



SHADOWRUN[®]

CUTTING BLACK



PLOT SOURCEBOOK



CUTTING BLACK





CONTENTS & CREDITS

CREDITS	5	Shadow Spirits	72
SNAFU	6	Bad Vibes.....	73
DETROIT RUPTURE	10	Shedim	74
Welcome To The War Room	15	Toxic Magic.....	75
Motor City SitRep: The Bare-Bones Basics	15	Less-Major-But-Still-Bad Threats	75
Just the Facts ... So Far	16	Blood Magic.....	75
How Did We Get Here?	17	The Infected	76
Hello From The Front Lines of Hell	19	Insect Spirits	76
Opening Salvos	19	LIGHTS OUT	78
Welcome To The Resistance!	23	UCRASH	82
This Just In: Motor City Mayhem!	25	Something is Rotten in DeeCee	82
Story 001: First Day	25	President Declares State of Emergency,	
Story 002: A View From Behind Armor Plating ...	25	seeks election delay.....	82
Story 003: Road Rage!.....	26	Breaking News: Québec Invades the UCAS	84
Story 004: No Second Chances Here	26	UCAS Forces Repel Québécois Attack.....	85
Story 005: Others Hunt in the Shadows.....	27	Ottawa Liberated from Québécois Occupation...	86
Detroit Standoff	27	Colloton Agrees to Armistice with Québec.....	87
Intelligence Briefing	28	BREAKING NEWS: NAN Forces Attack	
Battle Lines Redrawn.....	29	Five UCAS States.....	87
Current Tactical SitRep.....	30	Independent Reporters Accuse	
This Just In: Battles of Detroit!	34	Senator Kittering of Collusion with Ares	87
Story 006: Small Victories	34	BREAKING: Sioux Advance Halted	
Story 007: No Good Deed Goes Unpunished	35	by UCAS Military	88
Story 008: Ares Vs. Bugs: Round Two	35	Sen. Kittering Found Dead	
Story 009: Battle at Ares Tower	36	After FBI Opens Investigation	88
Story 010: To the Victors	37	FBI Breaks “Radical Terrorist Ring” in Ottawa....	89
GHOST ARMY	38	U.N. Mobilizes Relief Force, Says	
Wherever You Go, There You Aren’t	40	“it Will Take Time” for UCAS to Receive Aid	89
BLACKOUT	46	Kentucky State Government	
Panic On the Potomac	47	Secedes from UCAS, Joins CAS.....	90
Back From the Dead	50	The Christmas Truce:	
UCAS Responses	51	JTF5 allowed to leave Seattle.....	91
UCAS Drops a Nuke (Metaphorically)	51	Seattle Declares Independence from UCAS	91
Cities Going Dark!	53	St. Louis Declares Independence from UCAS	92
Tales From the Black	56	Colloton Signs Bill to Re-affirm BRA	92
The Janitor	56	LIVE: Vice President Martin Speaks	
Nicodaemus	57	Out for Canadian Autonomy	92
JayRicky.....	58	February and Beyond	93
August	59	Corporate Court Aid Arrives in Baltimore	93
Still Frames in the Action	61	Power Restored in Philadelphia.....	94
Voices in the Darkness.....	61	Despain Elected President	94
Defende Nos in Proelio	72	Big Changes	94
Major Threats	72	Seattle	94
		St. Louis.....	97
		A Look Back East.....	102

