of them show up as being directly involved in the production and sale of illicit drugs. that means that there are one hell of a lot of triad members that are unaccounted for — they're the ones that are working everywhere else. when it comes down to it, the chinese stick with the chinese, and A LOT of chinese have been triad members at one time or another. check with the los angeles law-enforcement bureau, and see how well its 60 chinese-speaking police officers are faring with the 750,000 asian immigrants that comprise a tight-knit underground network of extended friends and family. the LALE just can't be effective under those conditions; expecting it to be is ridiculous.

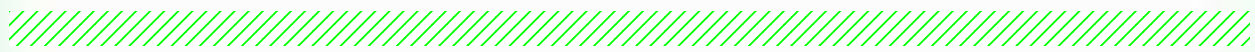


\\01.16.2008.20.35.20
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\\Access Request from Individual Ma Sik Yu
\\Authority: HK-TSB
\\Encryption Code: Lee Yeung 1647T-Ming4
\\Authorization Approved



Administrator: Officer Ma Sik Yu of the Hong Kong Triad Society Bureau is joining the conversation.

msyu@coolmail.globalop: So why not hit their US operations? I'd definitely agree with terHaar@brill.op that no Utopia or T2M operation would ever get close to the triads in Asia; it'd be infinitely easier to abduct King Andrew right out of Buckingham Palace than to get into the Golden Triangle. But why not start picking off the triads in the US? I know that each gang is only going to be one tiny part of the much larger problem, but when Hercules cut off enough heads, even the Hydra died.



\\01.16.2008.21.47.38
\\Message-ID: <203918CF0101220943.F0M9\$HYH06719@OpNet.TSB>
\\Access Request from Individual Georgina M. Shrubbe

\\Authority: Interpol-432
\\Encryption Code: Lee Yeung 1647T-Ming4
\\Authorization Approved



Administrator: Officer Georgina M. Shrubbe from Interpol is joining the conversation.

posner@opamerica: the problem is the same throughout north america, though; how do we know where to cut? what's a head and what's a toenail? it's like setting out to arrest the fog or a swarm of flies. almost no informants come forward, so we get no information that way; we haven't had any success infiltrating the triads, so we get no information that way; we can't effectively bug phones or record conversations because deals are all carried out in such obscure dialects, and by the time we figure out what's going to happen, it's already happened. we just can't find a way inside these guys. even when T2M's takemitsu scanned ma yuo, we really only got the name of his triad and some vague images that takemitsu interpreted as the heaven thunder triad's nova enforcers'— green smoke, shark people and that sort of thing. i haven't got a fucking clue what that means! when takemitsu tried to scan some worthwhile information, he was blocked by ma's mental image of a gate of swords, lightning and fire. ma died just a few minutes later.

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: Sorry for jumping into your chat, but we're having the same problems all throughout Europe, too. Obviously, all of Asia was forfeit decades ago; the triads have ultimate control over Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Indonesia and even China, though it's communist. In that region, it's just a question of money and influence, and the triads have a whole lot more of it than anyone else around.

terHaar@brill.op: Even the communists look the other way for the triads?

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: Well, as one of the most corrupt administrations in the world, China is ripe to be abused by the triads' skills at infiltration and influence peddling. The triads have spent hundreds of millions of US dollars buying their fair share of people, from local police to high-ranking party officials.

terHaar@brill.op: Exactly, that's why I don't think the triads ever really vacated China or Hong Kong; they're just paying for the right to stay hidden. They've been there for centuries, so there's no reason to think that they couldn't buy official ignorance/discretion with a few well-placed bribes.

posner@opamerica: and the middle east?

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Middle East are almost completely free of the triads but only because that whole region was always the second largest producer of opium. The triads were never able to get in the door there, and by the time the triads started to develop a black-market presence in other legitimate and illegitimate businesses, the Middle East was already closed to them. The triads also have a very strong presence in the Nordic countries. Between its laissez-faire Dutch approach to drugs and a police force almost completely handicapped by pro-criminal law-enforcement policies, Amsterdam is a lost cause. From there down through Germany, Poland, France and Spain, though, the triads' influence gradually weakens to nothing in Italy. The Germans started recognizing the Asian crime problem in the mid-80s when the triads began chasing out the Turkish presence that had always supplied the country's illicit drugs. And I was assigned to Paris for a while and helped the French put together a team to respond to the triads, but the effort was so completely pointless that it sputtered around for only a few months before finally falling apart. It was like trying to bail out a boat with a stocking. I think things have dissolved back to what they were in the mid-90s, actually. And, obviously, Italy's got its own organized crime problems, and the triads are nonexistent there.

posner@opamerica: same with central america and africa, i assume? central america's always been more into other drugs, so i suppose the triads had trouble getting in there? and africa's just too damn poor for anyone to really care about.

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: Well, there's no historical presence in either area, though we're starting to see quite an increase in triad activity since they've started to shift some of their presence into the nova-drug market. No one's really got much control of that market, so wherever mite, soma and Red 7 are being sold, you can assume a triad presence with about 95 percent certainty.

bchu@vancouverrcmp.net.op: What have you been able to do to impact triad activities? Anything effective?

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: I'll tell you, between handsome payoffs to local authorities and law enforcement's general unfamiliarity with Chinese language and customs, it's really been an uphill battle. The most we've accomplished is to put a shapeshifting nova into the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood. He's still just a soldier and he's only been in for about two months, but he's been able to pick up some valuable information.

bchu@vancouverrcmp.net.op: And the Chiu-Chao haven't identified him yet? That's incredible!

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: No, he's got some limited ESP/telepathic ability, so he can pick up on some of his duplicate's thoughts and such.

bchu@vancouverrcmp.net.op: Has he been able to mimic any of the generals in the Brotherhood yet?

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\\Message-ID: <00240#C03D72\$A1FF3940C0\$1700A8C0@OpNet.TSB>

\\Access Request from Individual ?

\\Authority: ?

\\Encryption Code: Lee Yeung 1647T-Ming4

\\Encryption Sub-codes: Alpha-01; ***-**

\\Authorization Approved

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Administrator: Operator W1 from ? is joining the conversation. Operator W1 has Black Operation clearance from the CIA, Interpol, the Directive, Utopia and ?.

trace1@?.gov.op: Gentlemen, sorry for the top-secret entry, but a little bird told me that y'all were having an interesting conversation here, so I had to log on from the office. Please continue.

gmshrubbe@pyrus.op: Well

bchu@vancouverrcmp.net.op, we haven't wanted to push it that far yet. We're worried that the triads will find out about our shapeshifter, and then, either we lose a good shapeshifter, or more likely, we start building cases from one hell of a lot of misinformation.

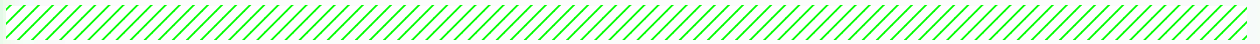
terHaar@brill.op: You might check with some of the departments in Australia. Remember that the Australian government was already concerned about the triads in 1986 because the country was supposedly becoming one of the major havens for triads leaving Hong Kong. I know that they tried to put a shapeshifter into a local triad — does anyone remember when that was? I know they found his head — shot through the eyes, ears and mouth — but I'm not sure they ever found all of him.

posner@opamerica: i think it was around 2009 or '10, and i'd heard that they never found the rest of him.

trace1@?.gov.op: Gentlemen, none of this is cleared for these channels, and this discussion needs to end right now. Log off, boys.

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\\01.16.2008.22.50.00
\\terHaar@brill.op logging out.
Administrator: Officer Bernard ter Haar has left the conversation.



\\01.16.2008.22.50.39
\\posner@opamerica logging out.
Administrator: Officer Laurence Posner has left the conversation.



\\01.16.2008.22.50.01
bchu@vancouverrcmp.net.op logging out.
Administrator: Inspector Brian Chu has left the conversation.



\\01.16.2008.23.51.10
msyu@coolmail.com logging out.
Administrator: Officer Ma Sik Yu has left the conversation.



\\01.16.2008.24.00.49
gmshrubbe@pyrus.op logging out.
Administrator: Officer Georgina M. Shrubbe has left the conversation.



trace1@?.gov.op: Well, that certainly did shut the whole thing down, didn't it?
nereid@directive: That it did; they were all getting a bit careless with their conversation, though, I thought.
trace1@?.gov.op: Do you think that the triads picked up on it all?
nereid@directive: Oh, I guarantee it. There were at least two triad operatives online tonight. The question that's in my mind is whether we were playing the triads or whether they were playing us?

History

Origins of the Triads

The first triads were formed in the late 17th century by five survivors from the Foochow monastery in Fukien. These monks escaped the destruction of the monastery by the second Manchu emperor, Kiang His, and organized secret resistance societies to protect the people against a repressive and vicious foreign ruler and, also, to recover the Ming throne from the Manchu dynasty. The triads, in fact, began to serve as unofficial local governments, usurping the administrative responsibilities of the Manchu emperor, judging guilt and innocence, punishing the guilty and resolving disputes across China. At the time, it was said that “The armies exist to protect the emperor; the triads exist to protect the people.”

The first secret triads were bound together by an intricate system of secret rituals, oaths, passwords and ceremonies that eventually developed into a complex and rigid initiation ritual that mixed ancestral worship, Buddhism, mythology and historical symbology. As the Manchu dynasty alienated more and more of the Chinese population, the ranks of the triads swelled with disenfranchised citizens eager to rebel against the social and political upheaval fomented by the Manchus.

The Manchus quickly decided their goals were best attained by wiping out the triads: eliminating their members, stripping away their popular support and cutting off the societies’ sources of revenue. To survive, the triads began to engage in various illegal activities; their piracy, extortion, smuggling and vice trade soon came to constitute a new means of existence for the triads — one much more lucrative than plain political dissention. Although the Manchus were finally overthrown in 1911, few triads cared anymore, having long since abandoned their patriotic fight in favor of a more lucrative criminal trade.

Modern History

Although triads in the 1920s moved into producing and delivering the heroin that countries around the world were rapidly making illegal, the drug had been legally mass marketed by the Bayer Company since the early 1890s, and a worldwide population of junkies was already well established. This was an enormous boon for the triads, but that alone would have only turned them into another drug cartel. The triads’ biggest windfalls really blew their way in 1941, 1949 and 1997.

1941

First, World War II not only created burgeoning worldwide black markets and vice trades that the triads could exploit for exorbitant profits, but when the Japanese abandoned Hong Kong in 1941, they also destroyed almost all the police records that referenced investigations, arrest

histories and other information regarding the triads and their members. With a clean slate then, the triads were able to spread their tendrils throughout the world from their historical Hong Kong territory without police interference. No one knew who they were or what they were up to, so they exploded all over the globe like a pollen bud.

1949

Then, when Mao and his communists took over mainland China in 1949, the triads were centralized primarily between Taiwan and Hong Kong, although a lot of members also escaped to Thailand, Laos and Myanmar; many other triads were also being formed around the world to build on business opportunities in other countries. But the triads that were exiled to Hong Kong with Chiang Kai-shek served as Chiang’s army in exchange for unlimited control of all Hong Kong’s criminal traffic and various governmental positions.

This gave the Chinese secret criminal societies a very real foothold to operate within an ostensibly legitimate government and from which the triads, over the next 60 years, infiltrated and compromised virtually every police, military, government and civic authority on the planet. By the mid-1990s, it was estimated that the triads *alone* were responsible for the production and sale of 2,000 tons of heroin annually — only 15 tons of which were used for legitimate medicinal purposes worldwide. Triad profits from heroin were estimated at more than \$250—*billion* US. The Chinese invented organized crime, and they remain the best at it, having learned most everything about crime more than 400 years ago.

1997

The third most important event in the evolution of the current triads occurred in 1997. Although Hong Kong has always been the seat of worldwide triad authority, law-enforcement authorities had anticipated being able to pick up a lot of triad leaders escaping Hong Kong when it was returned to China in 1997. The authorities did not anticipate the degree to which the triads controlled — and still control — China.

The triads’ mask was so perfectly constructed that some people speculated that a pre-*Galatea* nova must have masterminded the whole thing. In late 1997 — right after the return of Hong Kong to China — Interpol finally began to piece together a monumentally intricate maze of misinformation that had been fed to worldwide authorities by Chinese government officials and police regarding the triads. Law enforcement found out that it had been living in the triads’ fun house.

Senior triad officers such as Ng Sik Ho and Chung Mon, who had been reported killed, began surfacing all over the world. At the same time, other major triad officers against whom law-enforcement agencies had spent millions of dollars and years of manpower building airtight legal cases turned out to have died decades earlier.

A decade-long international investigation was wiped out when the Chinese disclosed records from the Royal Hong Kong Police showing that one of the largest, most secretive and fiercest triads was nothing more than a red herring meticulously woven and maintained by superintendent Lau Wing Kui in the pages of the *International Criminal Police Review*. Lau had long been recognized as the world authority on the tactics, activities and membership of the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood, but when China disclosed the records that it had found in Hong Kong, Lau was clearly tied to many of the crimes that he himself had investigated. Authorities realized that he had been shifting suspicion to the fictitious Chiu-Chao Brotherhood for years in order to shelter his own Kung Lok Triad from suspicion. Even the most wanted members of the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood were discovered to have been created by Lau out of patched-together computer records.

The Nova Age

By the time the *Galatea* exploded in 1998, worldwide authorities had not yet figured out a way to determine which triad tales were real and which were false. Every triad task force in the world was spinning its wheels trying to determine *how to determine* what was truth and what was fiction. Then novas started showing up all over the world. Although novas remain a relatively rare phenomenon — with only one person out of a million erupting — the law of averages has definitely worked in China's favor. With a population of more than 2.5 billion people by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, more than 1,500 novas had been registered by the state. As they erupted, triads throughout the region tried to snap them up and did their best to find ways to profit from novas.

Outsiders knew that China possessed men who could manipulate energy, shapeshift and control thought; men who could fly, breathe underwater and animate the earth; men who could run faster than light and could move from place to place in seconds. Observers, though, wondered at the relative dearth of female novas in China, although the country's tight control over intelligence prevented any research or investigation into this peculiarity.

The triads found a way to make money off their novas in the first decade of the 21st century; that's when it's commonly believed that the triads discovered the means by which to harvest and refine novas into mite, soma, Red 7, etc. Clearly, the profit to be made from so-called "nova drugs" — both financial and otherwise — is absolutely staggering.

Organization

Triad Structure

The headquarters for most triads are still located in Hong Kong out of a sense of history and origin. Triads

have always been located in Hong Kong, came into their own in Hong Kong and have built the center of their web in Hong Kong.

Despite this, though, triad leadership is not as active as one might suspect. While Camparelli and Zuhkov hold very tight rein over their Megasyndicate and maintain a level of interest in all of their Mafia's day-to-day operations, the triad leaders in Hong Kong are not so controlling of their branches, which operate independently to a large degree. Instead, the Hong Kong centers of operation work to preserve the triad's image, to maintain the observance of the group's ritual and to determine an overall policy for the triad's businesses and operation.

Triad Leadership and Lore

Within each triad and each branch of a triad, there is a rigid central hierarchy around which other members operate. Each post in the triad is numbered as well as named; these numbers are derived from Buddhist and Taoist numerological traditions and lore. The leader of a triad "cell" is called the *shan chu*, or hill chief, whose position bears the number 489. The second in command is the *heung chu* — the incense master, who is responsible for the triad's ceremonial and ritual observances — who is numbered 438. The core of each branch also possesses a *pak tsz sin*, or white paper fan (415), who provides advice regarding administration and finance and a *cho hai*, or grass sandal (432), who acts as the triad's liaison with other gangs, other branches of the triad and the triad's extortion and bribery victims. Enforcement and martial activities of the triad are governed by the *hung kwan*, or red pole (426), who is the military commander for the cell. Ordinary members of the triad — the *sze kau* — are given the number 49.

All of the triads' numbered positions begin with a 4, to reflect the eternal nature of the triads (in honor of the Chinese belief that the world was born surrounded by four oceans). The *Shan Chu* and *Heung Chu* ostensibly bear their numbers because the Chinese characters for 21 (4 + 8 + 9) and for 3 and 8, when written together, also form the characters for "Hung" — the Ming emperor in whose name the Foochow monastery monks sought to topple the Manchu dynasty in the 1600s. And, of course, the common members of the triad, the *sze kau*, swear 36 oaths upon their initiation... as reflected by their number, 4 x 9.

Culture and Traditions

There is no question that the triads are perhaps the most ritualized criminal organizations in the world, steeped in centuries of tradition and historical observance. The initiation ritual historically took 10 or 12 hours during the late evening, when the yin dimension of the cosmos was more accessible, and was a grand theatrical production involving historical mythopoeic themes designed to make new members feel part of something very special.

Triad rituals were designed to depict the symbolic death of an initiate, followed by his rebirth as a member of the triad. The initiate now had no ties to the world outside the triad and lived only in service to it. New members passed beneath a gate of swords, offered a simple sacrifice, swore 36 oaths and concluded with a blood covenant. Members swore complete faith and fealty to one another, that they might receive good fortune together, suffer disaster together, help one another and observe a perfect loyalty to each other member of the triad. Those who failed were doomed to be struck by Heavenly Thunder, pulled apart by five horses, carved up a thousand times by a thousand swords and flensed. The protracted ritual and the oaths served to drive home the severity of the traitor's death for a failure of loyalty.

Over time, though, the triads grew to thousands and then tens of thousands of members. The time spent on the ritual grew to be less and less; now, it's the sort of hour-long ceremony held in a dirty back room somewhere. New members go through the 36 oaths, swear an additional blood oath and are impressed with their two choices — loyalty or a violent, painful death. No robes, no history, no meaning — nothing special. Only novas go through a four- or five-hour version of the ritual, though it's clear to everyone that if the novas choose not to remain loyal, little can be done to stop them.

Operations

Heroin

The opium trade in China began during the late 1700s, when the British led the drive to monopolize the large tracts of poppies in northern India and targeted China's population as the most profitable market available. Britain's narcotics trade produced overwhelming profits and a large number of Chinese addicts. Although China opposed the violation of their country and waged the Opium War to stop it in the mid-1800s, the Chinese efforts were no match for the British war machine, and England's exploitation of the Chinese only increased.

Global expansion began to split the world into smaller nations and protectorates, spreading the opium trade and its antithesis — anti-opium rhetoric. China, though, remained chained to the poppy, and when the imperial government was overthrown in 1911, the country devolved into a collection of regional governments, allowing poppy cultivation and opium exports to flourish.

It was in the early 1900s that missionaries introduced to China a cure for opium addiction — “Jesus opium,” or morphine — which was in turn “cured” by heroin in the 1920s. Heroin had been manufactured for almost two decades by that time and was approved in many Western countries for general medical use.

Unrestrained prescriptions for heroin to treat everything from coughs to toothaches to menstrual cramps led to a substantial market for the drug.

The triads moved full force into heroin manufacture during the 1950s following a brutal internal war. Taking over the Golden Triangle — actually a quadrangle in Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and the Yunnan province of China — gave the triads control of a 4,500 square mile stretch of mountain territory where the poppies for almost all the world's heroin supply was harvested and refined. Since the triads controlled most of Southeast Asia, they were able to vigorously resist any intrusion into the Triangle, and since they also controlled several countries' military forces and were able to use military guards to protect their opium supply, any action against the triads in the quadrangle could easily escalate into a full-scale Western offense against all of Asia.

During the 1960s, the triads increased their power and took advantage of a booming worldwide economy to expand drug sales, and by the 1970s, the triads controlled virtually all of the world's heroin trade. By the time Utopia intruded on the world scene, the triads and Asian military forces had already recruited whole squadrons of novas to protect the invaluable supply trains from the Golden Triangle. Novas were instructed to kill anyone suspicious near the Triangle or the supply trains and sort out the details later. Triad enforcers, being the cream of the Asian military forces, had long been able to repel almost anything that threatened the triads' product.

Nova-Derived Drugs

Beyond the triads' heroin production and sales, the gangs were largely responsible for the discovery and development of nova drugs in the first decade of the 21st century. Some estimates placed the triads' market share between 60 percent and 90 percent of black-market soma and mite sold in North America and Europe. Top-secret information from the Directive references the triads' use of a “catalytic nova” able to temporarily spark M-R nodes. But even the Directive's information captures only a piece of the story.

The Heaven Thunder Triad's Ho Kai Ming is indeed able to spark M-R nodes for a short time, but this skill would be worthless without the Triad's talent scouts scouring Asian countries looking for children, junkies, the homeless and institutionalized people who might possibly possess even a little latent nova capacity. Although novas are rare and many of the talent scouts' finds are “flushes,” the scouts take their potential finds back to Ho Kai Ming for sparking — and harvesting.

Freshly harvested M-R nodes and nova steroids can then be processed into soma and mite that is salable for hundreds of millions, thanks to superstar nova users such

The Creation of Heroin

Heroin production begins with the blossoming of a poppy. After the poppy petals have fallen, the remaining green pod produces a thick white sap — opium. This sap is harvested by mountain tribesmen who use primitive curved knives to cut shallow incisions into the poppy pod, from which they collect the congealed brown sap — each poppy yields only a pea-sized pebble of opium. These pebbles are then converted by the triads into morphine for easier transportation and smuggling. The opium pebbles are dissolved in hot water, to which lime fertilizer is added. A frothing white scum is scooped from the top of the drum and passed through a flannel cloth into another drum of heated water to which concentrated ammonia is added. The ammonia causes the morphine to crystallize so that it can be collected and packed for shipment.

Triads typically ship morphine bricks to Hong Kong to be processed into heroin. Triad chemists combine equal portions of morphine and acetic acid and heat the mixture to 185 degrees until both components have completely dissolved. Impurities are then removed before water and chloroform are added to increase the strength of the mixture. Sodium carbonate is added and the heroin precipitate is collected and heated together with alcohol and charcoal, leaving a granular substance. The chemist then turns this resulting precipitate into either heroin 3 or 4.

Heroin 3 is a whitish-brown powder that is 65-70 percent pure heroin intended for smoking. Heroin 4 is almost pure heroin for injection only and is the drug of choice for Western addicts. By the time it is sold, heroin 4 is frequently cut to less than 3 percent purity for resale. Chemists making heroin 4 take the sodium carbonate precipitate and add ether and hydrochloric acid before collecting the China White heroin flakes that rain out of the mixture. Unfortunately, the volatility of the ether gas often results in an explosion that may level the lab, kill all the personnel in the immediate vicinity and destroy the heroin.

But nobody ever said that manufacturing illegal drugs was risk free.

as Stryker, Farouk and Simms. After decades of killing unwanted Chinese girl-children, it was a short step to killing social undesirables and potential girl novas for profit. Although extremely shadowy and carefully guarded, the triads have built an entire industry out of triggering and harvesting newly or temporarily erupted novas.

Infiltration

A question many government agencies ask is how the triads have been able to escape Directive, Utopia and law-enforcement agencies for more than 50 years? Although someone is arrested every once in a while holding \$20 million US worth of heroin, that's nothing in the grand scheme of the drug war. Authorities capture less than 3

percent of the triads' product — hardly even an inconvenience to the gangs.

The problem for governments, though, is that the triads have hands everywhere. And with millions of invisible members worldwide, the triads are quite adept at keeping their fingers on the pulse of society.

Other Sources of Income

In addition to their drug activities, the triads have moved huge sums of money into everything from illegal gambling operations and legitimate casinos to banking, real estate, restaurants, loan sharking, weapons, counterfeiting, tech, pharmaceutical research and investment. Some of the world's big investment bankers confidentially disclose that triads have *trillions* invested in their institutions that would disrupt the entire world banking system if law enforcement were to seize triad funds.

Triads have also infiltrated law-enforcement agencies throughout the world in order to gain access to some of the best technology available. Similarly, triad scientists have reverse-engineered, high-dollar gadgets that they've purchased on various black markets. Being able to take a mental noise generator and throw \$20 million US at it has advanced it to the mental interrupter. Triad engineers have developed and used an improved mental noise generator to carry out low-level test heists; with such toys, they're able to lock down everyone in the vicinity, walk in, take the loot, walk out and turn off the noise. Probably the triads' most substantial innovation, though, is their improvement to DeVries' brain-implant data connection. Although it's an important advancement in its own right, the triads' symbiotic brain data implant has also allowed the triads to develop broad ranging AI programs that make even baseline triad members seem almost psychic — able to predict moves, pick the perfect shot and time it flawlessly, decide when they're losing a fight and then escape in the middle of a desert.

Technology

Mental Interrupter

The mental interrupter is an advanced form of the Directive's mental noise generator (see **Aberrant: The Directive**, p. 57) that's been updated and improved by the triads. The mental interrupter has retained its small size, but the Chinese have improved its capabilities considerably. Rather than simply blocking the psychic abilities of nearby individuals, the mental interrupter scans nearby brainwave frequencies and, once it has obtained a strong and steady signal, broadcasts an "interrupt" signal on that frequency. The range of the mental interrupter has not improved significantly over the 25 to 30 feet in which the mental noise generator was effective, but it has been modified to simultaneously "jam" two separate frequencies.

System: The mental interrupter acts like a powerful Stun Attack, locking randomly onto any two brainwave frequencies in the vicinity — including the person setting the mental interrupter — and dazing the selected targets. The mental interrupter's effects cannot be combined with those of an individual's Stun Attack. After use, the mental interrupter must recharge itself for three turns before it can be reused.

Whiplash

Like the DeVries Agency's whipsword (see **Aberrant: Elites**, p. 69), the whiplash is a weapon of activated, edged single-molecule carbon filament; the press of a button on the whiplash's hilt activates nine strands of infinitely thin cutting power. A cheap whiplash is used like a cat-o'-nine-tails, and well-designed units may act like a whip with nine separate strops of 6 to 12 feet in length.

System: One employs the whiplash as a melee weapon. Although the damage it inflicts is always lethal, the strops of the whiplash do create a visible energy wave, so the whiplash does not get the whipsword's dodge modifier.

Symbiotic Brain Data Implants

Like the mental interrupter, the symbiotic brain data implant (SBDI) is the triads' improved version of the brain-implant data connection. Taking the data connection to its next logical level, the triads developed the symbiotic brain data implant as a self-contained unit for which independent programming can be written and which has the ability to provide information passively; the SBDI, however, may also initiate the electrical impulses to a body that are necessary for probabilistic next action. As with all items of Chinese manufacture, the SBDI is remarkably cheap, costing only a single dot of Resources. It lasts for 20 years and may be upgraded through a small port in the mastoid cavity into which the implant is installed. It's this upgradability that is the measure of wonder for the SBDI; the unit's value comes from the continuous stream of good (but by no means flawless) AI programs that can be loaded into its virtually unlimited memory.



Outcome Prediction Programs

Outcome prediction programs analyze a current situation and attempt to predict its ultimate outcome. Through the use of such programs, wearers of an SBDI may better determine when a battle is beyond winning and, so, may withdraw to preserve manpower and materiel assets.