Twilight.....	105	The Atlanta Zoo	152
DETROIT NOW	108	The Dome	153
Bloody, But Not Broken	108	Weird Stuff.....	153
Detroit Motor City: Vital Statistics	109	Ares: Corporation In Transition	154
What Once Was: Old Detroit Shadows	110	Southern Hospitality.....	154
Turning Point: War In the Streets	111	Arthur Vogel: The Boss ... For Now	155
When The Fighting Stopped.....	113	The Board of Directors	156
Standoff at Ares Tower	113	The Boss to Be?	157
Fallen Knight(s).....	114	Clayton Wilson	157
Ares to Detroit: Later, Suckers!.....	116	Daniel Truman.....	157
Fifty-One Days of Chaos.....	118	Mitsuko Shiawase-Yamana.....	157
Power Vacuum	118	Michael Bishop.....	157
Welcome To Motor City!.....	121	Karen King.....	158
A City Reborn	121	Daniel Chen	158
Everything Destroyed Is New(ish) Again	121	Carol Huntington	158
Motor City Power Players.....	124	Business Opportunities	158
Lay of The Land and Places of Interest.....	127	Ares Space	159
The Platinum Zone.....	127	General Motors	160
Motor City's New Scar	128	Ares Global Entertainment.....	160
Vendor's Row/ 8-Mile Road	130	Knight Errant Security	160
Bloomfield Biodrone Nature Reserve.....	130	Ares Consumer Products.....	161
Detroit Down Below.....	131	Info Santé	161
Dead and Gone In Motor City	131	The Eagle is Looking	161
Cannibal Labyrinth	131	AS THE DUST SETTLES	162
Earn Your Skin.....	133	Not So Blighted Blighty.....	162
When The World Came Crashing Down	134	Fall of the NDM	163
Bloody Boomtown	135	Cleaning the Tarnished.....	163
Project Pyro	137	Hope and Desolation	163
Echoes of an Alien Past	142	Enter the New Sheriff	164
Career Opportunities	143	The Dragon in the Room.....	165
Started In My Garage	143	Bug-outs and Blackouts.....	165
Renegade Tech.....	145	The Natives are Restless.....	166
Riggers' Paradise!	145	Catching Up.....	166
There's Something Happening Here	146	Trouble Grows on Trees.....	167
ATLANTA NOW	148	Off the Rails.....	168
Atlanta at a Glance.....	148	Eastward Ho!.....	169
Corps, Cops, and Crime	149	What's Next?	169
Corps.....	149	La Mort de la République.....	169
Other Corporate Players.....	150	Post-Blackout Roundup	172
Law Enforcement.....	151	GAME INFORMATION.....	176
Crime	152	Insect Spirits.....	176
Places of Interest.....	152	New Critter Power	176
Purgatory Central	152		



INTRODUCTION

In the Sixth World, civilization is a disguise, and a thin one at that. The corps have constructed the veneer of an orderly world because it helps money flow where they want it to go, but the society they built teeters, with a loose foundation and shoddy workmanship on every level. Any light push can topple the whole thing and unleash the chaos it attempts to contain.

The UCAS is about to get a giant shove.

Shadowrunners, of course, know all about chaos. It's their normal operating environment. Of all the people in the Sixth World, they're the most prepared to survive chaos when it erupts—and maybe make some cash or even do some good in the process.

Cutting Black details the events of about eight months in the UCAS, starting in July 2080 and ending in March 2081. The chapters take on an immersive style, helping players see events as they unfold while providing some of the context to help

them understand what is happening. These chapters provide all sorts of story areas where shadowrunners can be involved, with specific examples of what runners could do in each phase of the book (an upcoming campaign book, *30 Nights*, will provide more specifics, focusing on events from the **Blackout** chapter of this book). Gamemasters can pick a particular part of the events detailed here to be the focus of a campaign, or they can put players through the whole wringer, moving them from city to city and letting them experience the full breadth of crises the book presents.

The book is also a critical tool for anyone—players, gamemasters, or otherwise—who loves the Sixth World setting and wants to see how it will be changed by this latest series of events. There's a wild ride ahead, and the plots detailed here will have ramifications in the Sixth World for years. So strap in, get ready, and try to survive the *Cutting Black!*

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SNAFU

BY RJ THOMAS

SECTOR ALPHA-TANGO 12
DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UCAS
JULY 30, 2080
0341 LOCAL TIME

“Contact left, *contact left!*”
“No, contact right, *right!*”
“Oh, God, they’re everywhere!”

Corporal Dan Travis of Ares Macrotechnology’s Fifteenth Mechanized Security Company ignored the sounds and smoke of combat around him as he lined up his shot with his M-22 HMG; smartgun targeting data filled his vision. Depressing the trigger, the ultra-heavy machine gun bucked hard in his hands, as Travis drilled a wasp spirit with .50 caliber high-explosive rounds. The dead bug slammed into Travis’ APC, splattering gore against the open turret—and Travis’ face.

Cursing, Travis cleared bug guts from his goggles, but that was the least of his worries. His cybereyes identified scores of roach, ant, and other bugs types advancing toward his position along the streets or on the sides of buildings in a grotesque, chittering wave. Some bugs had already engaged Ares troops, slaughtering all they

encountered. Travis and other APC gunners replied with murderous suppression fire, reducing scores of bugs to bloody bits to protect infantry squads forward of the APC line. But for every bug dropped, six more seemed to replace them.

It didn’t take a tactical genius to realize the 15th was less than sixty seconds from being overrun.

“*Top!*” Travis bellowed into his mic as his M-22 ran dry.

“I see them. Lieutenant says stand by...” replied the ever-calm First Sergeant Tessa McAvoy from inside the APC as she took command of the APC’s forward-mounted MGs, giving Travis a chance to reload.

“Stand by? Are you fragging kidding me?! I knew that hoop-nozzle was going to get us geeked!” Travis muttered, his M-22’s barrel glowing cherry red as he quickly replaced the ammo belt. “Expect only light, sporadic enemy contact, he said ... you’ll be a reserve for the main force, he said ... my *ass!*” Travis said to himself as he pulled the M-22’s charging handle and resumed firing.

EIGHT HOURS EARLIER ...

“The operation is codenamed Latvian Gambit. Our ultimate objective here is nothing less than the complete end to the bug threat.”

Corporal Travis leaned forward in his seat, eyes on Captain Evan Dartmouth, CO of the 15th MSC. Up until



then, Travis thought this was just another stupid “readiness briefing” and had been contemplating dinner. Now any appetite he had was dead.

As Dartmouth spoke, he pointed to several AROs with an old-fashioned cavalry horseman’s riding crop and brought up relevant data. “We’ve been assigned with protecting and securing the main assault force’s left flank here,” he said, riding crop tapping an AR map of Detroit that opened up another ARO and highlighted the selected area. “Our mission is simple: secure the area and hold the line.”

Travis frowned. They were being tasked with securing a maze of office buildings adjacent to an industrial park with only infantry and “Army Master” APCs. In that kind of ultra-tight terrain, the Army Masters would have limited ability to maneuver against hostiles.

Looking to his right, Travis saw First Sergeant McAvoy scowling and tapping her tusks with her fingers. Travis would bet a month’s pay the Top Kick was thinking the same thing he was. Across the room, Travis saw his null-brained platoon leader, Lieutenant Keith Engle, sitting there nodding. The hoop-licker was hanging on Dartmouth’s every word like he was the second coming of Sun Tzu. Travis let out a breath through pursed lips.

Dartmouth droned on, talking about overlapping fields of fire, area denial, overall force superiority, and unit communication/coordination before asking if there were any questions—which, for Dartmouth, was normally a brief formality before dismissal. A company man to the core, Dartmouth was the kind of CO who didn’t

like his orders questioned. He told you exactly what you needed to know and what he wanted you to do, period. Travis leaned back and wondered why he left the CAS Armed Forces and went corporate. It was probably a dumb thing like triple pay and benefits.

But a nanosecond before Dartmouth dismissed everyone, McAvoy shocked everyone by speaking up.

“Sir, what kind of enemy resistance should we expect?” she coolly asked.

Dartmouth stood there, a look of shock flashing over his features before he turned toward McAvoy, riding crop behind his back in both hands. Engle’s eyes were now wide, his pasty face somehow becoming paler. Any other time, Travis would have wondered (again) how Engle got his command. But now, Travis and the rest of the company watched the CO and company First Sergeant stare at each other, eyes burrowing into each other before Dartmouth broke the silence.

“Operational planners indicate the main force has an eighty-nine percent chance of success. Therefore, you can expect light contact with the enemy—sporadic stragglers at most.”