System: Outcome prediction programs function like a weak Intuition and require a Perception roll for a successful AI analysis.

Action Prediction Programs

Action Prediction programs analyze an opponent's actions, skill level and probable movements to determine a probable next action. Such programs tend to be more effective when analyzing an opponent's technique and habits over the long term rather than during a single turn, but a good program can be quite effective even in melee combat.

System: Action Prediction programs function like the Pretercognition power, and the accuracy of the AI programming is determined by a Perception roll.

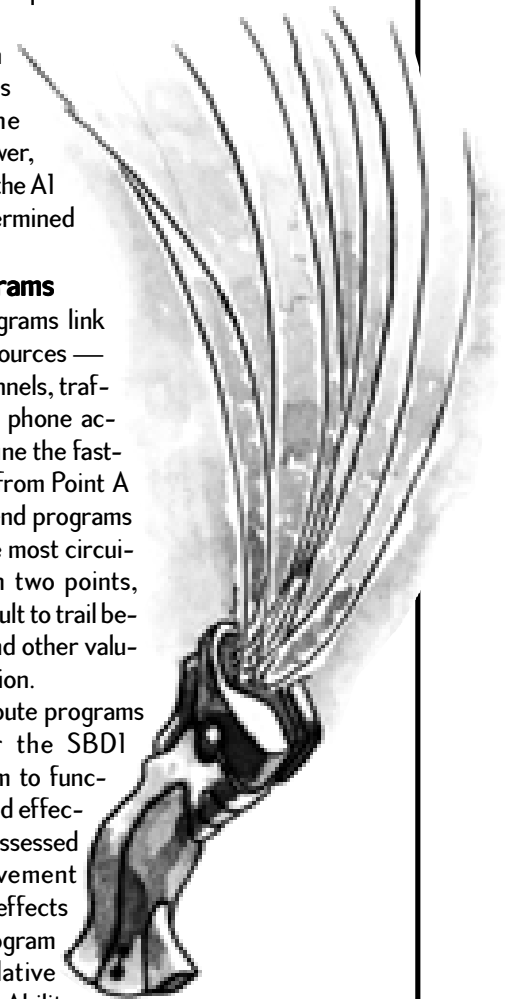
Best Route Programs

Best route programs link with all available resources — including police channels, traffic copters and cell phone activity — to determine the fastest probable route from Point A to Point B. Higher-end programs can also provide the most circuitous route between two points, the route most difficult to trail between two points and other valuable travel information.

System: Best route programs act as scouts for the SBDI wearer, allowing him to function more quickly and effectively, as if they possessed the Enhanced Movement enhancement. The effects of a best route program are similarly cumulative with the Streetwise Ability and the Hypermovement quantum power.

Shot Placement Programs

Shot placement programs are nothing more than barebones action prediction programs that focus on a lim-



ited outcome — deadly shot placement. A good shot placement program will force a shot to intersect with a probabilistic movement so as to achieve an optimal effect. Because of the fraction-of-a-second tolerances within which such programs must be effective, though, they are quite expensive. Even a cheap shot placement program may cost two or three dots of Resources.

System: Shot placement programs operate like the Dilate Time technique of the Temporal Manipulation quantum power, permitting an SBDI wearer to slow down another character's effective speed with an Intelligence roll in order to buy the time for a perfect shot.

Rogue Action Programs

Rogue action programs are probably the most insidious programs developed by the triads. Although there are an infinite variety of such programs, all of them have the effect of instigating erratic behavior in the individual to whom such programs have been downloaded. The effects are generally going to be equivalent to medium-level mental aberrations or Mental Flaws.

System: Rogue action programs cause a mental disorder (see **Aberrant**, p. 153) until the program is somehow removed.

Dramatis Personae

Baseline Triad Member

Triad members, as a general rule, are extremely well trained. In the minds of the men probably training them, the triads are still fighting a war from centuries ago, so even the triads' common street enforcers are hand-picked only when triad generals think the streets have toughened them up enough. They're all military caliber fighters with the sole purpose of inflicting more damage than they take.

The favorite instrument of triad members has long been the hatchet; *boo how doy* ("hatchet boys") worked as the primary defense for the tongs ("town halls") that triad members began establishing in America in the 1900s. Even today, most triad members still carry a hatchet, though the primitive weapons are rarely used anymore. Even the common gang members — the *sze kau*, or *49s* — carry the sophisticated tech weapons developed by their triads.

Because they've been taught perfect loyalty to their triad, most members will be more willing to die fighting for their triad than to be captured by someone from whom they don't think their triad will be able to buy their freedom. It's rare, though, that triad members' freedom cannot be bought. And, since the triad won't forget its roots, it will attempt to pull strings, call favors and pay any bribes necessary to secure even the least member's return. Triads really are more closely knit than most families, so law enforcement should not be afraid to depend heavily on the inter-triad loyalty of gang members.

Image: Triad members can look like common street thugs or Wall Street financiers and everything in between. They're always Asian, but needn't always appear so (if their features have been reshaped, for example). They're always well armed and know how to use the weapons they carry.

Gear: The *sze kau* generally carry handgun-based weapons such as laser electroshock pistols, maser guns and heavy pistols, though some may also carry whipswords and whiplashes. *Sze kau* are also frequently equipped with minor surveillance equipment and nansects, but will only deploy such devices at the instruction of a superior.

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: Triads

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Appearance 2, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

Abilities: Martial Arts 2-4, Melee 3, Endurance 2, Resistance 4, Intimidation 2

Ho Brothers

The twin Ho brothers were born in Kowloon's Walled City, where they were raised by their grandparents. The enclosed and dirty maze-like tunnels that ran throughout the Walled City were single-file corridors with low ceilings covered in a web of wires, electric cables, exposed fuses, sockets, plugs and dirt. Buildings in the City were 15 floors of no water, no sewage, no real electricity and more rats and rabid dogs than people. Fifty thousand people were crammed into 1.2 square feet per person; there was not even enough room to lie down except that the people slept in shifts. Several generations of a family could be crammed into a single room. Unlicensed abortionists, sweatshops, snake vendors, brothels, schools, opium dens, counterfeiting shops and groceries all existed next to one another in squalid little cells. Some people never left the Walled City but lived within its walls their entire life. And because the wooden 1840s buildings had spread and wedged themselves together at the top, sunlight never reached the streets and alleys of the city — the people's lives were lived in darkness or candlelight. Adolescent girls and boys were regularly gang-raped in the City before being forcibly sold into the porn industry by their own shamed families for a purchase price that could only be repaid by decades of \$2 tricks and the hope of death at the end. Neither the British nor the Chinese ever really claimed control over the Walled City, so it remained a self-sufficient hovel of misery until it was finally evacuated and demolished in the mid-1990s.

Not long before the Walled City was leveled, Ho Kai Yeun forced his brother to escape from the City's confines, and the two of them graduated from fighting over stairwells and delivering gambling payoffs and extortion notes

into work as small-time gang leaders and heroin pushers. During the Ho brothers' heroin-buying trips to Thailand, they met officials of the Chinese Nationalist opium armies and were recruited into Taiwan's spy network. Between their work for the Taiwanese intelligence community and their exploding heroin business, the Hos quickly built a \$1 billion per year business. By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the Ho brothers had come to control the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood and they've used their uncanny abilities to reform the triad into one of the most tightly organized, richest and most powerful underworld networks in the world. The Ho brothers have also long served as a cornerstone of triad unity, negotiating and arbitrating inter-triad disputes that threaten the centuries-old cooperation among the triads.

Ho Kai Yeun

Background: Ho Kai Yeun — Ah Yeun, most commonly — is the Red Pole for the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood. The red pole (*hung kwan*) in a triad is chosen on the basis of his prowess in the martial arts, and he serves as the “enforcer” for his triad, the general for the triad's lower ranks and as the primary defender of other triad authorities. Ah Yeun was a wise choice.

Ah Yeun and his brother rarely left the Walled City while they were growing up. They went to school in the City, they joined a gang and fought to defend the alleyway in front of their family's room, and they waged petty war with some of the other pre-adolescent gangsters. When he was nine, Ah Yeun was determined to guard his brother's flight from a rival gang and, before he was able to make good his own escape, he was caught and gang raped. To make sure he never went through such a thing again, Ah Yeun began working with Master Choy Lay Fut to learn Baguazheng SuWon Chi, a bizarre hybrid martial arts discipline utilizing general Shaolin techniques to harness, maximize and focus internal and external energies.

Whereas Master Choy had long been disappointed in his own son, he recognized not only an exceptional pupil in Yeun, but also a successor. Soon, Choy had taken over as Yeun's tutor, and the two of them were practicing Choy's peculiar interpretation of SuWon Chi 10 hours each day in the confining darkness of the tiny closet in which Choy lived alone. Choy taught Ah Yeun to understand the universal energy in everything — and everyone — around him. Ah Yeun learned to breathe deeply, draw such energies into himself and, in so doing, to — *know* them fully and completely.

By the time Ah Yeun left Choy's tutelage at the age of 16, he had become a strong and blindingly fast teenage fighting machine. Yeun took the 36 oaths of the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood, waited through the tedious ritual and then began acting as a bodyguard for his brother throughout Ho



Kai Ming's rise through the triad. It was during a traitorous attack on Ah Ming by Ma Ning Yee that Yeun erupted.

Ma had sought to advance his own position in the triad by removing Ming from his path. Unfortunately for Ma, though, Ah Yeun had long smelled the scent of betrayal on Ma and, to protect his brother, had begun a slow transformation quite some time earlier. Upon attacking, Ma was confronted by the own 36 oaths to which Yeun gave life. Ma Ning Yee's thoughts were filled with the mythical gate of swords, lightning and fire. He shrieked and withered inside his own mind, seeing and feeling himself struck by Yeun's heavenly lightning, burned by Yeun's fierce fire and his flesh flensed from his body by Yeun's thousand swords. Although Ma Ning Yee was later found dead in the squalid corridors from no apparent cause, his face was frozen in a rictus of perfect terror.

By the time he was 20, Yeun's fierceness had grown mythic, drawing the attention of the secretive Heaven Thunder Triad. He was rumored not only to know the evil that lurked in men's hearts but also to have tremendous powers to cloud the mind. Yeun's work with Master Choy had taught Yeun to hone his ability to traipse around inside other people's heads, to eavesdrop on their thoughts, to plant appropriate “suggestions” and, if necessary, to debilitate or destroy them with an endless loop of their own fears.

Image: Through his training, Ho Kai Yeun has become a beautifully toned but deadly young man. Where Ho Kai Ming is a flamboyant playboy, Yeun is morose and monastic; Ming may be the nightlife's pretty boy wherever he goes, but Yeun's style is to blend into the background and

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listen to others' thoughts. Where Ming is content to control one of the most powerful triads in the world and command trillions of dollars, Yeun's sights are much higher. Yeun has no desire to rule the world — or even a little part of it — he wants only to be the man behind the man who rules the world.

Roleplaying Hints: You love your brother dearly, and that's why Ming has been allowed to climb as high as he has. Master Choy painted for you a broad picture of Baguazheng SuWon Chi, but even more importantly, he also introduced you to the intricate history of the triads and opened you a door to the secrets of the Heaven Thunder Triad. You are monastic in every sense of the word; your faith in the historical sacredness of your service to the Triad is unflinching, you are entirely loyal to the Heaven Thunder and — so long as its goals don't conflict with those of the Heaven Thunder — you are also loyal to the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood. Your instructions come from the Heaven Thunder Triad, and although you've never been able to get into his mind, you supervise your brother and ensure that the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood conforms to and advances the greater purposes of Heaven's Thunder.

Gear: Carbon-fiber maser-suit, collection of portable surveillance equipment

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: Heaven Thunder Triad/Chiu-Chao Brotherhood

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Appearance 4, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Awareness 3 (Keeping Watch), Biz 2, Drive 1, Endurance 5, Interrogation 3, Intrusion 1, Martial Arts 5 (Blind Fighting, Multiple Opponents), Melee 4 (Improvised Weapon), Resistance 5 (Ignore Pain), Shadowing 3, Streetwise 3 (Black Market, Customs, Information), Thought Discipline 4

Backgrounds: Contacts 4, Favors 3, Followers 5, Mentor 3, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 3

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Stamina •• (Durability, Resilience), Mega-Perception •••• (Quantum Attunement, Ultraperipheral Perception), Mega-Wits ••• (Lie Detector, Natural Empath)

Quantum Powers: Disorient ••••, Domination •••, Empathic Manipulation •••, Immobilize ••, Mental Blast ••••

Ho Kai Ming

Background: Ho Kai Ming is beautiful; it is no wonder that his brother is completely enamored of him. While brother Yeun was learning the finer points of destruction, defense and mind control, Ming mastered the finer points of planning, influence and connection. It was Ming who built the intelligence network that supplied the Taiwanese; it was



Ming who split off the brothers' main efforts toward the exploding heroin business; it was Ming who first joined the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood; and it was Ming who turned the brothers' petty crime and drug sales into one of the most respected and lucrative triads. After Yeun returned from Master Choy's tutelage and the two left the Walled City for the last time, Ming's excesses spiraled out of control. He became the popularly flamboyant owner of Hong Kong's most fabled race track and a lavish entertainer at the casino tables in Macao. Between bestowing gifts and money on friends and acquaintances, Ming's narcotic and sexual extravagance and the soft argent glow from his eyes, Ming became known as "the Silver Ho."

As Ming quickly climbed through the ranks of the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood, he bore primary responsibility for increasing the Brotherhood's US and European heroin markets, a task at which he succeeded quite well. By sending his lieutenants around the globe to establish branches and make connections with other organized crime figures, Ming became Hong Kong's top heroin trafficker. From this position of eminence, Ming began (at Yeun's prompting) to build the Brotherhood's position as arbiter between the triads, securing the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood's position of respectability among its brethren (and tying all of the triads together as a more unified whole that would be easier for the Heaven Thunder Triad to manage). It was Ming who pursued the refinement of novas' M-R nodes and the production of derivative drugs.

Ming was pleased at the ease with which he slipped into life as the leader of the world's most powerful triad (or, unbeknownst to him, as the most powerful pawn of the

world's most powerful triad). Ming's special sense of the intricate financial possibilities open to the Brotherhood made him a natural leader of the triad, and his unusual ability to "spark" novas before harvest secured his position as the Brotherhood's silver egg-laying goose.

Although Ming recognizes the ultimate wisdom in Yeun's suggestions, he is mildly aware that someone else pulls Yeun's strings. Despite this, Ming made the conscious decision to follow Yeun's prompts for so long as they remain profitable.

Ming spends much of his time "holding court," answering questions and giving orders to others. Reports suggest that Ming's sparking of new or possible novas is quite perverse and that, depending on his mood and the chemicals presently in his system, Ming's personality hovers somewhere between "delicately volatile" and "wildly unpredictable."

Image: Exceptionally pretty in a debauched sort of way, Ming is used to a prominent and free lifestyle. He's become not only a supporter, but also an active member of the Boy Scouts and other charitable social organizations. A popular night-life figure in his tailored pin-striped suits, Ming is comfortable jet-setting between and partying in nightclubs, on yachts and in private mansions on three continents. He is used to tables filled with caviar, Hennessy XO brandy and Havana cigars, and although he enjoys "surprises," he has been known to shoot or dismember the entertainer who's surprised him a bit too much.

Roleplaying Hints: ViaSoft is nothing. The US government is nothing. You lead a *real* organization — one with the will to satisfy people's desires, to control others' destinies and to buy a nation if necessary. You are the Brotherhood's most important (if not it's oldest) brother, and your plans are paramount. At the same time, though, you recognize that Yeun has some *very* important suggestions. And though you hate feeling emasculated by accepting Yeun's ideas, you also see that Yeun's ideas are well orchestrated and backed by enough clout to support him. You may be in charge, but you can see the limits to your authority, and if it comes down to the nut-cutting, you wonder whether Yeun and his true masters will define those limits for you or whether you'll show them what limits really mean.

Gear: Ming often carries a whipsword, though, with Yeun about, Ming has little concern for his own safety.

Nature: Hedonist

Allegiance: Chiu-Chao Brotherhood

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 5, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 4

Abilities: Arts 3, Awareness 2, Biz 2, Command 3 (Tactics), Drive 2, Endurance 3, Intimidation 3 (Overt Display), Martial Arts 1, Rapport 4, Resistance 3, Stealth 1, Style 3

Backgrounds: Backing 5, Followers 5, Influence 4, Resources 5

Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 5, Taint 7 (Aberrant Eyes, Hormonal Imbalance [Rage], Unearthly Beauty)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence • (Mental Prodigy — Financial, Tactical), Mega-Wits — •• (Natural Empath, Synergy), Mega-Appearance ••• (First Impression), Mega-Manipulation • (Persuader), Mega-Charisma •• (Commanding Presence)

Quantum Powers: Node Spark •••••, Nova Proxy •, Psychic Shield ••

Chun Lao Fut

Background: By the time he died, Ho Kai Yeun's Master Choy was 107 years old; he had lived through a large chunk of the Chinese triads' heyday and had watched while the triads began spreading an intricate web of contacts throughout the world. Choy had watched while the triads solidified their control of the new heroin market and while the triads splintered and reformed themselves. Choy witnessed the prime markets of the triads change from prostitution to heroin to soma, and while he did not particularly like what he saw, he tolerated it in the name of advancing an organization to which he'd dedicated himself — Heaven's Thunder.

Choy had only one child during his life, Chun Lao Fut, AKA Chun Fat, AKA Byron Chun. Chun was an exceptionally precocious child, but he possessed tendencies that Master Choy simply could not understand. It wasn't that Chun was a bad boy — he was, in fact, quite polite, intelligent, well mannered and reserved — but Choy sometimes thought there was something quite *different* about Chun.

Choy loved his son dearly but grew to fear the boy's predilections. Master Choy tried to teach and build his son a stable future by training Chun in the positive Baguazheng SuWon Chi practices, but as he watched the adolescent boy go through the motions, Choy always felt that Chun shaped SuWon Chi, rather than being shaped by it. It was for Chun's benefit that Master Choy accepted membership in the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood and then in the Heaven Thunder Triad — Choy believed that he could watch out for his only child only by harnessing the power and capability of the triads. Instead, he watched Chun become... something else — many other things, in fact.

Even if Master Choy did not, Heaven Thunder recognized Chun as a potential nova early in his life, and the boy was initiated into the Chiu-Chao Brotherhood at the age of 11. When he erupted as a nova at the age of 16, Chun was quickly separated, though, for fear that he would disturb the *sze kau*.

Isolated from his peers and the rest of the *sze kau*, Chun grew to be more himself as he slipped further and further into the shadows cast by his own reality. Soon, the

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boy began to pursue his own agenda, which only sometimes matched that of the Heaven Thunder Triad, and despite all the eyes and ears at the Triad's disposal, Chun became able to drop out of sight in the space between two breaths. Chun became more and more unpredictable but was always able to obtain such critical information for the Triad that he was allowed to follow the beat of his own drum.

Image: Chun may have any image. He's a shapeshifter, so his looks are rather fluid. Generally, he's about 5'8" tall and of roughly the same age as Ho Kai Ming and Ho Kai Yeun, with features that are frequently androgynous. Chun

is outwardly very calm and unnoticeable, and if shaped as a human at all, his body will often possess dramatically contrasting male and female attributes.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the Chameleon, and you become what you need to be. If it serves you to be the fly on the wall, then that is the shape your body naturally takes; if a man with valuable information appreciates your feminine wiles, then those are the features that you'll enhance to get what you want. You, quite literally, are Everyman. You may serve Heaven's Thunder on occasion, or you may serve another triad; you may serve the lofty aims of Utopia or the unfettered goals of the Teragen. Your concept of humans and novas as a single species is quite ennobling and well formed in your own mind, but the notion doesn't necessarily gel with anyone else's thoughts about the means by which this ideal of equality is to be achieved.

Gear: Shock net, eclipsidol spray, butterfly knife

Nature: Paragon

Allegiance: Self

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Appearance 3, Manipulation 3, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 2, Endurance 4, Intrusion 5, Perception 4, Rapport 3, Resistance 4, Science 2, Shadowing 5, Stealth 5

Backgrounds: Dormancy 5, Eufiber 5, Mentor 3, Node 4 Quantum 5, Quantum Pool 30, Willpower 7, Taint 5 (Androgynous, Unearthly Beauty)

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Perception •• (Bloodhound, Ultraperipheral Perception), Mega-Wits ••••• (Enhanced Initiative)

Quantum Powers: Healing •••, Homunculus •••, Quantum Imprint ••, Shapeshift ••••, Sizemorph (Grow) ••, Warp Body ••

THE NAKATO GUMI

Personal Memo

To: Gregor van der Groot, Director, Technological Regulation
From: Pearl Ichizawa, Compliance Analyst
Re: Report on Japanese adherence to Utopian policies re: “blacktech”
Mr. van der Groot,

Greetings from Tokyo. I am pleased to report that my trip to Japan has been very informative. I cannot, however, claim to feel as pleased with my findings.

On the face of it, Japan is indeed enforcing Utopia’s moratorium on potentially dangerous technology. No fewer than 200 arrests were made last year and those items of “blacktech” recovered by the authorities confiscated. Were that the end of the story, I would be more than satisfied with the situation. It is not.

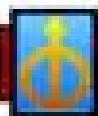
Those 200 arrests represent a fraction of the violations of Utopia policy in Japan, I would estimate around an eighth. Furthermore, those individuals who are caught are given ludicrously light sentences: fines of 1,000 yen or a night in jail. Worse, confiscated blacktech is often taken by the police for their personal use or, not infrequently, sold back to the criminals from whom they just seized it. That’s at the local level. On the national level, I saw evidence of similar behavior on the part of more powerful authorities. The Japanese patent office is a noteworthy example. Instead of forwarding requests for patents on potentially dangerous items/technologies to Utopia as we’ve repeatedly requested, officials here treat them as they normally would and grant patents for even the most objectionable items/techniques with a nod and a wink, often with a recommendation of where to go to have the item manufactured and tested — most often an almost legendary shadow corporation called “Kuro-Tek.” With corruption on this scale permeating every echelon of the Japanese government and law-enforcement establishment, it is hard to see how Utopia can prevent the continued manufacture and sale of these items.

Corruption is not so prevalent in other areas of Japanese law enforcement, which leads me to believe that there are factors contributing to this particular phenomenon:

First, Japan is a fiercely independent nation that treasures its autonomy. Utopia may not have observed the culturally appropriate protocols with the proper individuals when establishing the S&T policies, resulting in a sort of national resentment and the kind of passive-aggressive behaviors I report above.

Secondly, the relationship in Japan between the yakuza and the common man is not the same as that between organized crime and the common man elsewhere. The yakuza are more of an extended family or shadow government. So long as they are amiable, generous and well mannered, it is considered polite to allow their illegal activities to proceed unhindered. This is the dynamic that allows criminal organizations such as the Nakato Gumi not just to thrive, but to gain acceptance as national heroes.

Thirdly, the obvious success of the *Saisho* revolution grants the Japanese a sense of national satisfaction that is almost palpable. The Japanese resentment of the West’s technological superiority stems from two great historical insults: 1) the 19th century, when the USA forced Japan to open up to the unwanted advances of the West and ended the “golden era” of the samurai by introducing guns and 2) World War II, when the USA’s atomic bombing of two of Japan’s cities resulted in a serious wounding of the Japanese national spirit. Due to these two incidents, the Japanese are loathe to allow the West to get the technological jump on them again, and to the average Japanese, Utopia is a tool of the West, a misperception we should take great pains to disabuse them of.



THE NAKATO GUMI

While it is one thing to understand their attitudes, it is another thing entirely to condone them. If at all possible, I recommend placing increasingly severe UN sanctions on Japan until they begin policing themselves appropriately. If we adopt a laissez-faire attitude with regard to Japan, other nations may take note of 1) Japan's rebelliousness and 2) the fact that Utopia is not penalizing Japan for its relaxed approach toward cracking down on blacktech production and distribution channels. Were these two things to occur, we will have set a bad precedent, and an awkward situation may metastasize so as to become a problem of global proportions.

These are, of course, only recommendations. Should you have further questions regarding my findings, feel free to contact me at my Singapore address.

Sincerely,
Pearl Ichizawa
Compliance Analyst
Hardtech Branch
Science & Technology Division
Project Utopia

Private Communiqué

Communiqué double-encrypted with Navajo Daedelus 3; dated 11/20/14

From: Director Thetis

Re: Operation: Scorpion

Nyeung:

You have my approval to proceed with Operation: Scorpion, with a few modifications.

I agree completely that it's well past time we brought the Japanese into line with regard to technology regulations. There has been more than enough blacktech coming from there. Planting the idea that their own technology may be used against them is inspired, but creating another São Paulo is unconscionable. It's true that nuclear weapons are powerful specters in the Japanese psyche, but they are also too connected with foreign powers. There's no need to swing a hammer when a well-placed needle will effectively serve our purposes. This must be a more "domestic" threat, something that can't be so easily misconstrued as the work of foreigners.

I also want T2M-A/P left out of it. In addition to the unnecessary risk of injuries to Utopia personnel, there's the matter of the Japanese resentment toward T2M and Utopia. If at all possible, use one of their own novas instead, preferably a member of Nippontai. Again, we keep the entire matter domestic. Let the outcry against dangerous technology grow from within, and let them come to us. Carefully managed, the Japanese people will turn to Utopia for salvation from the technological dangers their leaders have created.

Director Thetis





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N! The News (01/07/15)

No Clues in Attempted Terrorist Attack

OSAKA, JAPAN — Japanese authorities have stated that, while they are pursuing leads in a narrowly averted terrorist incident in Osaka, they have little hope of uncovering the perpetrators thanks to the advanced technology they used to carry out the crime. Osaka Prefecture police say that an attempt to introduce a fatal neurotoxin into the city’s water supply wasn’t carried out by a human criminal, or even by a nova, but by an incredibly small robot.

Police recovered part of the robot, an insect-shaped device fitting into the palm of the hand and packing enough poison to kill tens of thousands of people in the city, should it have reached its target. Only the intervention of Denshi, a member of Nippontai, prevented it from doing so. He happened to be visiting the water-treatment plant following up on a potentially related incident.

“There was an illegal access of the treatment plant’s computer system,” Denshi told members of the press. “I was attempting to track it down when I detected the presence of the robot. It slipped past all of the plant’s other security measures. If I hadn’t been there, I don’t know that anyone would have detected it before it was too late.”

Denshi’s nova abilities allowed him to disable the robot but not before a self-destruct device eliminated most of the evidence. Police have stated that elements of the robot’s construction, along with the neurotoxin it carried, are on Project Utopia’s list of prohibited and dangerous technologies. Disturbingly, both technologies were developed by Japanese firms before they were banned. Other than that, however, police have no leads on the source of the robot or who sent it into the purification plant.

“This incident helps make clear the importance of the work we do,” said Project Utopia representative Jay Hidaki. “If every nation and company helped us to regulate this sort of dangerous technology, we could ensure that these sorts of things wouldn’t happen.”

KURO TEK

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Mr. Aarneson,

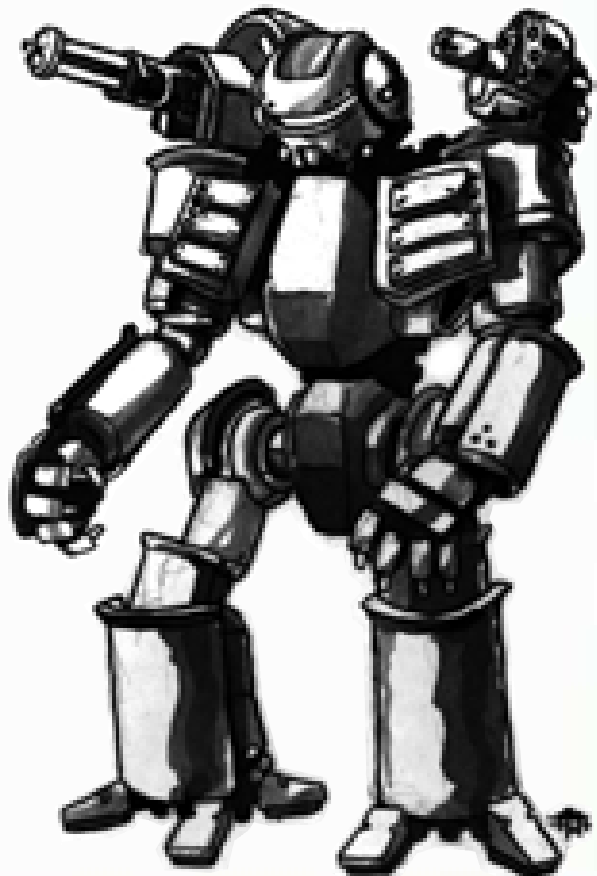
I'm deeply pleased to announce publication of the newest Kuro-Tek catalog. As you well know, Kuro-Tek provides only the finest in contraband technology. Whatever Utopia hopes to deny you, Kuro-Tek puts in your hands.

Our Research & Development team goes to extreme lengths to recover research and designs suppressed or stolen by Utopia; it then scours the globe to recruit the brightest minds stifled by Utopian policies and provides them with the highest quality materials and research facilities in Japan. The results of this ambitious R&D program are the stuff of legend (and news coverage). No other organization provides you with more useful, reliable and effective technology than Kuro-Tek. It is our great pleasure to provide you with the most advanced technological innovations in all fields, ranging from military-grade hardware and electronics to the latest software and biotechnology. We challenge you to find better technology anywhere else. If you do, [contact us](#), and we'll add it to our catalog!

You have now been a stalwart Kuro-Tek customer for over three years, and we have taken the liberty of listing just a few of the highlights from the new catalog that we believe you may find useful based on your past purchase profile:

KTA-327 Dangard Armored Warrior

Armored warriors rule the battlefield once more with the introduction of the Dangard series of armored combat robots. Standing 2.5 meters tall, the Dangard unit carries the armament of a medium tank or armored personnel carrier in a more compact (and considerably more agile) package. The Dangard's humanoid configuration and built-in gyrostabilizers allow it to move through any sort of terrain, and its short-range jump jets let it leap over obstacles with a single bound. The unit's armored hull is capable of withstanding sustained heavy weapons fire and even nova powers, and it packs an array of weaponry, including a 30mm rotary cannon, portable laser and grenade launcher. More importantly, the Dangard has a complete sensor package (including radar and



IR scan, plus additional optional sensor modules), making it suitable for surveillance and reconnaissance missions. The onboard computer can be programmed to follow complex mission parameters, or the unit can be controlled directly using telepresence VR technology that allows the pilot to directly experience things from the unit's point of view, without any direct risk! After the first appearance of these armored giants in Cambodia, demand has increased sharply, so order now!

KTA-785 Scorpion Glass (AYOR)

The ultimate assassination tool! This highly toxic synthetic polymer is as transparent as glass and three times as fragile. When broken, scorpion glass shatters into a thousand tiny splinters that lodge beneath the skin, where they dissolve into the bloodstream. Best of all, scorpion glass incorporates an anesthetic into the toxin, preventing the target from feeling the splinters and knowing he's been compromised. As little as 18 mg (about 4 well-lodged splinters) is enough to kill a small man within four hours. Available in whatever shape you request. Degrades into harmless components after two days in the presence of oxygen.

Handle with care.



thought disruption. The ranged trans-cranial magnetic disrupter sends an invisible beam of concentrated magnetic energy through the skull and into the brain, where it disrupts neural function. Depending on your accuracy, results ranging from perceptual hallucinations to induced seizures and death may be achieved.

Excellent for discrediting speakers unsympathetic to your cause!

Magnetic fields around RT-CMD cannot be masked. May destroy mag-sensitive devices. Prone to overheating after more than 10 minutes of continuous use.

KTV-779 Virtual Reality Conditioning Package

Based on state of the art software and neurolingustic programming developments, this compact system provides everything you need for interrogation and mental conditioning in a single carrying unit the size of a briefcase. It includes a powerful notebook system to monitor and control the conditioning process, selecting from numerous pre-designed "themes" to suit your individual subject. Conditioning is swift and effective even on the most difficult subjects, and the customizable program options increase efficiency when additional subject data is entered.

KTD-226 Sonic Grenade

Emitting extremely powerful vibrations in both the infra- and ultrasonic ranges, the sonic grenade pulverizes stone, concrete, glass, ceramic and living bone. Quite messy. Excellent for demolitions or situations where examples must be made. Available in slow- or fast-effect models.

KTN-339 Ranged Trans-Cranial Magnetic Disrupter (AYOR)

Three decades ago, trans-cranial magnetic stimulation was nothing but a research tool. Kuro-Tek has updated this tool with new developments in mag-tech and now offers the latest in r a n g e d





KTZ-99X Eclipsidol (Slite)(AYOR)

We at Kuro-Tek are sympathetic to the fact that one meddling nova can ruin your entire operation, that's why we dedicated vast resources to obtaining eclipsidol (known on the street as "slite"). By forcing a nova's M-R node into high gear, eclipsidol causes him to expend the entirety of his nova power in one exceedingly painful instantaneous supernova flash, leaving him relatively vulnerable for several minutes. Extremely effective against armored, flying and wall-crawling individuals.

Although the results can be spectacular, eclipsidol is contraindicated for use against novas with electromagnetic, pyrokinetic, mental blast or disintegration powers.

Use at a safe distance.

Eclipsidol comes in spray, intramuscular dart, micro-patch and suppository form.

All of our items are rigorously tested for user-safety; those that do not pass our safety tests are clearly labeled AYOR (At Your Own Risk), and an explanation is provided on the potential hazards associated with the use of

that particular item. We believe that every Kuro-Tek consumer should be an informed consumer and trust that our customers will have enough sense to judge for themselves how best to use a particular item.

Please use Kuro-Tek devices responsibly. Uses of Kuro-Tek devices that needlessly endanger innocent lives will be looked upon with great displeasure.

Should you wish to receive the new Kuro-Tek catalog in its entirety, please contact us via OpNet, provide us with your password and your current whereabouts, and a courier will deliver your new catalog chip within 24 hours.

Thank you for your business, and best of luck in all your honorable endeavors.

Most Sincerely,
Tatsuhiko Sawada

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THE NAKATO GUMI

Voicemail Message

From a voicemail to Kua Oatari, DeVries nova placement specialist:

Kua, it's Derrick. Jon and Tamra are... are dead, and we're talking capital D here. I haven't seen Solveig since they ambushed us in Kyoto. And I'm bleeding like a stuck pig because they... hit me with a dart full of... industrial strength anticoagulant. You need to let me know... and now... what it takes to get out of that damned contract. I hereby do... whatever the fuck it takes to get out of... my fucking contract with you. I'll gladly repay every last... cent of your money in full, with interest if you want, but it's becoming... way clear that I'm... that the four of us were in over our heads. The four of us were. We had no idea what you were... sending us in to do, an oversight you and I will... talk about later, I might add. After we took out that Kuro-Tek facility in Kobe, they got really... pissed off, and we've been getting slammed ever since. They have tech that can do things to the human body that I didn't even know could be done. Now, I know. I've seen it.

You want to say that we were too green to go after Kuro? Fine. *Mea fucking culpa* already. But I'm done. I've seen three friends die, and I'm done with this shit. You can go... find some other fools to go after Kuro-Tek.

Fuck. I feel them getting close again. I have to... have to go.

OpNet Program Excerpt

From the OpNet program "Gumi Nova Tragic," aired 02/24/15

Kenshi: So, it has come to this. I told you one day we would face each other again and that I would reclaim our family's honor, over your dead body, if necessary.

Ryu: Don't fool yourself, Kenshi! I am our family's honor because I follow the commands of my *oyabun*, regardless of the cost. You are the one who has abandoned our family honor by taking up with Project Utopia! You have sold out everything you had to do what *you* wanted, regardless of the consequences. Now, you leave me no choice.

Ichiko: Ryu, no!

Ryu:

Stay back, Ichiko! I don't want you hurt, but this struggle between us must end in blood, Kenshi's... or mine.

Kenshi: Don't worry, Ichiko. I won't let him hurt you. I'll take you where you'll be safe.

Ichiko: (crying) Ryu, Kenshi, please... don't do this!

Kenshi: He is a criminal! He defies the laws of Project Utopia! He insults everything that I believe in! I have to stop him.

This has to end *now!*

Ryu: Then come, brother, and let there be an ending between us.



THE NAKATO GUMI

DeVries Briefing Letter

04/12/15

Kyle,

I know you can handle this job without any problems, provided that you take the time to do your homework and prepare properly. That's what I'm around to help you do, so don't make the mistake of thinking that your powers, or your previous successful jobs, mean you can waltz through this one. We've had some regrettable outcomes in the past when we've gone to Japan, and I don't want a repeat of any of those missions. This is the big time, but I know that you're ready for it. I'm just going to hit the high points here, with links to the vital parts of [the briefing files](#). Go over them carefully. We want the Nakato Gumi to know exactly who hit them — but not until you're well out of reach.



All right, the first thing is a little [Yakuza 101](#). I expect you to read through the detailed information we've prepared, but I'll hit the high points for you. Keep these things in mind and you'll do okay.

First, the Nakato Gumi isn't like the versions of the yakuza you see on the OpNet or in the *manga*. It's a modern organization, as ruthless as they come, and it's got the best high-tech toys to play with. [Kuro-Tek](#) sees to that, so you can count on its men being well armed. Remember, these guys supply the Directive with *its* equipment. You can bet they keep some of the very best stuff to themselves. That tech isn't just weapons, either. The yakuza has access to quantum detectors and shit like eclipsidol, which can really mess up your node. Don't get cocky dealing with these guys, or you're dead.

Second, we know the Nakato Gumi has novas working for it, not many, but then, it doesn't take more than one to ruin your day. I've attached the bio on [Takako Orinama](#). She's fast, tough and at least as good a fighter as Jake Korelli is, if not better. Don't go up against her or any other Nakato novas, understand? Your best asset is your ability to get away from them, so use it. Watch out for novas who might detect you.

You're going to have to operate in Japan to make contact with our inside man. Study the [Japanese primer](#) carefully. You're never going to learn enough to completely understand things, but you can get an idea of what you're getting into. Remember two things. One, the Japanese don't much like *gaijin* these days, and two, a lot of Japanese think of members of the yakuza as some kind of folk heroes. They're sticking it to Utopia by selling blacktech and standing up for Japan's rights. Hell, there are plenty of places in Japan where the yakuza operate pretty much openly. Don't count on any help from the locals, and assume anyone could be a yakuza informant.

Next is the [layout](#) of the Kuro-Tek facility. The information is as good as our surveillance and my photographic memory can make it, but it's not foolproof. You're going to want to do some recon of your own before you 'port in there. Odds are good they've got the best scanners and alarm systems around. Do your best to get around them, but plan on setting *something* off when you get inside. You're going to have to work fast. Make sure you go over the [technology profile](#) of the target so you can pick it out in two seconds in the dark in the middle of a firefight because that may be the only chance you've got.

I can hear you thinking right now, "Jeez, Jeffries, thanks for making this sound so easy." Well, if I'm making it sound tough, that's because I know that it is. I've dealt with the yakuza before, kid, and trust me, this ain't no cakewalk. But you're good at your job. After all, you *were* trained by the very best, right? Play it by the numbers, and it'll go fine. I'll buy you a brew when I see you back in Pretoria.

Good luck,
Jeffries



THE NAKATO GUMI

Internal Audit

Amount: ¥756,000,000
Paid to: Matsushida Corporation
For: Servomotors

Amount: ¥100,000,000
Paid to: Masahiro Odashu (Chairman, Nippon Tai)
For: Gift

Amount: ¥50,000,000
Paid to: Kaneka Umi (Minister of Information)
For: Gift

Amount: ¥900,000
Paid to: Admiral Medical Suppliers
For: Canulas, syringes, misc. equipment

Amount: ¥1,800,000
Paid to: Acme Products, Inc.
For: “Toys”

Amount: ¥900,000
Paid to: Takako Ozawa
For: Daughter’s medical expenses (Gift)

Amount: ¥4,870,300
Paid to: Kyoto Pharmaceuticals
For: Mite

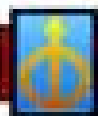
Amount: ¥28,000,000
Paid to: Nippon Radiologic
For: Radioisotopes (Strontium, Cesium, Barium)

Speech Excerpt

From a speech given to the Kyoto staff, August 6, 2014, by Yoshiro Nakamura, President and CEO of Kuro-Tek:

...since the New Beginning in 1999, Japan has been rebounding from our terrible shame. Once again, Japan has leaders. We find reliable spiritual leadership in the august personage of Bodhisattva Masato. We find competent governmental leadership in the likes of Kaneka Umi, Minister of Information. And most of all, we find technological leadership in the form of Kuro-Tek. Now that Japan is no longer lost, we must show the rest of the world. Japan has regained its position as a world leader in technology, and we must now guide the world away from its domination by the Utopia Project.

I started Kuro-Tek on this day 14 years ago to supply what I then thought was a relatively small and specialized market niche. By following what was most Japanese in myself, I was able to build a company that is not technically allowed to exist in the world today. It is now among the most innovative corporations in existence, and I — and Japan — owe that to you. We owe it to Mariko Yamashiro, Takako Orinama and Genji Tadashi, our three lovely nova protectors, and Akinori Kasai, our noble enforcer, who time and time again have used their abilities combined with our tools to devastating effect against the Utopia *gaijin* who seek to undermine our freedom to think, engineer, create and do business. I owe it to Yamazaki Kiyoshi, our incomparable leader of R&D, who repeatedly turns the hints and whispers of theory into useful technology, and I owe it to all of you, the analysts, managers, assistants and engineers gathered from a score of nations. Without you, Kuro-Tek would not be the resounding success that it is today, and to you, I give my most sincere gratitude.



History

Although its history is not as long as that of the triads, the yakuza has been present in Japanese society for hundreds of years, and it is quite proud of its historical traditions.

Origins

The origins of the yakuza are somewhat uncertain. It is believed to have developed from gangs of organized criminals in the 17th or 18th century in Japan. The yakuza members believe their predecessors were *machi-yakko*, or “servants of the town,” hired mercenaries who protected towns and villages from the depredations of raiders and criminal *ronin*, or masterless samurai, in the 1600s. The *machi-yakko* hold an almost Robin Hood-like reputation among the Japanese, outlaws who defended the common people from the harsh punishment of the nobility. The modern yakuza partake of some of that reputation.

Modern scholars, on the other hand, believe the yakuza developed from two different criminal gangs in Japan in the 18th century. The first, the *tekiya*, were unscrupulous merchants known for cheating customers, bullying other merchants (an early form of the protection racket), corrupting local officials, and similar crimes. The other group, the *bakuto*, was made up of organized gamblers, running illegal games of chance and other vice operations, primarily along Japan’s road network. In fact, the name “yakuza” comes from the card game *hanafuda*, played by the *bakuto*. The worst possible hand in *hanafuda* is an eight, a nine and a three, or “*ya-ku-za*” in Japanese. The yakuza wore this expression of uselessness as a badge of honor.

From an alliance of the two sorts of criminals came the organization of yakuza *gumi*, or clans, based around mutual self-interest and loyalty to a “father-figure” known as an *oyabun*. The yakuza prospered behind the scenes in Japan, growing steadily in power and influence as Japan was forced to open its shores to the Western world.

Modern History

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, the yakuza became more and more firmly entrenched in Japanese society. Yakuza bosses also become more involved in politics, supporting Japanese nationalism and imperialism. The yakuza was supposedly broken by the American military following V-J Day, but in truth, the environment of post-war Japan allowed the yakuza to go underground and begin to modernize. It found numerous opportunities for a new black market.

As Japan moved into the modern age, the yakuza moved with it, finding new “business opportunities” along the way. The yakuza added a third type of gangster, the *gurentai*, or “hoodlum,” to its ranks. Guns replaced swords as the weapon of choice, and younger yakuza adopted much of the style of the American Mafia (or at least what they knew

of it from American movies and fiction). A sharp suit, a big car and a gun became symbols of the new yakuza.

The booming Japanese economy of the 1980s put billions of dollars into the yakuza’s coffers. The yakuza maintained close ties with the Japanese government and Japanese businesses. Eventually, police began efforts to root out the yakuza, but its influence was so widespread that they rarely did more than scratch the surface of its operations. Yakuza were forced to operate a bit less publicly but still went about their business.

The 1990s saw a decline for the yakuza, along with the Japanese economy. The downturn affected yakuza profits and collapsed a number of smaller gangs. But the yakuza persevered in the face of adversity and did their best to adapt to the changing times. Japanese authorities cracked down even harder on yakuza operations, and accusations of political corruption brought more attention to the yakuza than they wanted.

The Nova Age

At first, the Nova Age brought nothing but trouble for Japan and the yakuza. The Moscow Crash in 1999 led to a global financial crisis that nearly collapsed Japan’s teetering economy. Thousands of *sararimen* (“salary men,” corporate employees) committed *seppuku* over the shame of their financial losses. Businesses folded left and right. One of the casualties of the sudden recession was the Yamaguchi Gumi, Japan’s most powerful and influential yakuza gang, dragged down by its ties with failing companies and torn apart in a massive gang war with its largest rivals.

Japan found hope in the abilities of novas, appearing more and more commonly. The Japanese government, in cooperation with the nation’s major corporations, announced *Saisho*, “the New Beginning.” The government offered subsidies to corporations to hire nova employees. With the aid of nova advisors and nova-developed technologies, Japan began rebuilding its battered economy. Part of the support for *Saisho* came from an unusual source, a yakuza gang called the Nakato Gumi, which helped provide money and convince key political officials of the plan (with the assistance of a nova of their own, Akinori Kasai, also known as Kuroi Kiri, or “Black Mist”).

The success of *Saisho* put the Nakato Gumi in the number one spot among the yakuza, giving the Nakato considerable influence with both the government and the major corporations of Japan. Like yakuza before them, the Nakato encouraged nationalism and isolationism in Japan to help secure their power. While Team Tomorrow was rounding up gangsters in North America, with plans to move on to Europe and South America, the Nakato Gumi fortified its stronghold against the coming storm. Sooner or later, they knew Project Utopia would turn its attention toward Japan.

The yakuza invested heavily in *Saisho*, particularly by investing in the Kuro-Tek corporation, one of many companies investing in high-tech research by novas. Kuro-Tek provided a front for Nakato operations in Japan and abroad. The Nakato Gumi also quietly supported the creation of Nippontai, Japan's own national nova team to compete with Team Tomorrow, and arranged for Nippontai to wage its own war on Nakato's competitors, winnowing out the ranks of the yakuza in Japan.

By the time Project Utopia turned its attention to the matter of organized crime in Japan, it received a polite response from the Japanese government of "thank you, but we have no organized crime in Japan," along with records of yakuza arrests by Nippontai. The Nakato Gumi continued to operate quietly behind the scenes, and most of the remaining yakuza in Japan were either brought under the Nakato banner or dealt with by Japanese authorities, including Nippontai.

Utopia didn't take note of the Nakato Gumi again until the United Nations granted Utopia's Science & Technology Division authority over the development of new technologies. With their success built on the work of novas, the Japanese corporations complained bitterly about the decision. The Nakato Gumi turned the decision into a new opportunity, since it created an even greater black market for technology Utopia had declared illegal. However, it also gave Utopia the means to directly intervene against tech-smugglers such as Kuro-Tek, and the struggle between the two truly began.

Project Utopia has done everything in its power to stem the flow of illegal and dangerous technologies coming from Japan (and other areas influenced by the Nakato Gumi). But Utopia is continually hampered by endless red tape from the Japanese government, uncooperative corporations and a disdainful Japanese public that sees Utopia's "help" as unwanted Western interference and a deliberate effort to curb Japan's success in the world market. In the Japanese view, now that's it clear *Saisho* is a success, the rest of the world is ganging up on them (via Utopia) to shut it down.

The Nakato Gumi, for its part, continues to operate successfully in Japan and is expanding its operations into the vacuum left by the collapse of other syndicates. The Nakato holds the strings of the Japanese government and the major corporations, and its willingness to provide illegal technology for a price has earned them a great many favors around the world. The Nakato has become very much a fixture of the Nova Age, and it has every intention of profiting from it.

Organization

The Nakato Gumi maintains many yakuza traditions, among them the organization of its syndicate, built along time-honored lines.



The *Oyabun-Kobun* Relationship

The foundation of the yakuza structure is the *oyabun-kobun* or “father-role/child-role” relationship. The *oyabun*, leader of a yakuza gang, is seen as a father figure to the *kobun*. The *oyabun* “adopts” the *kobun* (usually a younger man) into the yakuza family. This happens in a ritual called *sakazuki*, or the “cup ceremony,” where the *oyabun* and the new *kobun* formally drink sake together to seal their relationship. Although the *sakazuki* became quite informal in the late 20th century, the Nakato Gumi has restored many of the formal, Shinto-style elements of the ceremony.

It is the *oyabun*’s duty to look after his *kobun*, providing them with a place to live, food to eat and other essentials, as well as work within the yakuza. In exchange, the *kobun* offer their *oyabun* complete obedience and loyalty. The *kobun* are expected to carry out the *oyabun*’s orders without question. Loyal and experienced *kobun* even learn to anticipate their *oyabun*’s desires from reading the smallest gesture or inflection, acting without even having to be asked. *Kobun* are also expected to shield their *oyabun* from all forms of harm, including persecution by the authorities. If the *oyabun* is accused of a crime, a *kobun* is expected to confess to it and serve a jail sentence as part of his duty. In fact, yakuza are often considered “green” and inexperienced unless they’ve spent at least some time in prison.

The *oyabun* is also expected to encourage his *kobun* to improve their lot in life, as a good father should. *Kobun* are helped to establish businesses of their own and, eventually, their own gangs where they take *kobun* of their own but remain loyal to their *oyabun*. This is how the organization grows and prospers.

The Gumi

The *gumi* is an entire yakuza gang, often translated as a “family” or “association.” It is led by an *oyabun* and set up in a hierarchy that extends from the *oyabun* down to the humblest “soldier” on the streets. There is a strict chain of command within the *gumi*.

Yakuza also organize into *rengo*, basically a federation of multiple *gumi* or gangs, with all of their *oyabun* as equal partners. This arrangement has fallen out of favor in 21st-century Japan because of the unchallenged supremacy of the Nakato Gumi. Efforts to create a *rengo* among smaller gangs to oppose the Nakato have always met with failure, often because authorities were alerted to the effort and ensured the new “yakuza alliance” was broken up before it could even begin.

The *oyabun* is supreme leader of the *gumi*, in complete control of its operations and personnel. The *oyabun* of a *gumi* is often referred to as *kaicho* (“chairman”) or sometimes *kumicho* (“supreme chief”). Generally, the *oyabun* is insulated from the business of the *gumi*. None of its operations

can be traced directly to him, and multiple “fall guys” are set up along the way, willing to accept responsibility (and punishment) to keep the *oyabun*’s reputation spotless.

The *oyabun*’s second-in-command, the *wakagashira* or “young leader,” handles the day-to-day business of the *gumi*. He is the head of the *Sauko-kanbu-kai*, the Supreme Staff Council, a group of 12 of the *gumi*’s leading bosses that make up a kind of “board of directors” for the gang. Below them is the *kambu atsukai* (“executive”), who is akin to the president of a company and answers directly to the Supreme Council. It is the *kambu atsukai* who is the “public” leader of the *gumi*, with everyone above him screened from complicity.

The executive commands the *gumi*’s “young men,” or *wakashu*, each the leader of a smaller gang of *kobun* loyal to him. The *wakashu* are, in turn, loyal to their superiors and so on up the ladder. The *kobun* form the “street” level of the yakuza and carry out most of the gang’s actual operations.

The territory controlled by a *gumi*’s members is called a *nawabari*, literally a “roped-off area,” a reference to the building of castle walls in medieval Japan. Originally, hundreds of *gumi* divided territory up between them, but in 2015, the Nakato Gumi’s hold over Japan’s underworld is virtually uncontested, and its territory vastly outclasses that of any other yakuza *gumi*.

Culture and Traditions

The yakuza is an organization devoted to its traditions and ways of doing things. The yakuza traditions have been reinforced within the Nakato Gumi, both because Nakamura-sama believes strongly in them and because they are useful for dealing with some of the realities of 2015 life.

The Yakuza Code

The yakuza operates by an unwritten code of behavior that its members take quite seriously. Failure to follow yakuza codes of conduct results in punishment for the offender as his superior sees fit. This code can be summed up in three concepts: *jinji*, *giri* and *ninjo*.

Jinji is the respect for one’s superiors found throughout Japanese culture. It has led to a complex set of social rules for interacting with other people and showing proper deference and respect. It relates to things such as how deeply to bow when meeting people, how to address them, how to hand them your business card and nearly every other nuance of social interaction. Yakuza expect to be treated in a manner befitting their station, particularly by their underlings. However, yakuza also understand that they are in many ways outcasts from Japanese society, a fact they are perversely proud of. They know they will not always receive the respect that is their due, but they pride themselves on conducting themselves properly despite this.

Giri is usually translated as “duty” or “obligation.” It is the loyalty and honor of the *yakuza*, particularly regarding the *oyabun-kobun* relationship. Ties of duty and honor bind the *yakuza* together, and they must be upheld. It is *giri* that leads a *kobun* to obey his *oyabun* and even go to prison for him. It is also *giri* that leads an *oyabun* to look after his *kobun* and their interests. Honor must be upheld, whatever the cost.

Part of that honor includes things such as keeping the *yakuza*’s secrets, acting properly toward other *yakuza* and their families, not becoming personally involved with things such as drugs and never betraying the *yakuza* to the police or going to them for anything when it can be handled within the organization.