Travis swallowed. The fact Dartmouth said “you” and not “we” didn’t escape him, and he also noticed that Dartmouth was subtly bending his crop behind his back.

But McAvoy wasn’t done. “What about that eleven percent, sir?”

Dartmouth’s eyes narrowed. “You’ll just have to do your job, sergeant.”

“Understood, sir. Will you be in the lead vehicle?”

Travis thought he heard something snap behind Dartmouth.

The captain set his jaw. “No, I have been ordered to coordinate with ops-command at the field HQ. Lieutenant Engle will take lead. Now, are there any *other* questions, sergeant?”

McAvoy held Dartmouth’s gaze. “No, *sir*.”

Dartmouth nodded. “Good. Because these orders come directly from the top. And we all know what that means. We roll out in six hours. Your platoon leaders will have final briefing before then. Company, dismissed!”

“I tell ya, Dan-o, I got a bad feeling about this one. My bones say we ain’t coming back.”

Travis looked down as he finished applying the last of the gun lubricant to his M-22. It had been two hours since the briefing, and he was still anxious. “Packo, you’ve said that before every mission for the last four years.”

Corporal Ernesto “Packo” Hernandez, dwarf rigger and APC driver, looked up from their A-Master’s engine compartment and pointed a ratchet at Travis. “You joke about my gift, but don’t forget my bones kept us from hitting that IED near Kilimanjaro.”

Travis rolled his eyes. “As I recall, I saw the two insurgents on road long before we got close.”

“Yeah, but you didn’t see where they planted it. If not for my knee hurting ...”

“There was fresh overturned dirt near the side of the road! Any boot could have seen that!

“But I stopped just short of where the mortar round landed!”

“So now you’re going to take credit for someone’s bad aim?”

“Yes! I mean *no*! Because if I’d gone only two meters further...”

“Oh, you’re so full of *drek*, Packo!”

“You know who else is full of *drek*, Travis?” said a low, hard voice that pierced through Travis and Packo’s conversation like an APDS round through cheap armor. Both corporals audibly closed their mouths before looking down at McAvoy, who looked ready to chew armor plating. “If you two are finished exercising your soy-holes, I’d like to make sure my A-Master is combat-worthy, hopefully before we go into combat.”

They stood there for a few moments, the silence thick between them. Travis and Packo knew McAvoy wasn’t really slotted at them. They’d been crewing together for six years and survived five combat deployments—two in the Desert Wars, one in Kenya, and two more they didn’t talk about. Situations like that force people to get to know and trust each other pretty fragging quick.

Travis finally broke the silence. “So what’s the word, Top?”

McAvoy pulled off her field cap and ran metal fingers over her bald head. “Same as always. Engle has his head so far up Dartmouth’s hoop that he’s buying into the plan without questioning a damn thing. He’s not even bothering to request any air or magic support! He won’t listen to a fragging word I say ...”

“Dartmouth and Engle, those putas are going to get us all killed. You don’t frag around with bugs, man,” Packo said, absently tapping his ratchet on the engine block.

Travis nodded. “You know anything about this ‘main force’ that we’re supporting, Top?”

McAvoy shook her head. “Nope. Even my normal channels know next to nothing about them. Scuttlebutt says they’re some sort of new elite, super-augmented, and advanced Firewatch unit. Supposedly able to go toe-to-toe, mano-a-mano with even the nastiest of bugs.”

Packo spit over the A-Master’s side. “Hope so. Because after we lost the real Fi—”

Both McAvoy and Travis shot Packo a look before he finished that sentence. No one talked about the rogue Firewatch units anymore, not even in passing, and especially not where you could be heard. As far as the corp was concerned, the original Firewatch members were traitors who no longer existed, a stain that had finally been removed. Bringing them up never ended well for whoever did so. Still, many among the rank and file didn’t quite buy the official corporate line. Firewatch were the heroes, the ones who kept the bugs and other uber-threats at bay. At least, they used to be.

“Anyway, back to business. How much longer ’til our ride is ready?”