Ninjo is compassion, empathy and understanding of the needs of others. Many find it a curious trait for gangsters to value, but *yakuza* (and Japanese people in general) consider it important. *Ninjo* takes the needs of others into account and seeks to do the right thing. Oftentimes, *giri* and *ninjo* are in conflict, leading to the tragic situation of having to choose between duty and conscience.

Citizens Under the Sun

Part of the expression of *ninjo* is in how the *yakuza* deal with outsiders, who they call *katagi no shu* (or simply *katagi*), “citizens under the sun.” These are people who are not *yakuza* or involved in *yakuza* business. The code requires they be treated properly and left alone by the *yakuza*. For example, an old tradition requires *yakuza* to walk on the shady side of the street so that others can walk in the pleasant warmth of the sun (which is where the expression *katagi no shu* comes from). Innocent people should be left out of *yakuza* business whenever possible.

Although this tradition is nowhere nearly as strong as it once was (if it ever was outside of *yakuza* myth), it is still influential. The Nakato Gumi takes care to ensure, for example, that “freelance” criminals are not tolerated in Japan. Threats to public safety are often handled by the *yakuza* before they even reach the attention of police, part of Japan’s image as a “crime free society.” The *yakuza* operate behind the scenes whenever possible, and there is a mutual, unspoken agreement where the citizens ignore the *yakuza*’s activities. As the expression goes, “There is no gunplay in Japan, even when there is.”

A noteworthy exception to the rule of *katagi no shu* applies to the business world and government authorities. These spheres where the *yakuza* operates are considered “fair game,” and the *yakuza* uses whatever means are necessary to ensure success in its business endeavors. For the *yakuza*, the traditionally male-dominated areas of Japanese life are the new battlefields where the *yakuza* win their success. Assaulting a businessman’s wife and family is not proper according to the *yakuza* code, but they see nothing

wrong with blackmailing him, ruining his career or even killing him outright if it furthers their goals.

Irezumi

A *yakuza* tradition well known in the West is *irezumi*, or tattooing. *Yakuza* members traditionally get tattoos not long after they join the organization, and the tattoos become more and more elaborate over time. Most *yakuza* get their tattoos using modern electric needles and dyes rather than the traditional wooden or bone needles. The traditional process of tattooing is both long and painful, considered a test of endurance and willpower among the *yakuza* — and also a great honor, since traditional tattoo artists are increasingly rare.

Yakuza tattoos are elaborate designs incorporating Japanese symbols such as waves, fish, flowers, trees and legendary creatures such as dragons. They often have mythic motifs involving legendary heroes. Traditionally, the tattoos are not visible when the *yakuza* is fully dressed, ending above the elbow and below the collar line, although they may cover nearly every other part of the *yakuza*’s body. In a society with public steam rooms and baths, *yakuza* tattoos still mark their wearer as a member of the organization, showing that people join the *yakuza* for life.

Yabitsume

Yabitsume, or “finger cutting,” is another well-known *yakuza* tradition. It is a method of punishing infractions too minor to warrant expulsion or execution. The *yakuza* is given a small ritual knife and is expected to cut off part of one of his fingers, beginning with the pinkie. The seriousness of the offense determines whether the *kobun* cuts the first, second or third joint of the finger, which is offered up to the *oyabun* by way of apology. Bearing the punishment stoically is considered a mark of honor. Some *oyabun* preserve the severed digits in alcohol as signs of their followers’ devotion.

Traditionally, *yabitsume* begins with the right hand, the “sword” hand, although either hand is used in modern practice. It’s still quite common among *yakuza*, and many of them are missing at least the tip of the pinkie, a known means of recognizing a *yakuza*. *Yakuza* who still have all their fingers are either inexperienced or men to be reckoned with, since they’ve never made a mistake serious enough to offend their *oyabun*.

Operations

The Nakato Gumi is a multi-billion dollar operation, with interests in nearly every sort of underworld commerce, ranging from simple moneymaking scams to vice to developing and selling illegal technology. Generally, the lowest ranks of the *yakuza* deal with the simplest and most straightforward means of making money, while the upper echelons of the organization are involved in more complex activities, with a worldwide scope.

Yakuza Lexicon

boruzoku: motorcycle gang.

chimpra: punk, a “little prick.”

giri: a debt of honor.

kobun: a yakuza “child,” one who owes loyalty to an *oyabun*.

irezumi: the yakuza practice of tattooing.

ninjo: sympathy, compassion, moral feelings.

oyabun: the leader of a yakuza gang, a “father figure” to the *kobun*.

sakazuki: traditional drinking ceremony held by yakuza for initiations and the start of new *gumi*.

shabu (or shab): crystal meth

yabitsume: “finger cutting,” yakuza punishment consisting of cutting off one or more finger joints.

Gambling

The yakuza controls most forms of gambling in Japan, including popular pachinko parlors and more Western-style gambling, such as card and dice games. Gambling makes the organization a fair amount of money but primarily serves as a draw for other vices the yakuza has to offer. Most gambling in Japan takes place in licensed parlors or in quasi-legal bars and clubs with attractive hostesses to entertain the guests and serve as waitresses. Yakuza members often frequent these places themselves, although usually only to drink and socialize; any yakuza who loses a great deal of money gambling is sure to lose face in the eyes of his superiors.

Vice

The Nakato Gumi controls a brisk vice business in Japan and a few other parts of the world, usually those with large Japanese populations. The vice business in Japan can be broken up into two main areas: sex and drugs.

Sexual content and imagery is heavily regulated in Japan, making the illegal sex industry hugely profitable there. Hardcore pornography is illegal in Japan, and the yakuza smuggles in American porn, along with making and distributing its own. The growth of the OpNet has eaten into the porn industry, since foreign pornography has become so much more available via anonymous OpNet downloads. The ban on hardcore porn is barely even enforced any longer, although anyone in possession of hardcore materials can still be arrested for it (a common charge when police are looking to trump-up an arrest, since odds are good the average *sarariman* has some porn lying around).

Prostitution is an even more lively industry than pornography. The yakuza hires numerous “hostesses” for its bars and nightclubs. Often, these women aren’t even expected to offer sexual favors; they simply look pretty, serve drinks and allow men to leer over and occasionally fondle them. But more often than not, women in the employ of the

yakuza are expected to sell themselves for sex. The yakuza don’t consider this dishonorable or ignoble, either. A woman who becomes a prostitute is simply using what she has to make money.

It’s not unusual for a *sarariman* with the means to support a mistress, and he often finds her through the yakuza. Yakuza also often become involved with these women, and more than a few marry them. Most of the prostitutes working for the yakuza are foreigners, either women of Korean or Chinese descent or Western women, lured to Japan for “acting” or “modeling” work. Japanese men find Caucasian women (particularly blondes) exotic, so hostesses are often American and European women.

Some particular clubs cater to more exotic sexual kinks, but they’re few compared to the more mainstream “hostess bars,” a minor concern for the yakuza at best.

The other primary vice controlled by the yakuza is drugs. The Nakato Gumi smuggles drugs such as cocaine, spike, crystal meth (called “shab”) and mite into the country. Uppers such as spike are especially popular, both with the hard-driven *sararimen* and with the wild club scene. Things such as mite and Red 7 are less popular, although there’s a market for them among athletes and gang members. The yakuza are more likely to be users of mite than dealers, and some yakuza soldiers are massively built because of mite use.

The Nakato Gumi manufactures some drugs, such as shab, domestically but imports most other drugs from elsewhere, including the Golden Triangle (dealing with the Heaven Thunder Triad) or from the cartels in Central America.

Sokaiya

The *sokaiya*, or “shareholders meeting man,” is an operation unique to the yakuza and dependent upon the desire of Japanese corporate executives to maintain face and keep order in their business. Members of the yakuza buy shares in a corporation, entitling them to attend the shareholders meetings. They then threaten to disrupt the meetings unless the corporation pays them off, a form of protection racket.

Sokaiya also extends to other extortion involving corporations and businesses. The Nakato Gumi has strong ties with the major Japanese corporations, and it’s willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure those ties are not publicly known. The yakuza don’t exploit this resource more than they have to; after all, it’s in their best interests that the corporations remain profitable. But the Nakato Gumi does use *sokaiya* as go-betweens with the corporations, ensuring their compliance with whatever the Nakato need. It may be a small favor here, a “lost” shipment of merchandise there, a research project quietly sold to Kuro-Tek through several shell companies and so forth.

The most infamous and influential *sokaiya* in the Nakato Gumi is the nova Kuroi Kiri, the so-called “Black Mist” (see “Nova Enforcers”).

Illegal Technology: Kuro-Tek

The Nakato Gumi’s most lucrative business is developing, smuggling and selling technology Project Utopia has declared illegal. Two things make the yakuza the prime suppliers of black-market tech: the Japanese government’s disdain for Project Utopia’s technological regulations and Kuro-Tek, the *gumi*’s front corporation.

The Japanese managed to revive their failing economy with the *Saisho* initiative. They see Utopia’s regulation of new technology as nothing less than an outright attempt to curb the success Japan has had in the technological arena — jealousy on the part of other nations, particularly those on the United Nations Security Council that backed the plan. The Japanese government offers only lip service to Utopian regulations and is willing to look the other way when it comes to corporations such as Kuro-Tek smuggling technology.

Yoshiro Nakamura recognized the potential of novas to revolutionize technology very early on. He made sure the Nakato Gumi not only supported the *Saisho* program, but that it was a part of the initiative. Taking several small front companies, Nakamura merged them to form Kuro-Tek and immediately set about recruiting the best personnel to run the new company, with the goal of finding ways to profit from nova-based and -developed technologies.

At first, Kuro-Tek helped other corporations to cut through legal red tape and other obstacles in the *Saisho* program, building up contacts and influence in the Japanese business world. When the United Nations granted Project Utopia oversight authority on technological development, Kuro-Tek blossomed. Suddenly, it had the facilities, personnel and political ties to develop and manufacture all the technology Utopia considered too dangerous to be in the hands of the public. Kuro-Tek was able to leverage deals with various corporations to buy their banned or restricted technology, making it disappear before Utopia’s inspectors arrived. Kuro-Tek developed and improved upon it, then sold it on the black market to customers ranging from national governments to elite agencies to the very same corporations they’d bought the technology from in the first place.

Kuro-Tek is organized as a corporation with Yoshiro Nakamura as CEO. In fact, much of the *oyabun*’s time is taken overseeing Kuro-Tek, leaving other yakuza operations in the hands of his underlings. The corporation controls a number of small front companies that it uses to warehouse merchandise and ship goods throughout the world under the guise of legitimate commerce. Project Utopia has officially declared Kuro-Tek an “outlaw” company for its

numerous violations of UN regulations, but the Japanese authorities tend to overlook matters involving Kuro-Tek, even when they know the company is involved.

Kuro-Tek’s employees are broken down into Research & Development and Operations personnel. The R&D department develops, builds and tests the company’s products, often working from designs or research purchased (or stolen) from other sources. The R&D department includes a few Mega-Intelligent novas who don’t want to work for Utopia but don’t want their creative efforts stifled by what they see as Utopia’s unfair practices. Naturally, Kuro-Tek novas tend to focus more on invention for invention’s sake. They’re not really concerned with what people might do with their technology, so long as they’re allowed to play with the best toys around. This kind of opportunity might prove tempting to Mega-Intelligent characters who’re frustrated by the limits Utopia places on their work.

Examples of Kuro-Tek’s merchandise can be found on p. 61-62 of this book and on pp. 55-60 of the **Aberrant: The -Directive** sourcebook. Kuro-Tek is always on the lookout for ways to “field test” its latest devices, selling prototypes at reduced cost to customers such as the Directive or passing them on to Nakato Gumi *kobun* for testing. Characters may encounter just about any technology the Storyteller cares to dream up in the hands of Kuro-Tek customers, and Kuro-Tek always ensures that its security personnel have the very latest gear.

Personnel

The Nakato Gumi is a vast organization, with over 10,000 members making up some 400-plus gangs spread across Japan and other parts of the world. Most of the *gumi*’s personnel are street-level *kobun*, but it also has technicians, managers, *sokaiya* and others. These numbers don’t even include the thousands of people employed by the yakuza, directly or indirectly, who aren’t members of the organization, such as most of the people working for Kuro-Tek.

As a general rule, yakuza members are men. Few women ever join the yakuza because it’s against tradition (both in Japanese society and within the yakuza). Still, women, particularly yakuza wives, do exercise some authority within the Nakato Gumi behind the scenes. Otherwise, the yakuza remains a “boy’s club.”

Many members of the yakuza come from the lower classes of Japanese society, including the poor and people of foreign heritage, notably Korean. By comparison to mainstream Japanese society, the Nakato Gumi is actually quite progressive and politically correct, allowing any man an opportunity based solely on his skills and ambition. As a rule, yakuza tend to be less educated but more street-smart than other people in Japan.

The yakuza think of themselves as some of the last “real men” in Japan and carry themselves accordingly. The rest

of the Japanese have traded in their martial heritage for business suits and desk jobs, but the yakuza still think of themselves as warriors. They've adopted a number of "tough-guy" attitudes copped from American movies and television, including wearing sunglasses and swaggering when they walk. They talk in grunts and monosyllables, and they're capable of going from extremely polite to extremely violent in an instant.

Use the statistics on p. 282 of **Aberrant** for Nakato Gumi baseline personnel, adjusting as needed for the story and the character in question.

Nova Enforcers

The rumors are true, the Nakato Gumi does employ novas, although not as many as some people think. The yakuza is commonly portrayed in *manga* as having legions of novas at its beck and call, opponents for Nippontai and other novas to battle. In truth, the Nakato Gumi has only a handful of novas working for it. For the most part, novas aren't interested in working for the yakuza, particularly in Japan, where novas are practically worshiped. It's far easier to work for Nippontai or any of the major Japanese corporations or to become a media star than it is to work for the yakuza.

Most of the novas working for the Nakato Gumi were yakuza *before* they erupted. Becoming novas has improved their usefulness to the syndicate but hasn't broken any bonds of duty or obligation they owe, so they continue to work for the yakuza. The rest serve the Nakato Gumi either as hired mercenaries (the yakuza does a brisk business with elite agencies such as DeVries), or for reasons of their own, usually for the thrill. The yakuza have a romantic reputation in Japan, and some novas seek them out because of it.

Yakuza novas tend to avoid direct confrontations with other novas unless there's no other option. The Nakato Gumi prefers to keep a low profile to avoid the attention of Nippontai and Team Tomorrow, and blazing quantum battles don't fit that goal. When yakuza novas do go into action, they are quick and decisive. The Nakato Gumi does use novas for assassinations because of their efficiency and the fear they inspire. Plus, the more serious the crimes novas commit, the stronger their ties to the yakuza become.

Outside Relations

An organization such as the Nakato Gumi depends on its ties with other organizations to survive in the Nova Age. Fortunately, the yakuza excels at cultivating such relationships.

Japanese Corporations

One of Nakato's prime connections is with the major Japanese high-tech corporations. While Kuro-Tek can be seen as a rival to some of these corporations, the yakuza does its best to ensure that Kuro-Tek (and, by extension, the Nakato Gumi) is seen as an ally against the unreasonable technological regulations of Project Utopia. Kuro-Tek



Ninja

In popular culture — both in the real world and in the **Aberrant** world of 2015 — the yakuza are often linked with the ninja, black-clad spies and assassins. Yakuza agents in Japanese *manga* (and American comic books, for that matter) often have ninja-like qualities. The truth is that the real yakuza had nothing to do with the ninja, who worked primarily for the nobility of medieval Japan while the yakuza were concerned more with the common man. In 2015, any rumors of super-ninja working for the Nakato Gumi are just that, rumors.

However, some of the novas working for the Nakato Gumi have qualities some would consider “ninja-like,” which can lead to rumors of nova ninja in the game. Kuroi Kiri can come and go literally like a shadow; Takako Orinama is superhumanly swift and graceful; Ashigaru moves in a blur and can walk through walls; both Orinama and Ashigaru carry swords. They all share a fondness for dressing in black (for the same reason ninjas did: practicality). If you’re running a more “four-color” **Aberrant** game, you might want to play up these elements. In fact, feel free to give the Nakato a *real* “nova ninja” if that’s what suits your game.

offers to buy potentially “hot” technologies from companies concerned about running afoul of Utopia inspectors, even sharing the profits for the development and sale of the technology. It brokers deals for corporations that want to expand into areas of research Utopia has declared off-limits and helps maintain the appearance of compliance with Utopia and UN regulations.

This gives the Nakato Gumi access to considerable corporate resources in addition to Kuro-Tek and provides Kuro-Tek with access to cutting-edge research and technology through legitimate channels. This cements the idea of the yakuza as allies against Utopia in the minds of the Japanese CEOs and gives the yakuza considerable influence over them, since any word of their relationship reaching Utopia would practically guarantee the end of their careers (and possibly their companies).

Although Kuro-Tek and the yakuza are most influential with Japanese corporations, they have ties with companies around the world. Many other corporations have found it useful to unload banned technologies in exchange for a handsome payment from Kuro-Tek. ViaSoft has avoided several Utopia raids by selling off technology to Kuro-Tek, sometimes even buying it back later after Kuro-Tek has had a chance to develop it further. Novelty Consulting has acquired information from Kuro-Tek for its own research projects, and other corporations are willing to pay Kuro-Tek to engage in “black” research for them, so they can deny any involvement if Project Utopia finds out about it.

The Japanese Government

Like the Japanese corporations, the Nakato Gumi has strong ties with the Japanese government. Officially, the government denounces the yakuza as gangsters and criminals, but the reality of the situation is far more complex. The Japanese government places great value on the *Saisho* program and resents Project Utopia’s interference in what it sees as an entirely domestic matter. The yakuza gives the government a means of defying Utopia’s technological restrictions with plausible deniability. On the surface, the government claims to be doing all that it can to shut down tech-smuggling and confiscate illegal technologies. Behind the scene, it works hand in glove with Kuro-Tek and the yakuza, passing on samples of illegal technology and arranging just enough arrests to satisfy Utopian inspectors.

For their part, the yakuza supports the government’s policies, provides avenues for new technologies and technological research and maintains the status quo in Japan. Government officials are certain that the elimination of the yakuza would only leave Japan vulnerable to foreign exploitation, including by syndicates such as Camparelli-Zukhov and the Heaven Thunder Triad coming in to fill the vacuum. Better a homegrown syndicate that understands Japanese ways than foreigners exploiting the people of Japan.

Other Syndicates

Naturally, the yakuza are rivals with the other remaining criminal syndicates in the world. Project Utopia’s “war on crime” has ensured that only the strongest and most cunning syndicates survived. Now, the struggle between them is for nothing less than control of the world’s illicit operations. It’s a fight to the death — and one that the Nakato Gumi fully intends to win.

The Medellín Cartel

The least of the yakuza’s concerns at the moment is Columbia. The drug cartels aren’t heavily involved in the same business concerns as the Nakato, and they even provide some of the drugs the yakuza smuggle into Japan and other parts of Asia. The cartels are also good customers for Kuro-Tek, since they need every edge they can get against the novas trying to shut them down. Nakamura sees the cartels as potentially useful but too tied up in their antiquated business of selling narcotics. It’s something the yakuza is moving beyond in some ways. Drugs bring in money, but they also attract trouble. For now, the yakuza is content to supply the cartels with technology and take their drugs and money in trade. There may come a time when the Nakato Gumi will have to either destroy the cartels or seize control of them, but Nakamura expects to be able to do so after Project Utopia has broken the cartels and left them vulnerable.

The Triads

The *gumi*'s closest rival physically is the Heaven Thunder Triad. While the Nakato Gumi respects tradition, the Heaven Thunder seems to take it to absurd lengths. The Heaven Thunder Triad is steeped in mysticism and secrecy, while the yakuza moves forward into the 21st century, with the latest technology and techniques; the Nakato respect the traditions of the past but look toward the future. Still, the Heaven Thunder Triad's grip on Hong Kong and the Golden Triangle region is virtually unchallenged, and it does compete with the Nakato for control of vice and drug-smuggling operations in Southeast Asia. Efforts to bring the Heaven Thunder Triad down have been hampered by its extreme secrecy (and that of the Chinese government). The yakuza hopes to expose ties between the Triad and the Chinese government's exploitation of novas, motivating Utopia to take action against them.

The Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate

The yakuza's greatest rival is the Camparelli-Zukhov Megasyndicate, which, among other things, has great influence in nearby Russia. The C-Z and the yakuza are also the most aggressive syndicates, making them natural rivals for filling the power vacuum left by the collapse of other syndicates. The C-Z has largely secured operations in the Americas, Europe and Russia, and they're now looking toward Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Japan. The yakuza's prime advantages over the Megasyndicate are its close ties in Japan and the technological edge Kuro-Tek offers. Struggle in the Russian Confederation and Europe between the Megasyndicate, the Directive, Project Utopia and the local authorities are to the benefit of the Nakato Gumi, and they do what they can to keep those fires burning.

The Directive

One of the Nakato Gumi's greatest allies is the Directive. The organization relies heavily on Kuro-Tek for the technology it needs to keep pace with Project Utopia and even exceed Utopia's capabilities from time to time. Although the member governments of the Directive pursue their own technological research programs, they are under the close scrutiny of Utopia's Science & Technology Division. Kuro-Tek's status and yakuza ties allow it to pursue technological developments the Directive cannot follow up on as quickly or efficiently. Plus, the Directive prefers to focus its resources on gathering information and dealing with potential nova threats rather than technological research.

This relationship (and Japan's involvement in the Directive), has allowed the Nakato Gumi to subtly steer the Directive toward "concerns" that benefit it. The Directive has cracked down on the Camparelli-Zukhov's use of nova enforcers, for example, but the Directive has never come into conflict with yakuza nova agents. For the Directive point of view, the Nakato Gumi and Kuro-Tek are by far lesser

evils compared to threats like the Teragen and Project Utopia's "new world order."

Project Utopia

The greatest single threat to the Nakato Gumi is Project Utopia and its associated novas, including Team Tomorrow. Kuro-Tek is public enemy number one for Utopia's Science & Technology Division, and Utopia would like nothing more than to shut Kuro-Tek down for good, followed shortly thereafter by the rest of the Nakato Gumi. The yakuza relies on secrecy and its ties with Japanese authorities in avoiding Utopia's scrutiny. The Nakato Gumi also arranges to offer up "sacrifices" to Utopia from time to time, dangling tempting targets in front of the S&T Division to give it something to raid and seize so it thinks it is making progress in dealing with the "Kuro-Tek problem."

The yakuza doesn't know about Project Proteus. If it did, it would surely use that knowledge as leverage against Utopia to ensure it left yakuza operations alone. Proteus takes keen interest in Kuro-Tek's relationship with the Directive and in any technology Kuro-Tek develops that might be potentially useful in Proteus' own operations.

Devices

Kuro-Tek has access to some of the most advanced and illegal technology of 2015, and it provides that technology to anyone willing to meet its price. The Storyteller can use the following as examples of the sort of technology Kuro-Tek has available, although this selection only scratches the surface of the company's resources. This equipment is limited to characters with Resources •••• or better, and the Storyteller may require dots in the Equipment Background as well (see **Aberrant: The Directive**, p. 53).

Quantum Scanner

This device is about the size of a palmtop computer and has a similar display and control screen. It picks up quantum disturbances similar to a nova's M-R node, with a range of 30 meters (longer for more powerful disturbances). The user's player makes an Intelligence + Computer roll for his character to operate the scanner, and successes determine how detailed the information is. Quantum scanners can pick up the presence of novas and the active use of quantum powers, and they can detect a nova's unique quantum signature (provided it is stored in the device's database). Novas can use Dormancy to hide from a quantum scanner.

Dangard Armored Warrior

While several parties (including Project Utopia) are working on effective powered armor, Kuro-Tek has focused on developing an effective humanoid robot, using the space that would be occupied by a pilot for advanced control systems and computers. The result is the Dangard model combat *mecha*, 2.5 meters tall and armored like a tank. The robot has the equivalent of Mega-Strength •• and is armed

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with a 30mm cannon, portable laser and grenade launcher (see p. 276 of **Aberrant** for stats). Its jump jets let it make leaps of up to 250 meters.

The robot can operate on pre-programmed instructions, with an effective dice pool of 6 for most necessary skills, or a pilot can control it using VR telepresence technology, seeing and hearing everything the robot does and controlling it directly. In the latter case, use the pilot's dice pool or the robot's, whichever is greater.

Dangard Armored Warrior

Safe Spd.	Max Spd.	Man.	Passngr.	Armor	Cost
80	120	6	0	5 [10]	•••••

Scorpion Glass

Scorpion glass breaks into razor-sharp shards; roll 4 dice for each character within a meter of the breaking glass, a success indicates the character has been cut. Characters with 3 or more levels of lethal soak are immune. The affected character is immediately paralyzed and suffers one health level of lethal damage per turn until dead (with no soak possible). Novas with Mega-Stamina •• or the Adaptability enhancement are immune to scorpion glass toxin even if it gets into their system. There is currently no antidote for the toxin.

VR Conditioning System

This system consists of a close-fitting helmet connected to a laptop computer that controls the helmet's output. The VR helmet controls what the wearer senses, allowing the controller to influence the wearer in various ways. The user's player can make a Manipulation + Computer roll to achieve the effects of the Hypnotic Gaze enhancement of Mega-Manipulation. With long-term use of this device, a character can achieve profound alterations in a subject's personality. See the **Aberrant: Cult of Personality** sourcebook for additional information on brainwashing and mind control.

Dramatis Personae

Yoshiro Nakamura — *Oyabun* of the Nakato Gumi

Background: The *oyabun* of the Nakato Gumi became involved with the yakuza as a young man. Originally from Okinawa, Nakamura had little opportunity in the Japan of the 1980s, so he joined a local *gumi*, where his talents for organizing allies and hurting enemies served him in good stead. He worked as a *kobun* and spent six of his first 10 years with the yakuza in prison. That experience only deepened his devotion to the yakuza life, however, and motivated him to create something of his own. He started businesses and, eventually, founded his own gang. It grew steadily, although



it was still small compared to the most powerful *gumi* of Japan.

Nakamura was smart enough to attach his star to that of the *Saisho* phenomenon with the founding of Kuro-Tek, and his *gumi* rose along with it. He ruthlessly eliminated the other *gumi* while they were weak and incorporated the survivors into his own gang. Now, at age 50, Nakamura is head of the largest and most powerful yakuza *gumi* by far, CEO of a wealthy corporation and one of the most influential men in Japan. Nakamura supports his wife, their two children and two mistresses, and he hobnobs with government officials and corporate CEOs. He's quite fond of playing golf and often conducts business and makes deals on the golf course.

Image: Nakamura is still quite fit for a man his age, but small and slight, even for a Japanese. He has sharp features and black eyes with an unflinching stare. He has a small, neat beard and moustache but shaves his head bald. His chest, back and upper arms are covered with elaborate yakuza tattoos, but none of them show even when he wears a short-sleeved shirt (although he generally keeps his collar buttoned up). He dresses very well and smokes cigarettes when relaxing.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an important man, and you demand the respect that is your due. You treat your underlings fairly but firmly, and you're ruthless in the pursuit of your goals, which include profit and prestige for both the Nakato and Japan. You consider yourself one of a dying breed, one of the last real men left in Japan. You never raise your voice or act in an improper manner, and anyone who causes you to do either will regret it.

ABERRANT

Gear: Whatever he needs from the Nakato Gumi, Kuro-Tek or the Directive

Nature: Traditionalist

Allegiance: Nakato Gumi

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 4 (Detail-Oriented), Intelligence 3, Wits 5 (Level-Headed), Appearance 3, Manipulation 4 (Delegating), Charisma 5 (Natural Leader)

Abilities: Athletics 2 (Golf), Awareness 2, Biz 5, Bureaucracy 4 (Japanese Corporations, Japanese Government), Command 4, Drive 2, Etiquette 5 (Japanese), Firearms 2, Intimidation 2 (Implied Threat), Investigation 4, Linguistics 1 (Native: Japanese; English), Martial Arts 1, Rapport 3, Resistance 3, Stealth 1

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Backing 5 (The Directive), Backing 5 (Kuro-Tek), Backing 5 (Nakato Gumi), Cipher 2, Followers 5, Influence 4, Resources 5

Willpower 7

Kuroi Kiri (Black Mist)

Background: In certain circles of Japanese government and business, they speak of a mysterious figure who moves through the halls of power. Wherever he goes, he offers assistance to those he meets. It might be a bit of useful information, a hint about the future or a cryptic warning to watch out for risks ahead. But his advice is always good, and many powerful people have prospered because of it. But he always reappears sometime later on to call upon the debt of honor owed him, for repayment of the favor. To refuse means almost certain ruin. He's called Kuroi Kiri, meaning "black mist."

Akinori Kasai grew up in a poor neighborhood, with little prospect for his future. Kasai was a clever young man but limited by the circumstances of his birth and family. He had several minor run-ins with the law and eventually joined the yakuza as a means of getting out of his old neighborhood. In the yakuza, Yoshiro Nakamura recognized Kasai's talent, and he eventually became a *sokaiya*, entrusted to extort money from corporations for the syndicate. He was quite skilled at maintaining ties with different companies and ensuring his operation was profitable.

What Kasai couldn't predict was the Moscow Crash that nearly destroyed the Japanese economy. Many companies went bankrupt, and many executives took their own lives as a result. One such man blamed the yakuza for his losses. He met with Kasai and tried to kill him. Kasai had become overconfident, too secure in his position as a yakuza, and the man nearly succeeded. In fact, he would have if Kasai hadn't erupted. He convinced his assailant to leave peacefully, then spent some time learning about his new abilities. He told his *oyabun* about them, and Nakamura saw the possibilities immediately.

When *Saisho* became a reality in Japan, Kasai returned to his *sokaiya* duties, only now he was able to direct the most powerful corporations in Japan at his *oyabun*'s behest. As Kuroi Kiri, Kasai has become powerful and feared, second only to the *oyabun* in many ways. In recent years, Kasai has begun to flex his nova abilities even more. Although he could probably seize control of the Nakato Gumi, Kasai takes his oath of loyalty to his *oyabun* very seriously. Besides, Kasai's not much of a leader, and being *oyabun* would only isolate him from the business of the Nakato Gumi and doing what he enjoys, manipulating people.

Image: Akinori Kasai is remarkably average. He'd be almost impossible to pick out of a crowd of Japanese *sararimen*. He's average height and build, with black hair cut conservatively, wearing a sensible business suit (or other attire suited to the occasion). It's only when looking into his eyes that anyone notices anything special about him. His black eyes seem magnetic, and his voice is extremely pleasant and soothing.

Roleplaying Hints: For a long time you were looked down upon, now you have the power to make everyone who treated you badly dance to your tune. Now you're the powerful man they bow to with respect. The only people who ever treated you properly before you erupted were the yakuza, and you're loyal to them and to your *oyabun* in particular for giving you this opportunity. You will ensure that the Nakato Gumi prospers. Anyone who opposes you or your *oyabun*, or behaves disrespectfully toward either of you, must be taught a lesson.

Gear: Sony cell phone with OpNet access, Kazei 2015 model air car

Nature: Conniver



ABERRANT

Allegiance: Nakato Gumi

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4 (Shrewd), Appearance 3, Manipulation 5 (Persuasive), Charisma 4 (Polite)

Abilities: Academics 2, Awareness 3, Biz 4, Bureaucracy 5, Computer 2, Drive 2, Endurance 3, Etiquette 5 (Social Graces), Firearms 1, Intimidation 4 (Implied Threat), Interrogation 4 (Misdirection), Investigation 4, Linguistics 2 (Native: Japanese; English, Korean), Pilot 1, Rapport 5, Resistance 3, Style 4, Subterfuge 5 (Seduction)

Backgrounds: Backing 4 (Nakato Gumi), Cipher 3, Contacts 5 (Japanese Business and Government), Influence 4, Resources 4

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 7, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Appearance •• (First Impression, Mr. Nobody), Mega-Manipulation •••• (Hypnotic Gaze, Persuader, Trickster, The Voice)

Quantum Powers: Bodymorph •••• (Shadow), Shroud •••

Takako Orinama

Background: Takako Orinama's family has been involved with the yakuza for generations, since her grandfather joined in the years following World War II. Orinama was only a girl when her father died in the yakuza gang wars in the late 1970s, but she remembers meeting Nakamura-sama when he came to their home to express his regrets over her father's death and promised that she and her mother would be taken care of. Nakamura-sama took Takako Orinama's brother Hiro on as a *kobun* in the Nakato Gumi.

The *oyabun* was true to his word. Orinama and her mother were taken care of by the *gumi*, and the young girl continued to go to school. One day, when she was 15, she

was kidnaped. Members of a rival yakuza gang wanted to use her against her brother. The experience caused Orinama to erupt, and she took down 10 armed men single-handed. Her brother realized she had become a nova and immediately brought her to the attention of the *oyabun*. Nakamura-sama accepted Orinama's oaths of loyalty, and she was pleased to know that her family would be even more important to the Nakato Gumi.

Orinama has served as an agent of the Nakato for just over nine years and has learned a great deal in that time. Her experiences have hardened her but have only deepened her loyalty to Nakamura-sama and the *gumi*. She still has a rather romantic notion of yakuza life, seeing it as struggling against the repressive dictates of Project Utopia, fighting for Japanese sovereignty and success in the face of overwhelming odds. Where most Japanese women her age would be considering marriage, Orinama remains single, at least partly because her "Uncle" Yoshiro hasn't found a man worthy of her yet. Orinama secretly dreams of meeting Bodhisattva Masato, and she has become a devout Kamisama Buddhist.

Image: Takako Orinama is lithe and beautiful, with an unearthly grace. She usually wears her long black hair tightly wound to keep it out of her way. Unbound, it cascades down her back and is her pride and joy. She still smiles easily and giggles girlishly at times. While working, Orinama wears a form-fitting, black eufiber leotard, decorated with beautiful Japanese "tattoo" designs she can change at will. (Orinama has no real tattoos, since her *oyabun* has forbidden it as improper.) At other times, she wears traditional Japanese kimonos.

Roleplaying Hints: What an amazing life you have! You are touched by divine power and have the opportunity to use it to help protect Japan from Westerners who would corrupt and dominate your country. Your honorable mother and your "Uncle Yoshi" are very proud of you, and you know you are destined for something special. If only you could meet Bodhisattva Masato and feel his divine presence. You know he could help make your life truly complete.

Gear: Katana, cell phone, various masks

Nature: Follower

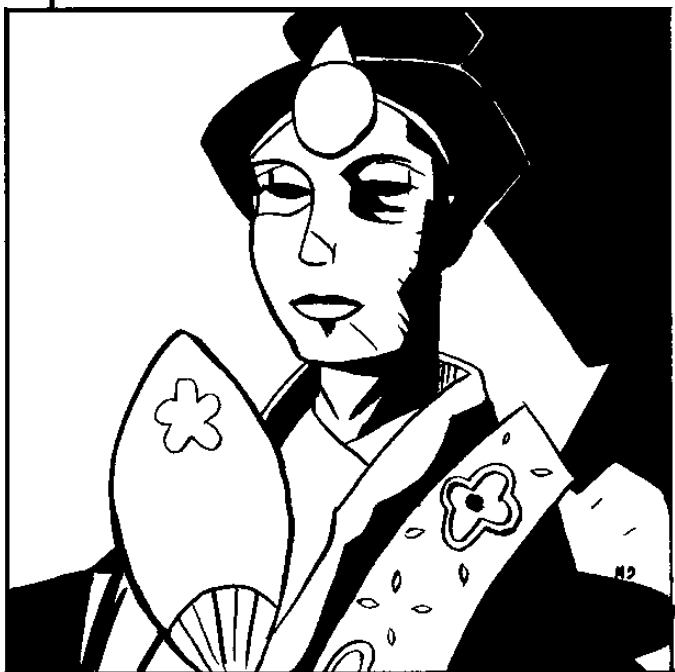
Allegiance: Nakato Gumi

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5 (Graceful), Stamina 5 (Unflagging), Perception 4 (Insightful), Intelligence 3, Wits 5 (Clever), Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 1, Endurance 5, Etiquette 2, Firearms 4, Intrusion 3, Legerdemain 2, Martial Arts 4, Melee 4, Resistance 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Style 2, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Attunement 3, Backing 3 (Nakato Gumi), Cipher 2, Contacts 2, Dormancy 4, Eufiber 3, Mentor 4 (Yoshiro Nakamura), Resources 2

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 6, Taint 3



Mega-Attributes: Mega-Dexterity ••••• (Accuracy, Catfooted, Enhanced Movement, Fast Tasks, Flexibility), Mega-Wits ••••• (Enhanced Initiative, Multitasking, Quickness x2, Synergy)

Quantum Powers: Boost (Strength and Stamina) ••••• (Extra Attribute)

Genji “Ashigaru” Tadashi

Background: Tadashi was a member of a *boruzoku*, a Japanese motorcycle gang, with a shockingly unusual love for racing her motorcycle along the open road. A wild young woman, she ran into trouble with the authorities, but she never changed her ways, making her an embarrassment to her family. They were actually grateful when Tadashi joined the yakuza, seeing it as a step up for her. They hoped the Nakato Gumi would teach her proper behavior. The Nakato Gumi unquestionably taught Tadashi how to apply herself, and she became known as a skilled (if somewhat reckless) driver.

Tadashi was doing errands for her boss one night, when someone stole her car. Helplessly watching the car speed away, filled with shame and rage and wanting nothing more than to go after the thieves, Tadashi erupted. She took off after the car in a burst of tremendous speed, tore one of the doors off with her bare hands and sent the terrified thieves running. She felt exhilaration like she’d never known before, but she developed a pounding headache immediately afterward. When she told her boss what happened to the car, the man didn’t believe him — until Tadashi demonstrated her nova abilities. Then, he sent her immediately to see the *oyabun*.

Tadashi feared she was to be punished for her failure, but instead, the *oyabun* promoted her and introduced her to the beautiful Takako Orinama. He gave Tadashi the nickname “Ashigaru” meaning “fast legs,” and she carries it with pride. Now, she’s a loyal soldier for Nakamura-sama and the Nakato Gumi.

Image: Ashigaru is a lithe and sinewy Japanese woman, 22 years old. Her black hair is cut very short — a shocking look for a young Japanese woman — and usually gelled into spikes. She wears a form fitting eufiber suit under a black leather jacket and fingerless biker gloves. Under her suit is the beginning of a tattoo of dark storm clouds with a monsoon wind spreading around her right thigh up along her side — a gift from the *oyabun*.

Roleplaying Hints: You are now fast enough that you are able to outrun the conformity of your own culture. You never feel so free as when you’re running like the wind, faster than anything else on the ground. You’re so fast no one and nothing can touch you, but you can touch them —



and hurt them if you want to. The *oyabun* is a great man, and you admire and respect him. Though you don’t know if she can ever return your feelings, you love Takako Orinama with all your heart and wish you could find a way to make her notice you. You strive to make yourself worthy of her in the *oyabun*’s eyes. There is nothing you would not do for Takako, and you’ll kill anyone who dares threaten her.

Gear: Paired short swords, pistol, Yamaha *Kamikaze* motorcycle (for fun, not for getting around)

Nature: Thrillseeker

Allegiance: Nakato Gumi

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5 (Fast), Stamina 5 (Tireless), Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4 (Clever), Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 3

Abilities: Athletics 3 (Dodge), Awareness 1, Biz 1, Drive 5 (Motorcycles), Endurance 3, Firearms 3, Intrusion 3, Linguistics 1 (Native: Japanese; English), Martial Arts 3, Melee 3, Might 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 4

Backgrounds: Backing 3 (Nakato Gumi), Cipher 1, Contacts 1, Eufiber 3, Node 2, Resources 2

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 8, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Strength • (Shockwave), Mega-Dexterity ••••• (Enhanced Movement, Fast Tasks, Rapid Strike), Mega-Stamina •• (Regeneration), Mega-Wits •• (Enhanced Initiative, Quickness)

Quantum Powers: Density Control (Decrease) •••••, Hypermovement (Hyperrunning) •••••

Private Memorandum

Excerpt from secret US drug-enforcement memorandum

Encryption Code: Beta-12

To: Nigel Carstens, Director Utopia (Nova Coordination)

From: William F. Reed, Director T2M Americas

Director Carstens,

Our Department of Intelligence Services has completed its analysis of the ongoing cocaine trafficking in Latin America. As you are aware, Utopia and T2M managed during the early 2000s to shut down almost all of the planes that were smuggling narcotics into the US. That did tremendous damage to the cartels' \$25 billion dollar annual income — obviously — and cut off about 50 metric tons of cocaine from reaching US and European streets annually.

In the last year or two, though, we've noticed more cocaine and heroin reaching the street-sale market. Our labs have tested the narcotics and shipping materials that we've picked up, and everything is pointing toward the Colombia-Peru region again; similarly, money-laundering reports are picking up in the Americas, and the remaining cartel leaders who are still under surveillance are coming into a lot of money from somewhere.

Of even more concern, though, are some of the reports that Intelligence Services is bringing in.

First, we know that Wilhelm Lehrder is back in action, with more money than ever; it appears that he has finally taken over the stragglers remains of the Medellín cartel's transportation and distribution chains and may possibly now be the only person controlling what was previously a 20- or 30-member conglomerate including Pablo Escobar, José Gacha, Griselda Blanco's people and the whole Ochoa family.

Lehrder has also owned previous Colombian presidents and is now apparently in the process of trying to buy the presidency for himself. Intelligence suggests that he's likely to be successful, largely because Lehrder has also apparently been spending a lot of money — hundreds of millions — on the Colombian educational system. We've not yet discovered the roots of Lehrder's interest in education, but given his own Nazi roots and his bent in that direction, if Lehrder is elected president of Colombia, then it's clear that the country will become the new home for fascism in the world.

Other reports from our T2M Americas Intelligence Services are even more disturbing. They indicate that Lehrder has reopened his own version of the *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS) training camps and that his MAS troops have declared war on what's left of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). Lehrder's MAS is also apparently acting as a well-armed security force for what we suspect to be Lehrder's production facilities and for Lehrder himself. MAS forces are also stationed at other "work camps" that Intelligence Services is still trying to learn something about.

We first became aware of these camps when one of the T2M boys discovered several tall smokestacks outside Puerto Lopez in southern Colombia. As soon as our man started getting close to the camp, though, there was a general evacuation, and the camp was destroyed utterly. He picked up one of the guards but was unable to discover anything other than the MAS connection with the camps; the guard died as soon as we began to probe his mind.

We suspect that the "accident" was, in fact, the result of the guards' detonation of preexisting charges. The explosion completely leveled all four of the buildings that comprised the camp, burned virtually all evidence at the site and flooded the area with hydrochloric acid and acetone.

The property has been tied back to Lehrder, and he's indicated that the "pharmaceutical manufacturing plant" suffered a terrible explosion due to a "mishap" with chemicals at the site. Lehrder's attorney did produce a tremendous amount of documentation supporting the claim that pharmaceuticals were manufactured at the site for US drug companies and that the facility had for some time been selling and shipping legitimate pharmaceuticals to US companies with the approval of the FDA, DEA and local licensing authorities. Intelligence Services' sifting of the rubble, however, indicates



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that many people did not escape the destruction. Many remains were found, and although all were so damaged as to prevent any estimation of the numbers dead, the bodies were curiously located only in one part of the building. Although the hydrochloric acid and acetone at the site first led Intelligence Services to speculate that the buildings may have been a cocaine processing plant, they've retracted that notion. Our working hypothesis is that *no* pharmaceutical manufacturing — legal or illegal — was conducted at the Puerto Lopez property but that whatever was going on in that building was so secret that Lehrder would rather have killed all of the employees there rather than risk discovery. We believe that the acid and acetone were red herrings utilized by Lehrder to disguise whatever may have been the camp's real purpose.

Finally, unverified reports to our Intelligence Services indicate that Lehrder has begun trafficking cocaine and heroin and that he's found some new way to get as much as he wants into the US and Europe. We've spent many man-hours trying to track down trucks, planes and boats that Lehrder may be using to transport the drugs out of Colombia but have been unable to discover anything particularly useful. The only things that we've been able to trace back to him are a few pleasure boats and a jet — all of which are fully accounted for by our own people. No cargo planes, no appropriate boats, subs or fast craft, no trucking companies. Some informants have mentioned something called "The Door," but we've not yet tied that information to substantive intelligence data. There seems to be little doubt that Lehrder is, in fact, moving narcotics again to support his MAS divisions, his public works in Colombia and, in all likelihood, other activities about which we know nothing. If that's the case, then we'll have to consider him to be more of a threat than the Orejuela brothers, the Cali cartel or the Eastern Plains cartel.

In summary, the analysis of the T2M Intelligence Services supports hypotheses (a) that the Colombians are back in the narcotics business in the US and Europe, (b) that Wilhelm Lehrder has found some new means of trafficking drugs and, therefore, (c) that Lehrder has resurrected the Medellín cartel and reformed it as the central agent for the transport of all the cartels' narcotics and (d) that Lehrder has revived a particularly fascistic and militaristic version of the cartels' MAS to help him control his operations and secure political control of the region. Intelligence Services also suspects Lehrder of other crimes associated with the Puerto Lopez disaster but will not speculate further.

Accordingly, I will be sending under separate cover requests for the reassignment of particularly perceptive and manipulative novas having strengths in the areas of flight, telepathic scanning, surveillance and subterfuge/camouflage. Ideally, I would request Utopia or T2M novas who are Colombian citizens or of Latin American descent.

My preliminary plan is to use novas to conduct a thorough surveillance flight of Colombia and Peru and determine the scope of coca production, as well as the possible location of other installations similar to the one discovered outside Puerto Lopez. Camouflaged ground teams will then observe the activities conducted around coca production plants, MAS camps and other relevant facilities. I would also like to begin the infiltration of Lehrder's organization, so I am also requesting the transfer of a sufficiently subtle Latin American nova to be educated in Axis-era fascism in such a way that he or she might appeal to Lehrder personally. As soon as we discover the activities being conducted by Lehrder and the Medellín cartel, I will advise you of the same and suggest appropriate remedial alternatives. If you have any questions or concerns regarding any of the above, please, do not hesitate to contact me.



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Private Telephone Conversation

Excerpt from transcription of encrypted telephone conversation between William F. Reed, Director T2M Americas and unidentified female



ist, and this conversation never happened. It is by knowing your suspicions that I will be better able to implement appropriate safeguards against what may *come* to be. If I rely only on what you've included in your analysis or what you're able to prove, then I may as well take a few months' vacation. Now, what the hell is going on down there?

Reed: Well, ma'am, I believe that the Medellín cartel is back in action and that it's being controlled by Wilhelm Peron Lehrder. You remember that law enforcement saw a little of Lehrder in the early 1990s, but he was a small player; we all paid more attention to his political views and the possibility that he might try to capitalize on his family's history to regain control of Argentina or neighboring regions. When Escobar was killed and the rest of the Medellín cartel was being rounded up, Lehrder didn't even register as a drug runner who was worth the effort. We know that he then spent several years traveling between Chile and to Italy to hide out with some of his family's old cronies. No one even bothered to worry about him.

Female voice: I have read your analysis of the situation in Latin America, Mr. Reed.

William F. Reed: Thank you, Director, I hope that it was informative.

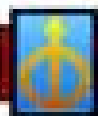
Female voice: Oh, yes, quite. What I found most interesting, though, was what you did not include, Mr. Reed. Tell me more of your suspicions; do not worry about supporting your arguments with any data that you have or have not been able to accumulate, though. Just tell me why you think the Medellín cartel still exists and what it is doing.

(long pause)

Female voice: Mr. Reed?

Reed: Yes, ma'am; I'm just trying to gather my thoughts and decide where to begin. It's quite unusual that you wouldn't care about my supporting information. I'm—

Female voice: Mr. Reed, we are dealing in a gray area here. I have never seen your report, I do not ex-



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Female voice: I seem to recall hearing, too, that he managed to tap into some of the cartel's money in the Cook Islands and Panama.

Reed: Right; we're all fairly sure that his father's neo-Nazi friends pulled some strings to get Lehrder information on Escobar's hidden offshore accounts some time around 2010. There's no way to really know how much he snatched, but I'm estimating something around \$1 billion. The money'd been sitting there drawing interest for more than 25 years because no one had been able to access it. I have no idea how Lehrder pulled that one off.

Female voice: Please, continue.

Reed: I just started to hear Lehrder's name again a few years ago, and he's gotten pretty big just recently; I suspect that he's either a nova or that he's hired a nova bodyguard, 'cause there are just too many unexplained things surrounding the man.

Female voice: Such as?

Reed: Well, first, I'm certain that he's behind most of

the cocaine shipments that are finding their way into the US and Europe, so I've had people watching Lehrder and some of his suspected distributors. I've got about eight novas working interdiction all around Colombia, but no one's seeing anything. We're investigation almost every flight that leaves the country. We stop every boat that leaves Colombia's shores, and I've got someone watching all the highway routes. I've even got an agent hanging out underwater in case Lehrder's trying that stupid submarine thing that the cartels attempted in the late 1980s. So, near as I can tell, though, there's no coke leaving the region at all — nothing leaving the region, in fact.

Female voice: So, you think he's producing it somewhere else?

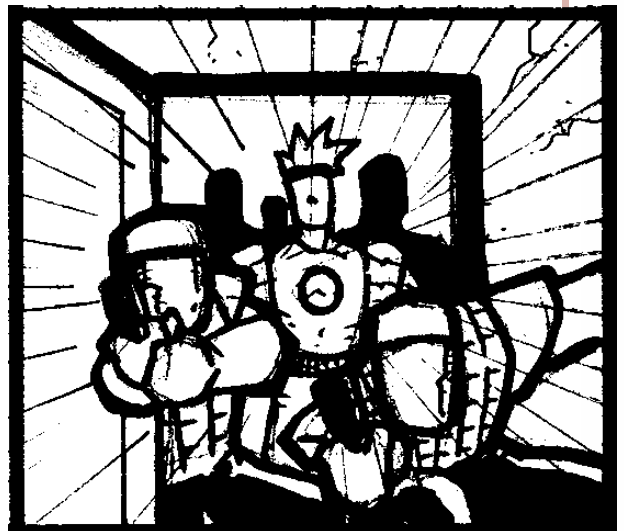
Reed: That was one of my first thoughts, but I don't think so anymore. All the infrastructure's set up in Colombia, the country's big enough that small cocaine farms and production facilities would be easy to miss, and I don't think Lehrder's even left the country for about two years. No, I think that he's found a new means of transporting his narcotics into the US.

Female voice: How?

Reed: I have no idea, ma'am. That one of the things that bothers me. A second thing that makes me think he's hired a nova bodyguard is that my guys can never get close to him. I've tried to have him picked up for questioning, but he just disappears.

Female voice: A *caleta*, maybe?

Reed: No, I don't think it's just a hiding place. My agents have literally taken apart the buildings where we think he's hiding and, even if we find a *caleta* somewhere, he's not in it. He's just gone, like he's been snatched from





right under our noses. Even if I personally saw him walk into a building, I'll sometimes get a report that he's been spotted hundreds of miles away at the same time. I don't know how he's doing it.

Female voice: Is he teleporting, do you think? Or warping?

Reed: All I can say is that if he is, then Utopia's never seen anyone with such good control over their capabilities. It's as though he can take a step from Medellín to Miami as easily as you or I can walk down the street — I don't know of any nova that can jump such long distances so quickly. Every time we move in on him, he just walks away. Maybe he's moving drugs the same way, but that's so goddamned scary that I don't even want to think about it; we'll never be able to follow his trail if that's what he's doing.

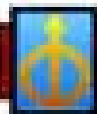
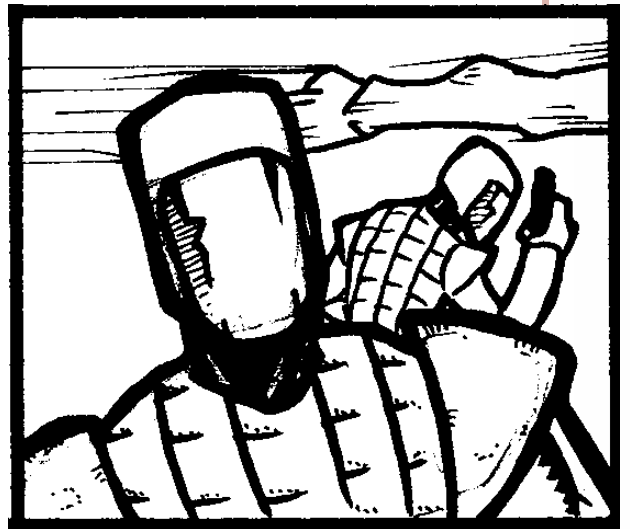
Female voice: Hmmm. And your suspicions that Lehrder's rebuilt the old Colombians' MAS? How accu-

rate do you think you are?

Reed: Quite, ma'am. South American revolutionaries have long been supported by the CIA, but I think Lehrder's funding this new MAS all on his own. I have unconfirmed reports in my files about a paramilitary network that Lehrder's building somewhere in the Middle Magdalena Valley — complete with its own fleet of planes, helicopters, launches, jeeps, bulldozers, printing presses, hospitals and stores of arms and ammunition. Even in the 1980s and 1990s, the Medellín cartel's income gave it the wherewithal to purchase very sophisticated weaponry. But, whereas the cartel used the MAS to shut down the kidnaping of their families, Lehrder's using the force more as a private army or something. Our agents have been discovering bodies that they believe may be victims of some sort of death camps, as well.

Female voice: How many bodies are you talking about, Mr. Reed?