“Just gotta tighten a few more nuts, Top. Then fill the ammo boxes. After that, we’re ready to roll.” Packo said somberly.

McAvoy nodded. “Get it done and get our gear squared, especially my special package. I have to go talk to the other crews. I’ve heard we may be saddling up sooner than planned.”

Both corporals nodded.

“Hey, Top. What do we do when Engle inevitably frags up out there?” Travis asked.

Without missing a beat, McAvoy replied, “Same thing we always do. We take out as many of theirs as we can, save as many of ours as we can, and hopefully come out the other side still breathing.” And with that, she turned and headed further into the motor pool.

Travis and Packo looked at each other for a moment before Travis held out his fist and Packo bumped it.

“Situation normal ...”

“... all fragged up.”

“This is Echo Six Romeo, we’re about to be overrun, repeat, we’re about to be overrun!”

“Travis!” McAvoy called out, her MGs now dry.

“On it!” he replied and swung his weapon to two o’ clock. Approximately seventy-five meters away, Echo Company was about to be pounced on by a line of roach spirits. With a mental command, Travis’ cybereyes zoomed in on Echo’s position. “No you fragging don’t ...” he growled and swept fire across the advancing roaches, bloody bits flying off as HMG rounds tore into bug flesh. This blunted their charge just long enough for Echo’s squaddies to finish the job with grenade and rocket fire. One of the squaddies looked back toward Travis and gave him a thumbs up—just before the ground beneath their feet gave way and insect limbs pulled them under.

Travis’ eyes went wide as the street where Echo used to be started collapsing, and the collapse began heading toward the 15th’s line.

“Top, we got underground contact, they’re tunneling under us!” Travis called into his mic as he cranked off another short burst, clipping another wasp spirit about to dive on him from a nearby building. “We need to *move!*”

And yet, nothing from Engle. Travis could see the lieu-

tenant's A-Master just sitting there, fifty meters up the road.

Even over the sounds of crumbling asphalt, weapons fire, and comm-chatter, Travis heard McAvoy inside the A-Master say, "Frag it. All units, this is Grinder Two Alpha, I'm assuming command. Repeat, I am assuming command! All units, initiate plan beta, fall back to secondary defensive positions! Echo Six, get your people on board, we are *leaving!*"

"W-what?! Grinder Two, this is Grinder Six, what are you *doing!* All units hold the line, repeat, hol—"

Without warning, the ground opened up beneath Engle's A-Master and swallowed it whole. But the nightmare didn't end there.

Travis found himself with a ring-side seat to a massacre. As the ground began to crumble, more Ares infantry were either swallowed by the collapsing streets or descended upon by rampaging bugs that tore unfortunate troops to pieces. In less than a minute, half the infantry were either hunks of inert meat or taken away to meet whatever insect-inspired Hell awaited them.

Two long minutes later, A-Masters of the 15th were in full retreat, their crew bays packed with the remnants of Echo Company. Travis and the other top-gunners blasted away until their barrels became white hot and warped or ran out of ammo, whichever came first. With no ammo left, Travis sealed the turret in favor of protection within the A-Master. As Packo in his rigger cocoon redlined the APC's engine, Travis strapped into the spare seat next to McAvoy. The two watched the master tactical display as more of the 15th's vehicles fell. One dropped through another bug sinkhole; two more were swarmed.

The A-Master slammed into something, and Travis looked out the window. On both sides of the street, the sides of buildings were collapsing, cutting off avenues of escape. "They're corralling us." Travis muttered to himself. He looked to the rear compartment. The Echo Company troopers looked grim, most of them trembling with fear. As Packo took a corner and slammed a delivery truck out of the way, the sound of metal-on-metal became deafening inside of the APC; the smell of an engine burning out permeated the cabin.

Travis and McAvoy exchanged glances before she reached under her seat and pulled out a satchel charge. They both knew it wouldn't save them, but it would keep them from being taken, and take as many bugs as they could with them.