Reed: Tens of thousands, ma'am, exclusive of the Puerto



Lopez camp. And the Colombian government is not only ignoring the problem, but actively *denying* it.

Female voice: Yes, the Puerto Lopez camp; tell me about that.

Reed: Oh, I don't have a damn thing on that, ma'am, and I don't even know what *I* think about it. All I can tell you is that Lehrder's been pouring money into Colombian education — primary and secondary schools, adult literacy programs, etc. He's developed one hell of an IQ test to figure out where the population's at, and he's apparently set up schools to educate and indoctrinate a lot of people — children and adults, both. It's a mammoth project, and I can't even guess where he's headed with all of it. To his credit, he's pulling it off. Relative to America and other first-world nations, the average IQ scores in Colombia are starting to improve after only three years of Lehrder's program. Then, when we found the camp, I wondered...

(long pause)

Female voice: Wondered what, Mr. Reed?

Reed: Never mind, ma'am. It's so crazy that you'll want me locked up in a barbwire room with all the other conspiracy theorists.

Female voice: Spill it, Mr. Reed, and spill it now. That's an order.

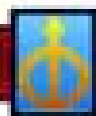
Reed: You know, the site was an absolute mess by the time my agents got there, so we really know nothing. Between the explosion and the chemical spill, everything was pretty well destroyed except some of the bodies.

Female voice: The bodies of the workers, right?

Reed: That's what's bothering me, ma'am. You know that my great-grandmother died in a concentration camp, right?

Female voice: That's in your file, yes.

Reed: I'm just not sure that those bodies were workers, ma'am. They were all too neatly arranged in one place. I thought they might be prisoners, but then, the bones would be laying haphazardly all over if they'd died while trying to find a way out of a locked room while the building burned around them. I think that those people were already dead, and I think that the chemicals at the camp were there to get rid of the bodies. I think that Lehrder's on some sort of extermination crusade, ma'am.





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Miami Herald Online (8/24/2015)

Author of Controversial Drug Biography Found Murdered

Conrado Ramos Borda, author of the as-yet unpublished *Bathed in Blood: The Authorized Biography of Wilhelm Peron Lehrder*, was found by authorities inside the trunk of an unlicensed vehicle outside The Gold Club — a nightspot known for its patronage by Miami’s new up-and-coming drug traders. Although Borda was apparently alive when he was discovered, he was pronounced dead at Kathryn Harris Memorial Hospital at 1:13 AM yesterday morning.

Borda is well known to have been working for several years on a biography of Wilhelm Lehrder, the wealthy businessman, politician, philanthropist and educator who now lives in Medellín , Colombia. Although Lehrder’s efforts have almost single-handedly reformed Colombia’s educational system, he is probably best known due to the unsuccessful efforts of international law enforcement authorities to tie him to the resurgent Colombian narcotics trade.

Friends of Borda’s have described to authorities a recent argument in which Borda and Lehrder disagreed about Borda’s description of a secret “door” in the biography. The substance of the argument remains unclear, but Borda is reputed to have been in hiding in Miami.

Authorities are still puzzling over the circumstances of Borda’s captivity. Speaking on condition of anonymity, persons within the Miami Police Department indicated that the vehicle trunk inside which Borda was located was welded shut from the inside. “The door, the door, the door’ was all he’d say,” one source reported. No welding equipment was discovered near the car.

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Education Times (2/4/2014)

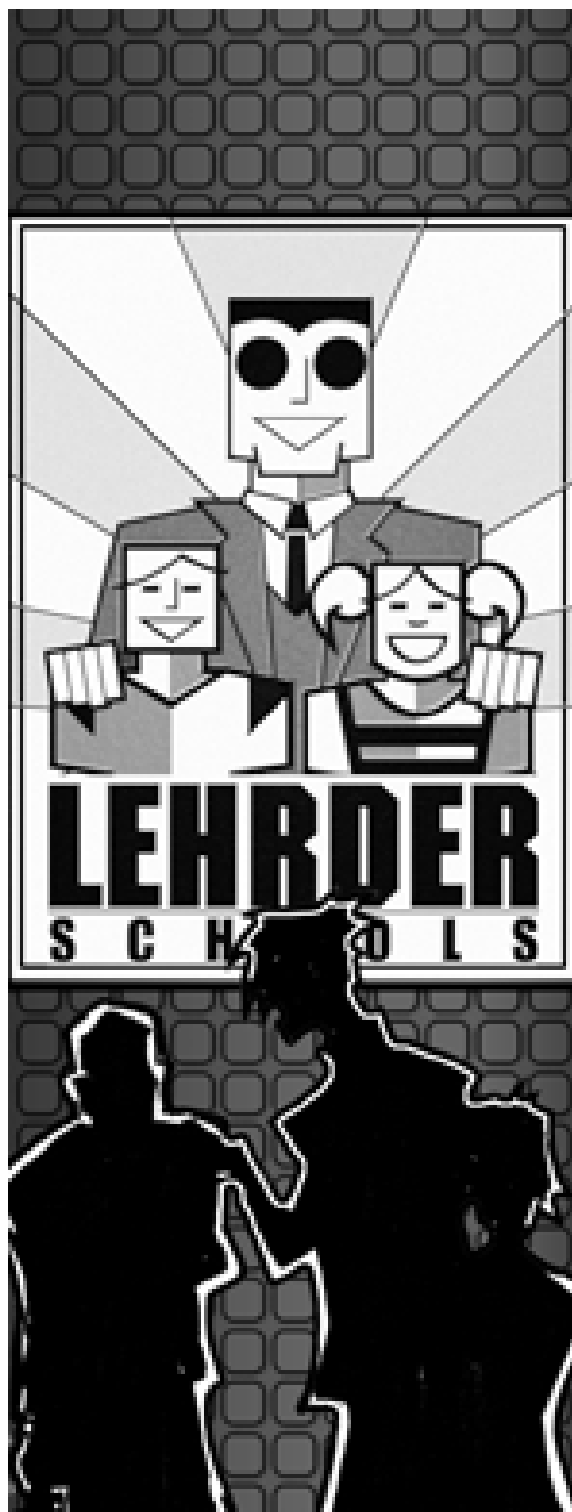
Colombia an Educational Leader?

In a 10-year investigative Report on World Literacy and Education (ROWLE) released by UNICEF and the United Nations last week, the Latin American country of Colombia swept many ratings as having the most improved educational facilities, the most improved children's educational programs, the most improved adult educational programs and the most improved overall literacy rate. Although Colombia has never been considered as a particularly well-educated country or even interested in cultivating a literate population, preliminary findings from the ROWLE report have the world educational community quite astir.

Much of the country's educational efforts are being led by entrepreneur and social reformer Wilhelm Peron Lehrder.

"My only goal is to give my people the educational support to lift themselves up out of the mud," Lehrder explained during a call from *Education Times*, "I'm tired of my countrymen being exploited by superpowers that don't care about us or our way of life."

Much of the Colombian educational efforts revolve around controversial IQ testing and regionally appropriate means testing combined with programs that are specifically designed to remediate problem areas. Lehrder declined to share much more information with *Education Times*, however, explaining that, "I have spent more than \$2 billion of my own money to inspire and educate people in this poor country so that we can hope to compete in the world market. Beyond that, I can only say that Colombians must learn to think together as a single country in order for Colombia to take its place in the world economy."



Excerpt from self-destroying OpMail message from Wilhelm Lehrder to Lara Bonilla

**Attention: This message will
erase itself in 30 seconds!**

Lara,

I have reviewed the information that you sent regarding business operations. Please begin implementation of the following changes:

1. Shipment charges from all the other producers will be increased to \$35,000 per kilo, effective immediately. If Cali or any of the small producers are not willing to pay this, then they are to be cut off completely — I will not move their product. Direct any other problems to Justo.

2. Increase the testing regimen and the flow of cattle through the production and purification camps. At this rate, it will take 20 years to attain my goals for Colombia's population. Build additional camps if you think that is appropriate, but I want this completed within 10 years; you're the one who says that the world will begin to notice my project long before that time, but I intend to have the people's absolute support — through whatever means — well before that. My goal is to pull Colombia up by its bootstraps and oust the imperialist slave lords who've ruled us for too long already. The freedom of our country will be bought by the money we earn from the cocaine that we sell to sink their nations. I will not continue to suffer my people to be the lowest of the world's low. But we cannot reach that goal until we have eliminated those who cannot or will not use their minds. We must be able to *think* as a country, no matter the cost.

3. Triple the amount of heroin that we are currently harvesting. It will be easier to transport large amounts, and we earn almost three times as much from heroin as from cocaine. Justo and Cano should be able to locate appropriately discreet regions in which the poppies may be grown. Give me some idea of how much heroin we can transport without the triads going ballistic on us.

History The Cartels

The business of cocaine trafficking did not take shape until the early 1970s, and at that time, only small amounts were transported abroad. It sold for more than \$60,000 per kilogram. Couriers smuggled a few pounds at a time on (or in) their bodies or in their luggage, conveying the drugs to a wholesaler. The tremendous income to be had from such high-dollar sales forced a revolution in the manufacture and transportation of cocaine, so, by the mid-1990s, the industry was utilizing cargo planes, tractor trailers, semisubmersible vessels and camouflaged fast boats to move well over 500 tons of the drug into the US alone.

Market saturation and a falling sale price ended the political and economic cooperation between cocaine manufacturers and traffickers and a ruthless competition for sales and market share took place in the drug underworld. Two primary cartels — the Medellín cartel and the Cali cartel — took shape, controlling 70 to 80 percent of cocaine exports from Colombia. Each organization developed its own personality, too; the Medellín traffickers were politically ambitious and favored violence as a political tool, while the Cali cartel advanced its goals through bribery and manipulation. In a similar vein, the Cali cartel grew as a loosely woven cooperative of exporters without any single driving personality. Because of this decentralization, it was able to survive Utopia's purge somewhat intact; the Medellín cartel, on the other hand, relied heavily on the connections and strategies of Pablo Escobar. His death in 1993 crippled the organization, and a death blow delivered by Utopia in the early 21st century dropped the cartel into its grave.

Political Activities

Dealers in each of the cartels — Medellín more than Cali — sometimes also trafficked in fringe political parties. As a flunky in the mid-80s, Wilhelm Peron Lehrder joined the *Movimiento Latino Nacional* (MLN) and soon rose to a position of minor leadership. Such marginal organizations generally fit well with the cartels *plomo* or *plata* (lead or silver) approach to life, and it was from the ranks of the politically disenfranchised that the parties and the cartels recruited for paramilitary training schools.

Given its addiction to the use of violence for political ends, the Medellín cartel's camps were probably the best known for training the traffickers' private armies. Recruits were trained by former Israeli Army and SAS personnel in such skills as camouflage, self defense, weapons, counterintelligence, communications, explosives and terrorism. Throughout the 1980s, the Medellín cartel employed more than 10,000 operatives throughout Colombia, and given the cartel's annual cocaine income of between \$4 to \$7 billion, troops were provided with only the most sophisticated weaponry.

The Cali cartel, though, preferred to nurture and harvest its relationships with Colombia's political drivers through bribes, legal manipulation and economic penetration in order to maximize its own legal and illegal profits. "We don't kill judges," one trafficker is reported to have said, "we buy them." Such assimilationist tactics ultimately made the Cali cartel's tactics much more difficult to fight than the Medellín cartel's terrorism.

The Nova Age

Although the DEA, FBI, CIA and other world law enforcement agencies were completely unable to even hinder the flow of more than 100,000 kilos of cocaine into the US during the 1980s and 1990s, Project Utopia and Team Tomorrow managed to shut down Colombian drug trafficking almost completely within a matter of months.

Drug traffickers had for years used predictable and interdictable methods to haul narcotics into America, but their means had served them well, and so, no new means of transportation were ever investigated — even after the appearance of novas on the world scene. In 2001, though, it took very little time for Utopia and T2M to identify and bring a complete halt to the introduction of drugs into the US and Europe by plane, train, submarine and automobile. Many addicts were forced to give up their cocaine cold turkey. Hospitals reported an enormous leap in the number of cases of cocaine withdrawal — a sign that Project Utopia happily took as proof that its efforts were working better than its leaders ever could have dreamed.

When the transportation of cocaine from Latin America was stalled, then, the lack of a reachable cocaine market combined with the credit-based nature of the trade to produce cocaine wars and deadly collection battles that wiped out the vast majority of small to mid-level dealers and traffickers. Those dealers who weren't killed for their failure to pay suppliers and who weren't killed by rival dealers were only lucky enough to be apprehended by authorities, and within less than a year, nova efforts brought the cocaine trade in America to a crashing halt. Coke that had been selling for \$5,000 to \$7,000 per uncut kilo flew past previous highs of \$50,000 and \$60,000 per kilo up to new heights of \$150,000 and \$200,000 per kilo. Cocaine left the province of the commoner and once again became affordable only to the world's wealthiest glitterati. Many cartel leaders were either captured by authorities or slaughtered in desperate showdowns with law-enforcement officials. Only a handful of the shrewdest traffickers disappeared into obscurity to enjoy their billions.

After the emergence of novas on the world scene, though, the Medellín cartel went through greater death throes than those under which it had been laboring since Pablo Escobar's death in 1993 and, finally, died as an organization — leaderless, under siege and without a viable

market for its goods. The decentralized Cali cartel slipped deeper underground, and most of the independent producers were killed.

Wilhelm Peron Lehrder and Just-in-Time Cocaine Delivery

Wilhelm Peron Lehrder was one of the Medellín cartel underlings who were sufficiently small time to escape capture or death. Eventually, Lehrder was able to return to the cocaine market with a new way to move his product and grandiose plans for his own future. It was true genius inspired by the entrepreneurial spirit that drove Lehrder to discover a new means to build his business. In April, 2013, Lehrder met with the most progressive and intelligent of the remaining cartel members to outline this new means of delivery; this conversation was to become the cornerstone on which would be built Wilhelm Lehrder's future as one of the most important figures in the resurgence of the Colombian cartels.

When Lehrder discovered El Puerto, he recognized the man as the key to the future of the production and distribution of cocaine. By making utterly astonishing payments for delivery of goods, Lehrder kept El Puerto well within his control, and Lehrder's own careful control of an invaluable spike, soma, Red 7 and stolen adrenocilin supply managed to open up untapped distribution networks to which supplies of cocaine and heroin could be carefully adjusted at — almost literally — a moment's notice.

El Puerto allowed Lehrder to deliver or recover cocaine and heroin from distributors utilizing the just-in-time" model of supply and demand pioneered by W. Edwards Deming, the statistician and process improvement visionary credited with guiding Japan's post-World War II industrial recovery. Through this approach and the quick delivery provided by El Puerto, Lehrder was able to eliminate the waste, theft and capture of his product by getting exactly the necessary quantity of narcotics to the right place for distributors at the right time. No longer were Lehrder and the members of his cartel concerned about police interdiction; with even a few hours notice of a potential raid by police, drugs that had been delivered for distribution could be retrieved with the help of El Puerto.

El Puerto might be paid \$5 to \$10 million for the delivery of only 1,000 kilos of cocaine to various places, so the costs of operation were tremendous, but the profits to the cartels were infinitely greater, since that 1,000 kilos might well be subsequently sold for \$120 to \$150 million. Healthy world economies, an overwhelming demand for recreational drugs and the newfound wealth of novices thirsty for Amp Wells at the Amp Room (and eventually the Phoenix Room) poured a staggering amount of money into the once-dead cocaine trade.

A Better Colombia

All of the drug sales, though, were secondary to Lehrder's ultimate plan. Because Lehrder grew up in an environment where his grandfather's name was famous (but without the presence of a father figure), Lehrder likely yearned for some degree of paternal approbation. It was at an early age, then, that young Wilhelm began adopting the well-known philosophical tenets that his grandfather had embraced while traveling through wartime and post-war Europe. After the fascist Juan Peron married Eva Duarte to build the legendary Argentine political partnership, the doors of South America opened as a safe haven for the Nazi exiles with whom Peron had built a long-lived relationship. In return, the Nazis used their scientific skills on behalf of their host countries and handed over millions of dollars in hidden Nazi assets to fill the Peron coffers.

Because of the complete absence of his father, the larger-than-life image of his grandfather could not have helped but rubbed off on the young Will Lehrder, who lived with his mother in Quindío, Colombia. Despite the little money they occasionally received from the aged Juan Peron, though, Will and his mother lived in slums and survived among some of the poorest people in the world. Along the way, Wilhelm Lehrder began to recognize not only the difference between the intelligent and the unintelligent, but to understand the latter's drain on national and economic resources. All of this served as the soil in which grew Lehrder's plans to build a new Colombia free from depletion by the stupid and mentally inadequate.

It was when the young Wilhelm Peron Lehrder met one of his father's oldest friends, though, that his plans began to fall into place. Purely by accident, Lehrder met Nazi SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny, a Hitler loyalist central to the most influential underground fascist network in Europe. Skorzeny had not only been the initial contact for many fugitive Nazi war criminals seeking relocation to South America, but he had also been instrumental in cultivating neo-fascism in the new generation of Europeans. Skorzeny took Lehrder on as a devoted student of eugenics and a "weeder of the human garden." The two learned much from one another. By the end of their time together, Lehrder was devoted to the idea of building a better Colombia.

Operations

Legitimate Operations

Beyond its illegal drug trafficking, the Medellín cartel also invests heavily in legitimate businesses. Large sums of laundered money are moved into banking, communications, construction, light industry, publishing, agriculture and retailing, which, in turn, launder further amounts for distribution into subsequent businesses. Lehrder himself maintains a private herd of realtors, lawyers, accountants and

bankers, who maintain his private holdings, including homes throughout the world, hotels, casinos, pharmaceutical companies and shopping centers. As an organization comprised of Lehrder and his trafficking cohorts, the modern Medellín cartel and its subsidiaries are reputed to own or control more than 30 percent of the real estate in Colombia and to finance more than 40 percent of the building construction.

Such legitimate business enterprises allow the cartel to provide Colombia with charitable contributions and political donations without the appearance of a narcowelfare state. Likewise, the cartel's political lobbying efforts are all routed through fully legitimate businesses; these are mostly aimed at protecting the easy operation of narcotics businesses and obtaining expanded rights for charged and convicted traffickers.

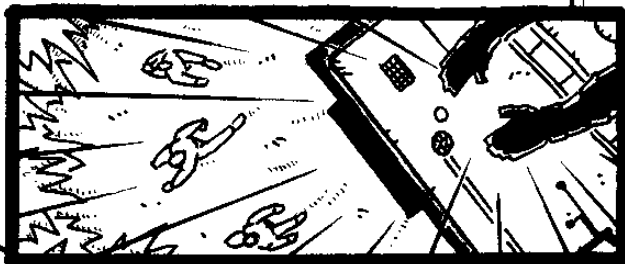
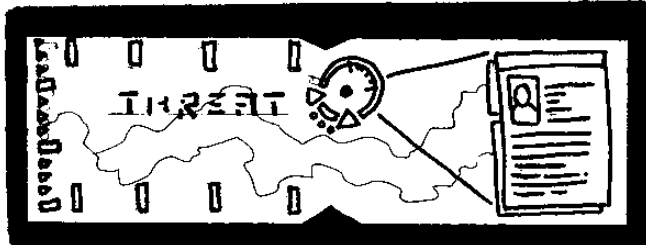
Heroin

Opium poppies can be grown anywhere in the world, and it's a wonder that it took the Colombians so long to recognize the pretty little flowers as a second income-producing crop. By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, the Medellín cartel had begun utilizing its cocaine distribution network to sell ultrapure heroin number 4. Colombia's 6,540 hectares of arable land and the favorability of its climate make the country one of the largest potential producers of opium in the world.

Chinese triads have, historically, controlled the flow of heroin, however, and the Medellín cartel has come into increasingly greater conflict with the Chinese drug-traders. So much so that the two organizations are on the brink of a shadow war the likes of which the world has never seen.

Cocaine

Cocaine has long been not only Colombia's single largest export, but during the 1980s and 1990s, it was Florida's greatest import; cocaine sales exceeded the state's \$5 billion annual tourism income by well over \$2 billion. And, even though Florida's attorney general tried to prosecute every case made by US DEA and Customs officials, only seven full-time prosecutors were assigned to the state's drug cases, and sights were set low. No one had time to put together a big picture of the trafficking occurring, so otherwise important arrests often resulted in no more than minor possession or sales charges. Since police and prosecutors were concerned with adding as many arrests and convictions as possible to their statistics, they focused on persons moving dozens or hundreds of kilos for a quick arrest. No one targeted the people moving tons of the stuff. The result was a cocaine free-for-all in Florida that, within 10 years, provided the leaders of the Medellín cartel with the wherewithal to grow from Colombian peasants and thugs into some of the richest men in the world.



The Production of Cocaine

Cocaine production begins with coca plants, which grow anywhere between 1,500 and 6,000 feet above sea level in warm, moist weather. Leaves from the coca plants are harvested three or four times a year, and it takes approximately 363 kilos of coca leaves to yield one kilo of salable cocaine.

The dried leaves are treated with lime and potash — which begin to break down the leaf's alkaloid structure — and are then soaked in vats filled with kerosene. Sometimes, the leaves are pressed to help extract the alkaloid-infused kerosene, and the mixture is subsequently mixed with sulfuric acid to form a collection of salts, including cocaine sulfate. With the addition of more lime and potash, a gummy grayish sludge — coca paste — forms at the bottom of the vat.

The coca paste is refined and processed further with more sulfuric acid, potassium permanganate and ammonium hydroxide to leave a very pure cocaine base that is not soluble in water and, therefore, cannot be inhaled through mucous membranes but can be smoked ("freebased"). To create a powder that can be inhaled, the base must be dissolved in ether or acetone with hydrochloric acid, yielding cocaine hydrochloride — the substance beloved by baselines and novas alike. Unfortunately, ether and acetone are both highly volatile and, combined, possess enough stored explosive energy that the average life of a cocaine cook is not a long one.

Tactics

Cocaine traffickers were all career criminals — streetwise, tough and deadly. Regardless of whether they had grown up in Colombia or not, those still living thrived in one of the world's most dangerous businesses; those who *had* been raised in Colombia, though, were part of a culture of violence that had existed long before drug trafficking came along. Kidnaping, street murders, restaurant massacres and the like had been Colombian traditions since *La Violencia*, a bloodbath waged by and between the country's liberal and conservative militias from 1948 through 1950. During *La Violencia*, an estimated 300,000 people were killed before a national peace was reached. Even afterward, though, right-wing death squads took it upon themselves to "restore order" throughout the countryside. *La Violencia* had taught Colombians everything they needed to know about violence; drug traffickers were simply another expression of that national trait.

By the middle of the first decade of the 21st century, Colombia sported a murder rate of more than 120 per 100,000 — more than 10 times the US average — making it the most violent country in the world. The country was well on its way to being an utterly lawless and anarchic country. Drug traffickers waged war not only among them-

selves, but added to the fray were the conflicts among all the criminals, revolutionaries, terrorists, governmental authorities, oil companies and other insurgents — everyone warred with everyone, and there was more than enough mayhem to go around. Colombians with the wherewithal to escape the country were forced to flee in order to escape rampant kidnaping, extortion and murder.

By the time Utopia stepped into the picture, the US had been waging its own drug war for more than 35 years. More than 50,000 civilians had been killed and 1 million others displaced in the government's \$1.5 billion per year conflict.

Education Efforts

Of the Medellín cartel's annual \$1 billion+ net profit, Lehrder has been funneling an average of \$200 million annually into educational program for Colombian adults and children. The development, maintenance and administration of IQ tests cost Lehrder more than \$20 million each year. These highly sensitive tests are administered to more than 3 million Colombians annually, resulting in much better identification of Columbia's problem areas. Lehrder's educational team has found that around 27 percent of the population falls noticeably below the IQ and functionality levels prescribed by Lehrder and that an additional 2 percent falls so far below the appropriate levels as to be deemed substantially disabled.

Children are aggressively channeled into the clean, modern and frighteningly orderly schools built by Lehrder. Those marked as talented or gifted are given a stipend proportionate to their performance. An exceptionally bright student performing at peak levels can take home enough of a stipend to support her parents. Those who cannot or will not perform are "redflagged" and disappear from the system.

Adults are put through a similar testing regimen. Those who cannot read are moved into adult literacy programs, where they remain until they succeed. Those who do not succeed disappear.

Cleansing Efforts

All of the flash and glamour surrounding Lehrder's educational efforts serves as no more than an effective smokescreen covering much more practical purposes. Through a carefully devised testing regimen, Lehrder is able to identify his countrymen's intelligence and capabilities. By doing so, Lehrder intends to improve Colombia's future by eliminating the "intellectually inferior."

Through six "production and purification camps" situated throughout the country, Lehrder's educational efforts have resulted in a remarkable improvement of the average level of intelligence and literacy rates in Colombia. By the time Utopia discovered the Puerto Lopez camp, more than 220,000 people had already died in that facility alone, their bodies dissolved in acid and disposed of as part of Lehrder's cocaine-manufacturing process.

License to Parent

Lehrder acknowledges that intellect is shaped as much by environmental factors as genetic potential, and to that end, all Colombian citizens wishing to be parents must qualify for a parenting license. Obtaining the license requires successful completion of classes in infant nutrition, parenting techniques and techniques for maximizing a child's IQ.

Any citizen producing a child without a parenting license is placed on probation until the child's first IQ test at the age of 5. If the child is normal, the parent's probation is completed. If the child is talented or gifted, the parent is granted a parenting license automatically. Any citizen who produces two children without a parenting license is sterilized unless both children are deemed to possess intellectual capacities significantly above the average. Multiple births are excepted from this policy.

Structure

The Medellín cartel in the 1980s and 1990s was an organization run by 13 leading families, each of whom controlled vast amounts of cocaine production and sales. Foremost among them and the undisputed leader of the pack, though, was Pablo Escobar. When Escobar was killed in 1993, the cartel was effectively leaderless, although it continued for more than a decade until the organization fell apart in the face of infighting and strikes by Team Tomorrow.

It was the cartel's structure that was revived by Wilhelm Peron Lehrder in 2012. The cartel under Lehrder is organized around and *for* Lehrder. Although other traffickers participate under the auspices of the Medellín cartel and although other cocaine producers ship a large percentage of their product through the cartel, there's no question about who's in charge. The cartel had been almost completely destroyed by Utopia before it was rebuilt by Lehrder almost single-handedly; the cartel's means of distribution is a secret closely guarded by Lehrder; and Lehrder is the glamorous "invisible man" when it comes to apprehension by the authorities.

FARC

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) is the largest and oldest rebel group operating in Colombia. It is also closely tied to drug trafficking and, therefore, is the best-trained, best-outfitted and most successful insurgent organization in Latin America. In the late 1990s, FARC threw off all pretenses of being anything other than the enforcement branch of the Fascist Party of Colombia, existing solely to overthrow the Colombian government. FARC frequently serves as a mercenary army for the Medellín cartel; indeed, FARC's primary source of income has generally been from its protection of cocaine fields, labs and personnel.

Dramatis Personae

Wilhelm Peron Lehrder

Background: Wilhelm Peron Lehrder was the only child born to the beautiful 14-year-old Nelly Rivas by Erich Juan Peron, himself an illegitimate child of Juan Peron. Based simply on his grandfather's heritage, Lehrder soon came to be regarded as a "dangerous Nazi" by the Colombian National Police. Cables from Colombian military intelligence services indicated that Juan's friends consisted of expatriate fascists who regularly discussed the possibility of installing in Colombia a "pro-Nazi totalitarian government." The cables further reported the group to be "rabidly anti-Project Utopia, vehemently anti-democratic and bitterly anti-American."

Retaining his grandfather's famous Latin American surname, Will grew up to be short but very handsome — five feet, six inches, with thick, dark hair, boyish features and penetrating eyes. People who knew him said that he was quite playful and unambitious but respectful. Will Lehrder grew up during the late 1960s and traveled to Europe once with money sent to him by his grandfather. It was during this trip that Lehrder met Otto Skorzeny, with whom Lehrder would eventually develop a valuable and lucrative relationship — both professionally and personally.

Lehrder was arrested for the first time in the United States in 1982 while trying to sell more than 100 pounds of marijuana. Although there were relatively few strings to be pulled from Berlin, Skorzeny made sure that Lehrder was well taken care of by the neo-fascists at the Danbury Correctional Institution. Lehrder met many new friends, and to fend off the tedium of prison, he read voraciously, becoming fond of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Jung's *Arche-*



ABERRANT

types of the Collective Unconscious and everything written by Friedrich Nietzsche. During his tutelage in the American correctional system, Will Lehrder also became determined to perfect his own narcotics trade, learning new methods to run it as a lucrative business enterprise rather than as a half-assed sport for the weekend warrior. Most importantly, though, Lehrder made the connections necessary for him to enter into America's fledgling cocaine trade, allowing him to become a cultural bridge between the Colombian cocaine producers and a US distribution network comprised largely of Americans.

Upon his release, Lehrder began using money made from marijuana sales to Otto Skorzeny to put together the pieces essential to smuggling cocaine into America by air. Lehrder formed a small conglomerate of producers willing to pool their drugs into large shipments that were eventually sent as small shares on the Medellín cartel's planes.

Lehrder soon became able to pay for all of his own personnel and distribution systems, and by the late 1980s, Lehrder had his own planes that were hauling hundreds of kilos of cocaine for small Colombian producers on a weekly basis, profiting Lehrder hundreds of thousands of dollars per trip and allowing him to purchase the tiny four-mile long Nancy's Cay in the Bahamas. For only a few million dollars, Lehrder managed to purchase a private and isolated staging point for all his operations. Although he was never a large figure in the cocaine trade, Lehrder transformed during this period from a kid who moved relatively small amounts of pot for chump change into a man who was easily able to move hundreds of kilos of cocaine for millions.

Though he spent lavishly on his operation, Lehrder stockpiled money and began investing in his more private ambitions. Lehrder had learned well from his father and looked forward to a day when he would be able to bring his home country into the modern world as the president of Colombia. Lehrder wanted to take the country back from largely Western control, and he used cocaine in an almost military way to further his goals.

Image: Lehrder is an attractive man, though not exceptionally so. He is slightly shorter than average, with thick, dark hair and a lighter complexion. His eyes are a light green, and his lips are full. Although Lehrder's age has led to his thickening through the middle, he is not overweight and carries himself with a sense of command.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the gods' gift to Colombia and so have a divine right to rule the country by whatever means necessary. You wield a great deal of power and know it; between Lara Bonilla and El Puerto, though, there's almost nothing that can get in your way. You must constantly remind yourself, though, of who maintains your power because, without either one of them, T2M would have you in a heartbeat.

Gear: Lehrder generally wears a flak jacket for personal protection and carries small arms such as a light pistol or laser electroshock pistol.

Nature: Leader

Allegiance: Self

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Appearance 4, Manipulation 4, Charisma 5

Abilities: Awareness 3, Biz 4, Brawl 3, Command 4, Drive 2, Endurance 1, Firearms 3, Interrogation 2, Intimidation 3, Might 1, Resistance 2, Streetwise 4, Style 1, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Backing 5, Contacts 3, Followers 3, Influence 4, Resources 5

Willpower 7

El Puerto

Background: El Puerto grew up as Pablo Jorge Arroyave in the slums of Medellín, while Colombia slowly turned from an outback province into a lawless nation of anarchy ruled by King Mob. Arroyave managed to survive his youth in one of the most violent countries in the world, one where drug lords, criminals, revolutionaries and terrorists waged constant war against not only the government and the country's infrastructure, but also among themselves. But Medellín was as pretty a place as a person could find in South America; a city where anyone — rich or poor — could win prestige with enough guts, brains and vision.

So, from the home (or, at least, the four pieces of tin tied together in the corners with nylon rope) where he occasionally lived with 13 other members of his immediate family, Arroyave wanted nothing more than to escape. And so, Arroyave came to know Juan Vasquez, who sold him coke and introduced him to Rafael Restrepo, who sold him coke and introduced him to Manuel Escobar, who sold him coke and was able to get him a job with Wilhelm Lehrder's squads in Medellín.

All went well for Arroyave until the day that the American DEA found the coke lab that Arroyave and his friends were supposed to be guarding. The coke lab was razed, the workers fled into the forest, and the rest of Arroyave's guard team was killed. Only he escaped. Through discreet inquiry, Arroyave discovered himself to be in Iquitos, Peru — more than 10,000 km from Medellín. With no clue how he'd come to be in Iquitos, a pounding headache and a fear for his friends guarding the coke lab, Arroyave started walking north.

Arroyave soon learned that he could absent himself from danger almost without thought, though determining the particularity of his destination took some time to figure out — gods thank the occasional yachts that traveled the Caribbean Sea when Arroyave escaped another coke lab attacked by the US DEA. Quickly, though, he found himself before Don Wilhelm himself, explaining his



convenient “absences” during DEA attacks. Surprisingly, Arroyave was not shot, but was, instead, invited to sit with Don Wilhelm and enjoy a drink and a snort from the Don’s own cache of drugs.

Thus was born El Puerto.

El Puerto began working directly with Don Wilhelm himself, learning how to open “warp doors” to transport himself, other people and things from place to place. El Puerto found Don Wilhelm to be remarkably congenial and more than willing to share his own alcohol and drugs with the underling formerly known as Pablo Jorge Arroyave. El Puerto enjoyed the spike and Red 7 that Don Wilhelm provided and, in particular, the rush from the soma that Don Wilhelm once gave him.

Soon, Don Wilhelm was able to co-opt Dr. Robin Gugliotta directly from Utopia’s Science and Technology Division to work as the Medellín cartel’s first developer of nova skills. Dr. Gugliotta worked with Lehrder and El Puerto to help El Puerto master and develop his skills. And, while he was not particularly bright, El Puerto was able to build on his own knack for opening “warp doors” between Here and There through which things and people could pass.

El Puerto worked to increase the range of his skill and began working for Don Wilhelm in a whole new capacity — one that paid more than poor Pablo Arroyave could ever have previously imagined. El Puerto believed that he’d finally hit the big time by becoming Don Wilhelm’s personal friend; although he recognized that he now had a much more important position in Don Wilhelm’s plans, El Puerto could never have realized the true worth to Lehrder of having a

means of free product transport between points without the risk of interdiction. Lehrder came to the belief that by maintaining the illusion of being nice to the moron, paying him a truly ridiculous salary and providing a generous vacation schedule, he would remain able to forever utilize El Puerto as an unparalleled means of delivery.

Image: El Puerto is not a thinker, but he’s quite the looker. A small man, El Puerto possesses classic Latino looks, with lovely proportions and perfect muscle tone. High cheekbones, long eyelashes and heavily lidded hazel eyes give El Puerto a boyish face that begs men and women alike to “come hither.”

Roleplaying Hints: You give the illusion of being very thoughtful and well-considered until you open your mouth; some of your former compatriots still trapped in the lower and more disposable ranks of Lehrder’s operation sometimes called Arroyave “the Open Door” among themselves until they once found that you had appeared behind them through one of your “warp doors.” Not knowing where you might appear taught Lehrder’s men a new appreciation of you, and your ability to open doors over tremendous distances left many people in awe. Despite your own mental limits, you take instruction very well. You are very loyal to your friend Don Wilhelm. If Lehrder told you to open a warp door between China and the US, you would either find a way to open the necessary doors or die trying.

Gear: El Puerto carries few tools or instruments. Hoping to keep El Puerto from becoming a target, Don Wilhelm has provided his personal nova with a stolen invisibility suit and a light pistol for personal defense.

Nature: Follower

Allegiance: Medellín Cartel/Don Wilhelm

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Appearance 5, Manipulation 2, Charisma 2

Abilities: Athletics 4, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Firearms 2, Melee 2, Might 3, Rapport 2, Resistance 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 4, Style 4, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Backing 5, Mentor 3

Quantum 4, Quantum Pool 28, Willpower 3, Taint 1

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Appearance • (First Impression, Seductive Looks)

Quantum Powers: Teleport ••, Warp •••••

Lara Bonilla

Background: Lara Bonilla fell in love with some of the obscure and radical mathematical writings of Hari Seldon while she was still in high school in Buenos Aires. A mathematical prodigy, Bonilla commanded a perfect grasp of advanced calculus by the time she was 11, and at 13, she began working on Seldon’s theories regarding the use of psychomathematics and psychohistory as predictive tools. Despite the efficacy of Seldon’s



ideas, Bonilla began developing her own psychomathematical models.

Working with Professor Maxwell Pelton Mermelstein at the University of Miami, 16-year-old Lara Bonilla worked on computer systems that could interpret the world's constant stream of information, apply her models thereto and produce an accurate predictive result. And it was through Professor Mermelstein that Bonilla was introduced to the drug culture and, eventually, to Wilhelm Peron Lehrder.

Lehrder and Bonilla met at a party hosted by Mermelstein's friends in Lima, Peru. Their eyes locked across the crowded room as though they recognized one another from a thousand previous lives. When they touched, it was magical, and Bonilla thought, completely predictable; although she'd seen an outcome like this more than two weeks ago, in fact, it was still a thrilling experience.

The two of them spent the night on the deck of the Lima condominium, first watching the sun go down over the South Pacific and then just talking until the small hours of the morning. Bonilla never had any delusions that Lehrder was anything other than a drug trafficker; that was what the models told her he would be. And even though she'd never had any interest in narcotics, Bonilla tried cocaine upon her return to Buenos Aires because that's what she knew to be the correct next step.

The experience was a frightful one for her, though, as her latent node exploded in her mind with a flood of psychomathematical probabilities, changes to her finely tuned model and statistical visions of the future. Between the effect of the narcotics and her own eruption, it took

quite some time for Bonilla to recover from the experience; when she did, though, Bonilla realized that she'd come to fully understand a much-improved psychomathematical model and was able to run information through her own mental model without the computer program that she'd developed with Professor Mermelstein.

The relationship between Lehrder and Bonilla blossomed to the point where, at 18, she left college and moved to Colombia as Lehrder's mistress. Clearly, Lehrder found Bonilla's predictive capabilities to be extremely valuable, and so, he took very good care of her. Combined with El Puerto's warp capabilities, Bonilla's skills allowed Lehrder the perfect opportunity to move his product throughout the world without risk of capture.

Image: Lara Bonilla is a beautiful, svelte girl. She's Latin American and looks it — a spectacular beauty with a slight build, long black hair and eyelashes that would do credit to Grace Kelly or Marilyn Monroe. Despite her looks, though, Bonilla has a poor self-image and often dresses in baggy, unflattering clothes.

Roleplaying Hints: You are dedicated to Lehrder because of the love that he's shown you. Despite this, though, you're even more dedicated to honing and testing your own psychomathematical models. Your M-R node has taken you places where Hari Seldon never dreamed of going, and you love the power that your predictive capabilities have given you.

Gear: Bonilla carries no weapons because she's almost always able to avoid problematic situations where weapons would be necessary. She has, however, capitulated to Lehrder's demands that she at least wear reinforced clothing. On the third anniversary of their meeting, Lehrder also bought Bonilla a symbiotic brain data implant that allows her to download and consider vast amounts of information as part of her psychomathematical models.

Nature: Caregiver

Allegiance: Wilhelm Peron Lehrder

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Appearance 3, Manipulation 2, Charisma 4

Abilities: Academics 4, Arts 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 5, Biz 1, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy 3, Computer 5, Drive 1, Endurance 3, Intrusion 2, Investigation 2, Legerdemain 3, Linguistics 1 (Native: Spanish; English), Melee 1, Might 1, Resistance 3, Science 5, Stealth 3, Style 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Backing 5, Mentor 3

Quantum 3, Quantum Pool 26, Willpower 4

Mega-Attributes: Mega-Intelligence ••• (Eidetic Memory, Mathematical Savant)

Quantum Powers: ESP •••, Intuition ••, Luck ••••, Premonition •••••, Pretercognition ••••

CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING

Storytelling

Now that you know the major players in the underworld of 2015, it's time to put that information to use in your **Aberrant** game. Most Storytellers are likely to use the various criminal syndicates as antagonists, foils and occasional allies of the main characters in their series. The first section of this chapter looks at those roles in detail. Others may be inspired by the material in this book to run a series based around one or more of the syndicates and the people involved with them. The second part of this chapter looks at the possibilities inherent in an underworld **Aberrant** series.

Antagonists and Allies

The typical role of criminal syndicates in an **Aberrant** series is as an element of the setting for the players' characters to interact with. How the characters are likely to interact with organized crime depends on the allegiances of the characters and the main themes of the series.

Project Utopia

Project Utopia naturally opposes the major criminal syndicates and has devoted itself to eliminating crime as one of its goals to create a better world. Unfortunately, while Utopia and Team Tomorrow scored some impressive initial successes against organized crime, they haven't been successful in completely eliminating it. In fact, one could certainly argue that all Utopia did was trim away the deadwood from the major syndicates, allowing newer, stronger organizations to take their places, organizations that aren't going to be as easy to crack as their predecessors.

The truth of the matter is that organized crime is a relatively low priority for Project Utopia. Team Tomorrow isn't a crime-fighting force (although they can be, if that's what you want, see the "Crime-Fighting" sidebar). Taking down syndicate operations is good public relations for T2M and Utopia, since it's the sort of thing people expect from heroic novas, but that's about it. Utopia has much bigger fish to fry in dealing

with problems such as political tensions, the environment, world economics, illegal technology, nova threats and so forth. It's only when the syndicates touch on these larger issues (destabilizing governments or smuggling illegal technology) that Utopia really sits up and takes notice.

Part of the Utopia philosophy is that it wants to address the root *causes* of crime rather than playing police and trying to arrest criminals. Of course, how Utopia plans to tackle the problem of eliminating crime is up to the Storyteller, but it offers many different possibilities.

One option is to tackle the question of material need; if no one in the world wants for anything, then what's the need for smuggling or a black market? Once money becomes irrelevant, why try to make it illegally? As Utopia solves the problems of starvation and want worldwide, the black market shrinks. As Utopia ends wars and creates peace, the illegal weapons market dries up. But for each criminal market Utopia eliminates, its efforts unwittingly create a new one. For example, Utopia's regulation of new technology has led to a very profitable black market in illegal tech, one that syndicates such as the Nakato Gumi are only too happy to profit from. Advances in medical science have also led to new drugs such as spike, soma and mite, which the syndicates produce and sell. The new prosperity in places such as India and Ethiopia created larger vice markets there. Each advance Utopia makes is turned inside out, and organized crime finds a way to profit from it.

There's also the issue of dealing with criminal behavior itself. It's certainly not beyond the capabilities of Project Utopia (or its novas) to use behavior modification of some kind — technological, quantum-based or both — to tear out the weed of crime at its roots.

On the face of it, the idea seems implausible; would society really stand for the brainwashing of criminals to make them into honest citizens? But society countenances the execution of criminals in many

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cases or their imprisonment for life, and new methods of “rehabilitation” may appear more humane and cost-efficient in the long run. This is particularly true when the program is made voluntary.

What if a telepathic or Mega-Manipulative nova offers to alter a convicted criminal’s mind to eliminate his criminal propensities? If the convict agrees, he gets a reduction of his sentence and a better chance at parole. It’s not a giant step from there to the imposition such “treatment” on criminals against their will. Mark Gruenwald’s *Squadron Supreme* (available as a graphic novel from Marvel Comics) tackles the issue of “enforced” rehabilitation implemented by people with superpowers.

For their part, the syndicates prefer to keep out of Project Utopia’s way, while looking for anything they can use to ensure Utopia won’t bother them. The entire criminal underworld remembers the purges that came with Utopia’s war on crime, and nearly everyone in the syndicates knows someone who ended up in prison (or

dead) because of it. The syndicates are better off staying below Utopia’s radar for the most part, doing business behind the scenes and surviving for another day.

That’s not to say that the syndicates can’t take on Project Utopia. Strong-arm tactics and influence are two of the things organized crime does best, and Project Utopia and its people are certainly not above either temptation or human failings (even those of them who aren’t very human any more). A syndicate can dig up an embarrassing incident or piece of information and use it to blackmail someone into doing a “favor” here or there. Syndicates even arrange such incidents to give them opportunities to get a hold over people.

The syndicates are also in the daily business of taking Utopia’s good works and finding a way to twist them into something they can profit from. It can be frustrating for Utopia-affiliated characters to see all their hard work turned into a new vice for the Megasyndicate or the Heaven Thunder Triad to make money from, and that frustration might lead the characters to try and do something about the syndicates.



Crime-Fighting

One of the clichés of the comic books is that while superheroes often fight crime, they ultimately don't seem to do very much to prevent it. Criminals still rob banks in Gotham even though they *know* the Batman is in town. Part of this is obviously because if there wasn't any crime, there wouldn't be very much for superheroes to do... or would there?

On the one hand, it's quite possible to take the syndicates described in this book and give them a more "four-color" spin for use in an **Aberrant** series where the player characters are superheroes fighting crime. Play up the stereotypes and make them larger than life. The Megasyndicate is full of oily men in pinstripe suits who use Tommy-guns and talk like they're in a Hollywood gangster movie (even the Russians). The yakuza is slick, high-tech and employs ninja enforcers. And so forth. If the Teragen and other novas are the "supervillains" in a four-color game, then the syndicates are the "meat and potatoes" criminals the heroes get to beat up. The trouble is that no matter how many individuals they take out, the syndicates keep on going.

The other option is to explore some of the real effects of "fighting crime" in an **Aberrant** series. What if the characters succeed in virtually ending crime in a major city? Then what do they do? Do they retire? Do they find a new cause to throw their efforts behind? How much "maintenance" does it take to preserve their success? How long can they maintain it?

An effective "crime-fighting" series can be built along the lines of any of the major police dramas on television, with the addition of nova law enforcers. Even novas will face much of the same legal red tape, see the same terrible crimes and feel many of the same frustrations real-world police officers do on the job. Perhaps even more so since novas are likely to feel even more pressure to make a difference with their abilities — and to feel more frustrated when they can't.

Project Proteus

To Project Proteus, the syndicates are a useful tool like any other. At some point, they'll be eliminated, of course, but for the time being organized crime tends to be beneath Proteus' notice. Like Utopia, it has bigger concerns than organized crime.

Still, the syndicates are useful from time to time. Proteus can sometimes nudge them in the direction it wants them to go, and they can provide good PR for Utopia when some suitable "crime-fighting" can be set up, with the deck stacked to favor Team Tomorrow and Utopia novas.

The underworld also provides the black market and criminal connections Proteus uses to carry out some of its black ops — with the syndicates none the wiser that there is a secret organization behind some of the thefts, assassinations and other crimes that happen in their territory. Proteus is utterly ruthless in dealing with the syndicates (more so than usual) because it knows the kind of tiger it's riding dealing with organized crime.

The syndicates would certainly love to get some dirt on Proteus, if they knew it existed. It would be the perfect bargaining chip to use against Project Utopia, which is why Proteus is so careful in its dealings with the underworld.

Aberrants

Former agents of Project Utopia are placed in an unusual situation with regard to the underworld. On the one hand, many of them are responsible for breaking the backs of earlier syndicates and sending a lot of mobsters and criminals to prison (or to meet their maker). On the other hand, these novas are now renegades and criminals themselves, many of them living outside the law. They're forced to look to the syndicates as potential allies in their struggle. Necessity, like politics, makes for strange bedfellows.

The Aberrants aren't naïve enough to think that the syndicates would help the renegade novas out of anything other than self-interest, but they also know the syndicates have no love for Utopia and that they can be bought.

For their part, the syndicates, particularly the Megasyndicate and the yakuza, are willing to exchange favors with the Aberrants. Having the assistance of a nova or two never hurts, and the syndicates think they can get their hooks into some of the Aberrants, if they play their cards right. The Aberrants also offer the possibility of a chink in Utopia's armor, something the criminals might be able to exploit, given the opportunity.

As if they didn't have reason enough to mistrust the criminal syndicates, the Aberrants also have to beware the possibility of ties between the syndicates and Project Proteus, which do exist to a degree (see above).

Teragen

The self-proclaimed members of the One Race should have little or no interest in the dealings of baseline criminal organizations, but that is not entirely the case. It's true that the Teragen as a whole cares nothing for the activities of the syndicates, pointing to them as examples of how the zips will never change, no matter how hard Utopia tries.

But, living outside human law as they do, Terats do sometimes find the criminal syndicates useful in their various plans to spread the word of Teras and to ex-

plore their own nature as novas. Narcosis, in particular, has ties with the Medellín cartel (through various intermediaries). The cartel helps supply her with soma and other drugs for her baseline followers, and she supports their efforts to develop new nova-specific drugs, in the hopes of adding them to her arsenal of influence.

The Harvesters faction of the Teragen sometimes finds itself in need of particular high-tech equipment, things Utopia has banned as dangerous because they lend themselves to things such as home gene-splicing shops where someone might cook up a dangerous plague or something even worse. In this situation, these Terats turn to Kuro-Tek to provide the necessary materials, working through enough blinds that Utopia cannot trace where the equipment has gone, even if they do manage to catch up with Kuro-Tek.

The Teragen also knows that information, materials, almost anything, is available for sale from the syndicates, for the right price. The Terats would hotly deny the implication that they were in any way dependent upon a baseline criminal organization for their support. But the truth is that the Teragen has relied on the syndicates in the past, although that is becoming less frequent now that the members of the Pantheon have built up support networks and followers of their own.

The syndicates are willing to deal with the Pantheon (when they're aware that's whom they're dealing with in the first place). Otherwise, the Teragen is too high profile, and too high on Utopia's hit list, for the syndicates to get involved in their affairs. Better to leave the Teragen alone and work to stay on the good side of the One Race for as long as possible.

The Directive

The Directive finds itself in an interesting symbiotic relationship with organized crime, the Nakato Gumi in particular. The Directive uses Kuro-Tek as its technological arm, the supplier of the various devices field agents need to do their work. Kuro-Tek and the Nakato Gumi have naturally encouraged the relationship and done all they can to keep the Directive dependent on them for their hardware needs. The Directive's support affords them a measure of protection against Project Utopia's Science & Technology Division, although the Nakato Gumi knows that the Directive would cut Kuro-Tek loose if it had to.

In fact, there are some within the Directive concerned about the organization's reliance on Kuro-Tek. Director Harris supported buying technology from Kuro-Tek because it was expedient and helped to get the Directive up and running as quickly as possible. Now, he'd like to see the agency weaned from Kuro-Tek, doing its own research and development. The problem is that the

member nations of the Directive have been reluctant to commit the huge amount of money necessary to foster the R&D division, especially when Kuro-Tek provides so well, and Japan and Director Nakamura are strongly against the idea.

The Directive has gone up against the C-Z Megasyndicate and the Heaven Thunder Triad and will do so again in the future, if necessary, but Director Harris is concerned the Nakato Gumi wants to use the Directive for its own ends, diverting resources from the agency's more important work. The reality of the situation is that the Directive needs Kuro-Tek, at least for the time being, so when the Nakato Gumi needs a "favor," passed on via Director Nakamura, it's in the Directive's best interest to go along, provided other operations are not compromised. This kind of "side work" can clue in Directive agents about the organization's ties with Kuro-Tek, and Director Harris might tap them to help him cut some of those ties, possibly behind the other directors' backs.

Elites

Elites interact with the criminal syndicates on a regular basis more than any other group of novas, as both allies and opponents. The syndicates hire elites to handle a wide range of tasks, including taking on other syndicates. Various clients hire elites to go up against the syndicates, usually to recover stolen articles (or blackmail evidence), but also for rescue missions, espionage and assassination.

Despite the fact that they work for the syndicates one day and against them the next, elites remain on fairly good terms with organized crime for the simple reason that they need each other. The syndicates have a difficult time recruiting and keeping nova agents, particularly novas capable of dealing with opposition such as Project Utopia, so elites are a vital part of the syndicates' operation. To the elites, the syndicates are customers like any others, so long as they're willing to meet the elites' prices (plus a little extra for the risk that comes with working for organized crime). An elites game is a good opportunity to introduce the characters to the various syndicates and the important people within them without going the route of a full-fledged underworld series.

Story Ideas

Gang War: Sooner or later, the syndicates come into conflict, and the characters get caught in the middle. When two or more criminal organizations start moving into territory that the players' characters have an interest in, things start to get ugly. It starts out with threats and warnings and quickly escalates to assassinations and violence in the streets. The characters might choose to

support one side or the other, or they might try and quell the fighting, either by rounding up both sides or by trying to get them to negotiate. Things can get interesting when the syndicates involved start calling in favors, particularly if the players' characters happen to owe somebody.

An Offer You Can't Refuse: A syndicate digs up some dirt on one or more of the characters and makes them an offer: Either they do a "favor" for the syndicate from time to time, or their little secret comes out in the most damaging way possible. Naturally, the syndicate has taken all precautions to ensure that the information is protected and out of the nova's reach. What does the character do? Does she go along with the mob's "harmless" requests (which become more and more demanding over time), or does she call its bluff and risk having her ruinous secret revealed?

Dealing With the Devil: A syndicate (particularly the Nakato Gumi) has an item of technology the novas need to deal with a problem they are facing or to further their own goals. The syndicate is willing to negotiate for the item, but it's not about to let it go cheaply. The characters have to decide whether or not to negotiate with the syndicate (and meet their price) or to try to take what they want, by stealth or by force. In the latter case, they may earn themselves a powerful and vindictive enemy.

The Underworld Series

For a true change-of-pace **Aberrant** series, you can run a story deeply involved with the world of organized crime. This series requires a particular group of players who are all interested in this sort of game, although there is still room for a wide range of character types and motivations.

Novas or Not?

The first thing to consider for an underworld series is whether or not the players are running nova or baseline characters. There aren't many novas involved with the syndicates directly, so nova characters stand out more than in a typical **Aberrant** series. The players' characters may be the only novas working for the syndicate (perhaps along with a few others).

Playing baseline characters trying to run a criminal empire in a world with novas such as Team Tomorrow would be a considerable challenge, but it might not be to everyone's taste. One possibility for including "baseline" characters in the series is to use "stealth" novas or nova infiltrators (see below). The **Aberrant: The Directive** sourcebook offers many suggestions on playing baseline and "stealth" nova characters in an **Aberrant** game.

Motivation

The next thing to consider is what are the character's motivations for working for the syndicate? This question is particularly important for nova characters. After all, a nova can make a fortune as an elite, municipal defender or even a product spokesperson for a major corporation. There's very little motivation for novas to become criminals — or, at least, very little *financial* motivation. There are a number of other motives that might steer novas into working for organized crime:

Duty and Loyalty: Two of the strongest motivators in human history. A character who feels that he owes something to the syndicate may not be able to just walk away from those obligations because he erupted. He might have worked for the syndicate before erupting. Or he might have been born into (or married into) a syndicate family. Despite his best efforts to cut any ties, he still feels a duty to his family. Or the character may feel he has a "family tradition" to uphold, to make his elders proud of him. Perhaps the syndicate did him a good turn once, and he feels the need to repay it.

Debt: Criminal syndicates rack up plenty of people who owe them both money and favors. If one of those people erupts, you can bet the syndicate is going to try and collect. If not the nova herself, then perhaps one of her loved ones owes the syndicate big-time, and this is how it wants to be repaid, unless the nova wants to start a war against an entire organization, with her loved ones caught in the crossfire. Maybe the nova has a particular illegal habit the syndicate is all too happy to satisfy in exchange for a little help here and there.

Guilt: Blackmail is a prime tool for organized crime and has been for a long time. A nova may be able to fly faster than sound and bend steel in his bare hands, but he can't escape the secrets of his past, and criminal organizations are very good at digging up those secrets — or manufacturing them to suit their needs. A nova blackmailed into working for the syndicate is a dangerous asset but still a potentially useful one.

Refuge: Not all novas are pretty enough to be media stars, and some have aberrations, both mental and physical, that would make most people cringe and get them locked up in Utopia's Bahrain facility for the rest of their lives (which probably wouldn't be all that long). These novas aren't among "the beautiful people," no matter what they may look like. Some of them find refuge in the underworld, where their talents are in demand and their aberrations are likely to be overlooked, so long as they don't interfere with getting the job done. In fact, some particularly twisted novas might find it easier to live outside the law in a sub-culture that respects and fears power and needs what they have to offer.

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Redemption: Finding redemption working for organized crime? Doesn't seem likely, but some characters might be motivated to get involved with a syndicate in order to create change from within. Perhaps the character is an idealist who thinks he can divorce the syndicate from its illegal dealings. Or the character might be an undercover agent, sent to infiltrate the organization and help bring it down from the inside.

Revenge: Criminal syndicates are full of vendettas and petty conflicts. A character might join up with one in order to get revenge on a rival syndicate or perhaps even to get revenge on someone within the syndicate, possibly by upstaging him and pushing him out of the organization.

Theme

The overall theme of **Aberrant** is one of power and responsibility, summed up in the question "What would you do with the power of a god?" An underworld series plays on this theme by looking at people who abuse their power or use it solely for their own self-interest, outside the law, and by asking whether or not criminal behavior is inherent in human nature or can be changed.

The first theme examines the nature of being a criminal, violating the law in order to get ahead in the world. There's a tendency to romanticize criminals in American culture because they defy the law, break the rules and often get away with it. There are times when everyone fantasizes about being able to do whatever they want, of having power and the will to use it ruthlessly. In this respect, criminals are similar to novas; they both have the power to step outside society's laws and do what they want. The question is, what will characters capable of doing anything do, and who will stop them, if anyone?

The other, related, question is: "Does power corrupt, and does absolute power corrupt absolutely?" Are syndicate bosses corrupt because they're powerful or powerful because they're corrupt and willing to ignore the laws society makes? Some philosophers believe that human beings are inherently selfish and that laws (and the fear of punishment) are the only things keeping human society from degenerating into anarchy. What happens when you find yourself beyond any fear of reprisal, beyond the power of the law? What do you do with that kind of freedom? Or are you really trapped by your obligations and commitments to your organization and not really free at all?

Mood

Underworld stories can evoke a number of different moods. Some of the most common include the following:

Danger: The criminal world is attractive and thrilling because it's dangerous. It's life on the edge, outside

the law and the safe boundaries of everyday society. There's danger from the authorities, trying to shut the criminals down and bring them to justice. There's danger from the criminals day-to-day activities, risking their lives committing crimes and dealing with rival criminal factions and even people within their own gang. Characters in an underworld series should feel that there's always something about to happen, something coming around the next corner. They could face death or imprisonment any moment and have to rely on each other and their own wits to stay ahead of the game.

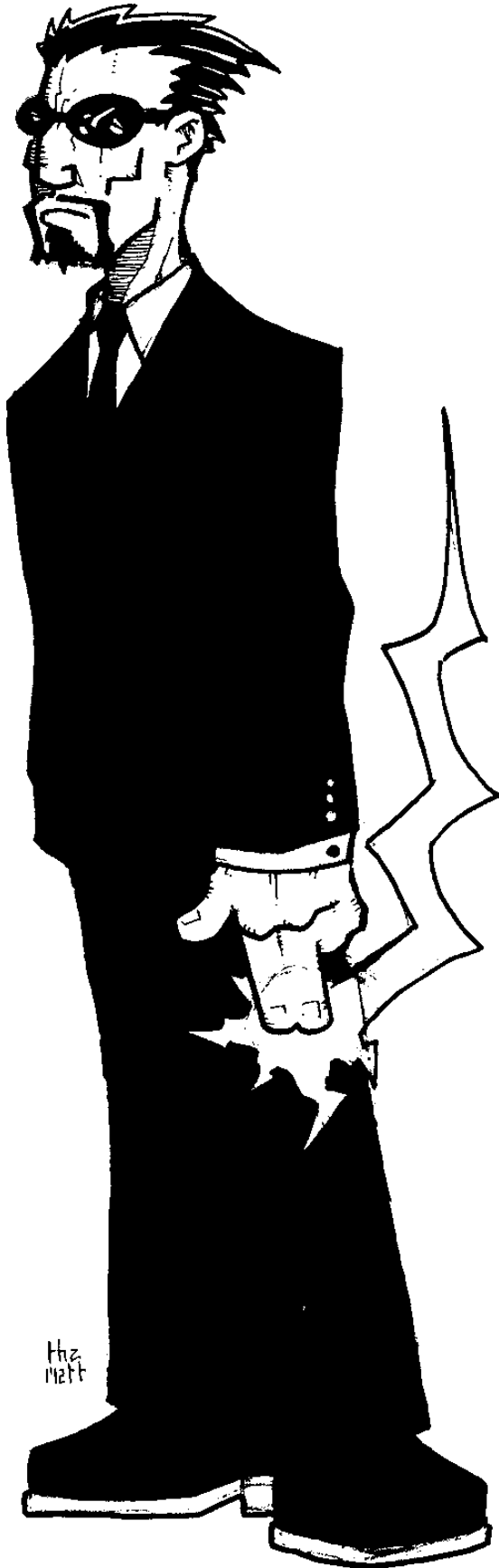
Duty: The syndicates are built on principles of duty and loyalty, although they're more often honored in the breach than in practice. Criminals feel a sense of loyalty to their syndicate and often to their superiors or their boss, and that loyalty motivates them to break the law, betray others or even take the fall for someone else. Yakuza series are particularly strong on the idea of duty winning out over one's own desires, and criminal characters may find themselves caught between their duty and their own goals.

Rebellion: The criminal is a rebel, thumbing his nose at the law and daring it to stop him. Criminals have a kind of freedom other people sometimes envy and idealize because they operate outside of society's rules. But criminals also exhibit the dark side of rebellion and defiance of the rules. They murder, maim, rape and torture, often without remorse or regret. They show the animal side of humanity, capable of the most depraved acts in order to make money or garner favor with their superiors. Criminals also walk a tightrope between rebelling against the laws of society but obeying the rules and traditions of their syndicate. When they break the rules, sometimes they succeed and pull off a major coup — other times, they fail and are punished, either by society or by their own organization.

Violence: The underworld is a terribly violent world, where criminals are predators profiting from human misery. There's the violence of guns, assassination and torture, but there's also the violence done against individuals through drugs, prostitution, slavery and degradation. Plus there's the violence done against society when its laws are violated.

On the one hand, this atmosphere of violence is quite liberating and allows the players to go wild. Their characters can do things that only people in gangster movies do. But violence simply for violence's sake tends to reduce the game to nothing but a splatter-fest, causing the players to become numb to the violence their characters inflict.

Violence has the most impact when its personal and the characters are confronted with the consequences of their actions. The people killed in mob hits usually



have family or loved ones, some the characters may see again. Victims beg and plead for their lives, and sooner or later, the threat of violence is held over the characters' heads. What happens when the characters are asked to assassinate someone they like and respect? What happens when someone they care about gets caught in the crossfire or used as a means of revenge?

Series Concepts

There are a number of different possible series based around organized crime. This section looks at a few of them, but it only hits upon some of the possibilities.

The Bad Ol' Days: Rather than starting out in 2008 or 2015 when the criminal syndicates in this book are already well established, it can be interesting to start out a series at the beginning of the Nova Age, before Project Utopia's war on crime. The players can take the roles of characters involved with the syndicates when Team Tomorrow first begins its assaults on the Mafia in the United States. Perhaps some or all of the characters erupt as a result, allowing them to influence the future of the underworld. They might take the places of crime lords such as Camparelli, Zukhov and Nakamura, seizing control of existing gangs or forging their own out of the remains left behind by Utopia. They can build versions of the syndicates in this book or entirely new ones left to the players' imaginations, figuring out ways to avoid Utopian reprisals and survive in the world of **Aberrant**. This sort of series also makes an effective prelude to another underworld series.

Nova Muscle: The characters are all novas working for a criminal syndicate. They may, in fact, be the only novas working for the syndicate, making them very important people indeed. They have to contend with the enemies of their organization, many of whom have novas available to them as well. In particular, there's the threat of Team Tomorrow and Project Utopia moving against the organization, as well as the various other factions of the **Aberrant** world. The characters also have to deal with factionalism and politics within their own organization. Some of them may be loyal to one faction while others are loyal to another, creating conflict within the group. Maybe they decide its time for the baselines to stop running things and stage a coup, turning the series into something else entirely.

Crime Lords: In this series, the characters are the heads of criminal organizations, either influential middlemen or powerful crime lords such as the heads of the Megasyndicate or the *oyabun* of the yakuza. They might have risen to their positions of power through Utopia's purges and the early years of the Nova

Age (like in the “Bad Ol’ Days” concept). They might be baselines or novas, long time heads of the syndicate or a new leadership installed by a coup or change in tradition. Although this series still offers physical conflict in the form of attempted assassinations, encounters with novas on the side of the law and so forth, it tends to be a more social game. The characters have to juggle the responsibilities of leading their organization(s) while fending off attacks from their enemies, both internal and external.

Wiseguys: Finally, the characters might be infiltrating the syndicate in order to bring it down from within. They might be working for the authorities (Utopia, the Directive, Interpol, etc.), for a rival syndicate or for an organization such as Proteus. This series is one of paranoia and deception, as the characters try to live double lives, working as members of a syndicate while trying to carry out their mission and not to compromise their morals. Ideally, the characters should find it difficult to betray some of the people they know within the syndicate, while also developing rivalries and disliking others, perhaps even people within their own legitimate organization.

References

For inspiration and additional information, check out some of the following media resources.

Books

Comrade Criminal by Stephen Handelman — An in-depth look at the Russian *Mafiyah* in the mid-1990s.

Ritual & Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity by Barend J. ter Haar — An outstanding and detailed look at the purposes behind the triads’ rituals; what they’re for and what they mean.

Trail of the Triads: An Investigation into International Crime by Fenton Bresler — an interesting overview of triad organizations.

Warlords of Crime: Chinese Secret Societies, the New Mafia by Gerald L. Posner — One man’s walk through the underworld of Chinese organized crime.

Comics and Games

Dark Champions by Steve Long — A sourcebook for Hero Games *Champions* RPG that covers “street-level” superheroes and provides some information on organized crime.

Destiny’s Price — This sourcebook for **Mage: the Ascension** covers the gritty, “street-level” aspects of the underworld and may be useful for Storytellers looking for a different angle.

Killing Streets — While this sourcebook is for **Kindred of the East**, White Wolf’s game about Asian vampires, its information on the yakuza and triads complements this work nicely.

Suicide Squad — A series from DC Comics in the late 80s and early 90s. Several storylines involved organized crime (particularly the yakuza). Other good comic-book resources include *Batman*, *Daredevil* and *The X-Men*.

Film and Television

Black Rain — A film about two American police officers investigating a crime linked to the yakuza in Japan.

Bound — Independent film where a made man’s girlfriend falls for a blue-collar lesbian and the two of them cook up a scheme to rip off the mob.

The Godfather — The quintessential Mafia movie; although it’s full of stereotypes, it provides a good look at organized crime from the inside. The sequels are well worth seeing, too.

The Sopranos — An HBO television series about the average American Mafia family.

Web

<http://www.twenty4.co.uk/on-line/issue001/project02/KWC/> — a fascinating website devoted to the Kowloon Walled City — an extraordinarily disturbing place.

Second-Story Man

A native of Brooklyn, Patrick O'Reilly lost his parents to a car accident at a young age and was raised by his paternal uncle and aunt. Perhaps as a result of the emotional trauma of losing his parents, Pat grew up painfully shy, retreating into a fantasy world of comic books and sci-fi novels. Though his uncle encouraged young Pat to play outside with others his age, the boy eschewed physical activities in favor of his books, video games and the OpNet. Pat's few pathetic attempts at childhood social interaction led to savage beatings at the hands of playground bullies or humiliating laughter from members of the opposite sex.

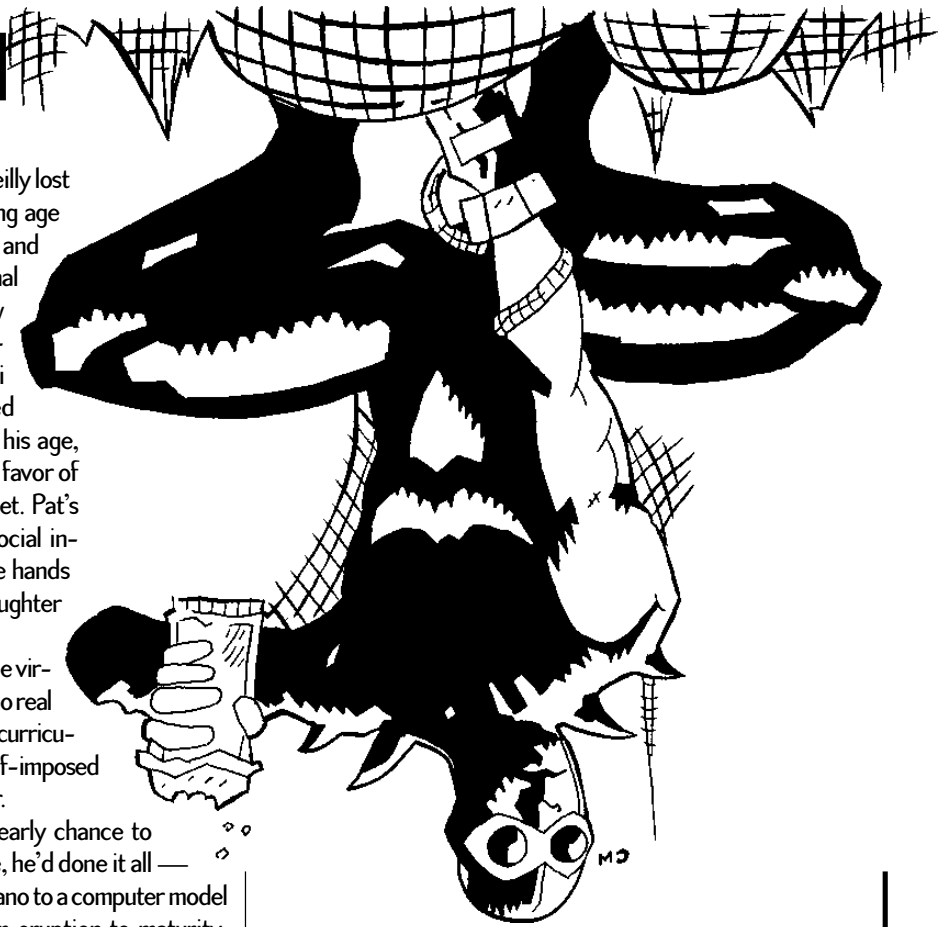
Thus, by high school, Pat had become virtual nonentity to his classmates. He had no real friends and seldom participated in extracurricular activities. A rare exception to Pat's self-imposed introversion was the annual science fair.

The boy had long enjoyed this yearly chance to stretch his stifled creativity. In his time, he'd done it all — from the ubiquitous papier-mâché volcano to a computer model of the growth of the M-R node, from eruption to maturity. The subject his sophomore year was a study of the toxicity of insect and arachnid venom in species native to the United States. The project seemed a shoo-in to win first place until classmate Tom Avery tripped Pat while the boy carried his clear-plastic vivarium to the gym for its presentation.

Most of the captive insects and arachnids were crushed in the subsequent fall. Some few escaped, flying or crawling to freedom. One in particular, a brown recluse spider, took the opportunity to revenge itself on young Pat for its captivity, biting the hapless teen on the hand.

The bite was excruciatingly painful, as was the splitting headache that followed fast on its heels. After the initial confusion caused by the myriad escaped creepy-crawlies died down, Patrick was rushed to the school nurse. An ambulance was called, and the boy spent the night in the hospital under observation.

Soon after his release, young Pat realized something had changed in him. Always a weak, uncoordinated boy, Pat was suddenly strong, fast and agile. Also, the scar from the spider bite would at times discharge a white, tacky substance. Looking at the dried material under the microscope, Pat discovered it was a form of spider silk. Putting two and two together, O'Reilly realized he had erupted. Over the next couple of weeks, a scar identical to the one on his right hand appeared on his left, also oozing the same liquid silk. Pat discovered that, by tensing certain muscles in combination, he could fire thin streams or wide tangles of the silk. The teen also grew tiny flesh-tone claws in his fingertips and toes, which he could use to cling to most surfaces.



Revealing his eruption to his uncle, Pat asked the man for advice on what to do with his quantum gifts. The man took a moment to consider the question and then said to Pat, "With great power comes great opportunity, my boy." Taking the man's advice to heart, Patrick enjoyed a brief career as an XWF jobber known as El Araño, before being offered a much more lucrative position in "acquisitions" by the C-Z Megasyndicate.

Since his eruption, Pat has gained self-confidence and a happy-go-lucky outlook on life. He's also become popular with the ladies, his nova-enhanced strength, dexterity and stamina and his other abilities lending themselves to some off-the-wall bedroom antics.

Image: Pat O'Reilly is startlingly average in appearance — brown eyes and hair, average height and no distinguishing features. His fashion tends toward Old Navy and The Gap rather than Armani or Buendia. When on a job, O'Reilly dresses in an all black unitard.

Roleplaying Hints: You are the luckiest man on earth. You spent the majority of your life being miserable and figured that you had decades of misery left before you'd finally die and be done with it. Your eruption changed everything. You've got power, you've got respect, and the money's starting to roll in now that you've hooked up with the Megasyndicate. Sure, you've had to do some morally ambiguous things (burglary and whatnot), but it isn't like you've been asked to hurt anyone or anything. Hell, you're dating a supermodel. What's not to like?

Gear: Cell phone (set to vibrate), apple fruit-pie, miniature flashlight, black clothing, night-vision goggles.

ABERRANT

Black Marketeer

Tetsuo Mitsushima was a born loser. The youngest of four boys growing up in a middle-class family in Kanagawa Prefecture, Tetsuo proved a constant disappointment to his family. His grades were mediocre, and he was prone to violent outbursts when frustrated, which proved to be much of the time. While his siblings were graduating from university and moving into lucrative management careers, Tetsuo struggled through high school, narrowly graduating. After graduation, Tetsuo's father pulled some strings to have the young man brought in at an entry-level telemarketing position at the company he worked for, Yashida, an OpNet enabled cellular service provider. If the elder Mitsushima had understood anything about Tetsuo, he would have realized that a high-stress, commission-based sales job was the last thing his easily frustrated, anger-prone son needed. Then again, it's entirely possible that Tetsuo's father did know and just didn't care.

One day, after a record 54 straight hang-ups, the young man suffered his inevitable breakdown. Tetsuo spent several minutes ranting, hurling office supplies at his co-workers and trashing his small cubicle before grasping his head in pain and, soon after, regaining his composure. Tetsuo bowed deeply, apologized for his outburst and marched directly to his father's office... where he proceeded to explain to the man how he'd completely wasted his 54 years of life on this earth and how the family would be better off without the old man. The elder Mitsushima hanged himself mere moments after Tetsuo left the man's office.

Soon after this incident, Tetsuo was approached by representatives of Kuro-Tek, which, unbeknownst to all but members of Yashida's upper management, secretly owned the company both Tetsuo and his father worked for. It seemed Kuro-Tek had taken an interest in Tetsuo's emergent nova powers and had steered police investigation away from the young man. His father's death was ultimately ruled a suicide.

Appreciative of Kuro-Tek's aid and looking for a way to capitalize on his new abilities, Tetsuo was convinced to come work for the technological giant. He has since used his matchless salesmanship to great advantage, selling forbidden tech to everyone from the Directive to the rogue nation of Nigeria. As a side project, Tetsuo's also used his abilities and influence to bring his elder siblings' careers to a screeching halt, trapping them in tedious low-level positions. Kuro-Tek is aware of this "hobby," but the

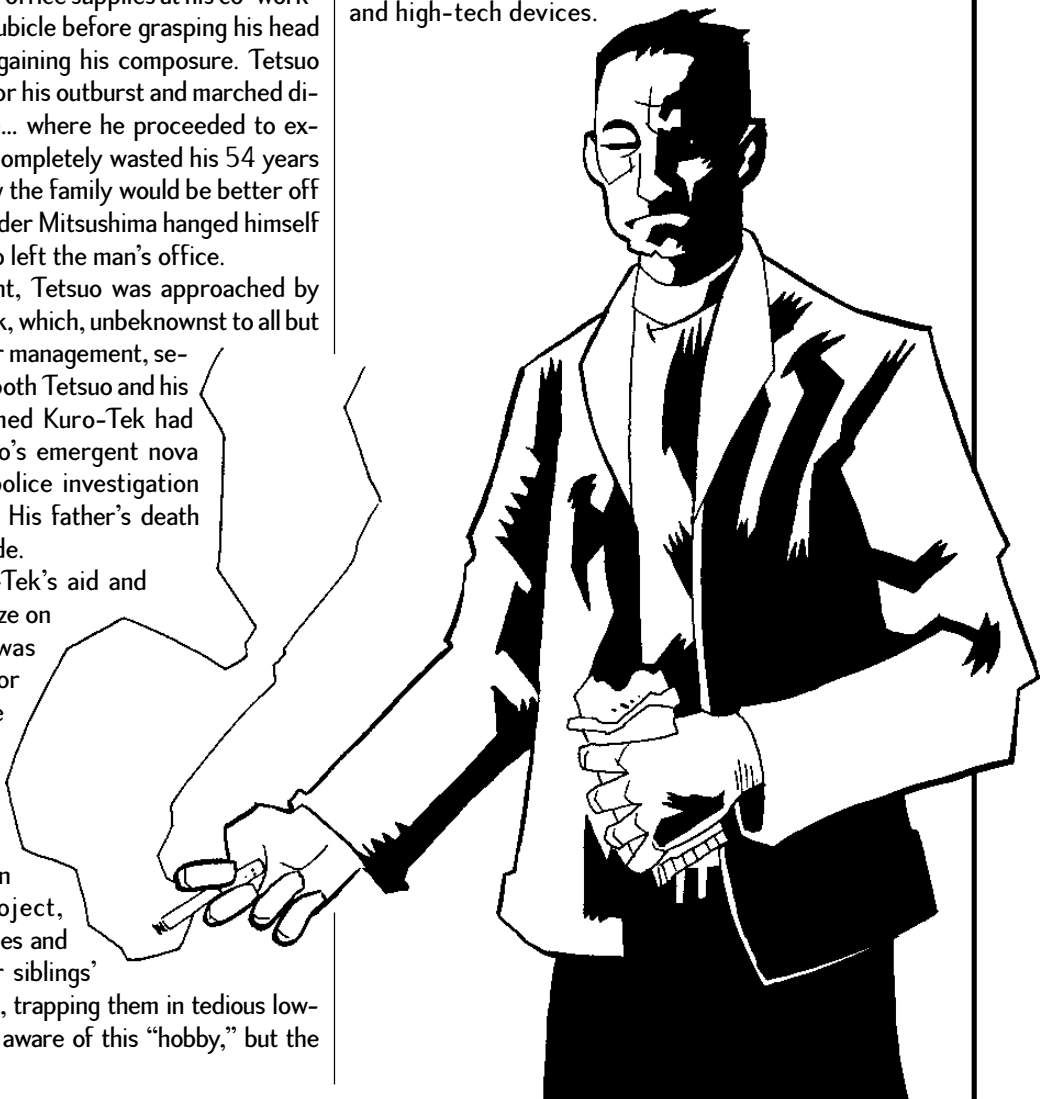
money Tetsuo brings in for the company makes his superiors more than willing to overlook his... eccentricities.

Image: Tetsuo Mitsushima dresses impeccably, usually sporting business suits created by famed fashion designers Anibal Buendia and Hiro Yamaguchi. The nova has brown eyes and black hair, with a slight build leaning toward gaunt. Though not unattractive, Tetsuo's body language tends to convey one clear message — "Do not touch."

Roleplaying Hints: You are an arrogant, self-absorbed little snot... and proud of it. You care about nothing more than gratifying your own twisted urges, which include destroying the lives of your own family members and playing cruel mind games with your underlings at Kuro-Tek.

You are also the greatest salesman who ever lived. You could sell ice to Eskimos — literally. If it weren't for your undeniable value to Kuro-Tek, you probably would have been eliminated by your superiors at the company (or their secret masters within the Nakato Gumi) long ago.

Gear: Designer eufiber business suit, cherry fruit-pie, cell phone, any number of experimental weapons and high-tech devices.



CREDITS

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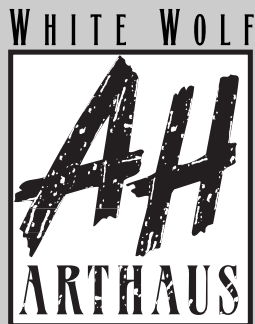
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PRINTED IN THE USA.

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