But before McAvoy could arm the charges, the world gave way underneath them. Travis felt his head slam against the APC's bulkhead at least three times, knocking his cybereyes offline. Inside the cabin there were cries of panic and the sounds of chattering.

Travis tried to form words, but they died in his throat. He felt wetness in his mouth. Gunshots rang out, deafening him. For what seemed like an eternity, he hung against his harness. The world became chaotic mix of blurred images as his eyes slowly rebooted. His ears rang with blood and fear. But then, despite the ringing, Travis thought he heard something different, something change, as if the timbre of the weapons fire had changed. He reached up and disengaged his straps, falling to the APC's floor, which was actually its side.

The infantry compartment was empty, the doors wide open. Frag. Travis looked over and saw McAvoy, her helmet down over her face. Desperately he tried to crawl to her, but his body refused to cooperate. Reaching out with

his left hand, Travis was about ten centimeters from McAvoy before he felt something grab his legs and pull him out of the APC. Panicked, he tried to draw his sidearm, but his hand was seized by someone in heavy mil-spec armor. Travis blinked in amazement as he looked into the faceplate of a Firewatch trooper, but there was something different about the armor, it was an ... older model?

"It's all right, trooper, we got you," Travis' rescuer said. As he was being hauled out of the APC and into some kind of sub-basement, Travis saw several more Firewatch operators, magicians, and heavy combat drones laying into the bug horde with heavy weapons and combat magic, bug guts and gore flying everywhere. He remembered McAvoy and tried to speak, but darkness chose that moment to claim him.

Travis woke with a start and bolted into a sitting position, only to fall down again due to intense vertigo. After a few breaths, he realized was on a cot and felt bandages over his head and neck. Slowly he opened his eyes and turned his head. In the rows of beds around him were other Ares troopers in various levels of injury and care. A human female magician was performing a healing spell on a trooper missing an arm. A few minutes later, she stopped, took a few deep breaths, and looked at Travis.

"Ah, you're awake. Only took you four days. That's not surprising, considering your injuries."

Travis blinked in surprise. "Four *days*," he croaked, throat on fire. Water would be good before speaking again. The magician handed Travis a plastic bottle.

"My name is Doctor Abigale Bronn, former chief of medicine at ... doesn't matter. I'm a street doc now, serving a different clientele."

"Mc ... Avoy, Her ... nandez?" Travis croaked between gulps of water.

Bronn's face became that neutral-somber look all doctors had when giving bad news. "I'm sorry. I was told you and some infantry troops were the only ones from your APC to survive."

Travis laid his head back, tears forming in the corners of his eyes, voice cracking as he asked, "What ... happened?"

"I'll tell you."

That was someone new. Travis looked toward the source of the strong voice, and his eyes went wide. Standing in the doorway in full combat fatigues adorned with magical implements was none other than Colonel Anne Ravenheart, the leader of the traitors, the "renegade" Firewatch faction.

"Damien Knight is what happened," she said, striding into the makeshift ER and addressing Travis. "He thought he'd end the bugs once and for all, be a big damn hero. His arrogance cost too many good lives. Now, we're risking a bug breakout of apocalyptic proportions, and we need people to fight back. We've already got some allies, but I need more, especially people like you who can fight and help me rally the Ares remnants and hold the line. What do you say, corporal?"

Travis sat up. "No."

Ravenheart arched an eyebrow. "No?"

"Not ... holding any damn line. We kill ... them all. Nothing less."

Ravenheart smiled and extended her hand, which Travis eagerly took.



DETROIT RUPTURE

“Hey sugar-tusks, what say we head inta’ da back and you give me and my chumma’ here a ... private dance, eh? Waddya say?”

Marv stopped mid-gulp from his beer mug and peered over the rim.

The audio enhancements and select sound filters in his cyberears easily cut through the strip-club’s pulsating bass and alerted him to the inappropriate proposal. A heartbeat later, custom eyeware filters removed the stage lights’ strobe-effects and gave him a clear view of the room.

Six meters and change at his two o’ clock, Marv saw a customer, an ork with chrome-plated tusks, getting grabby with one of the waitresses, an ork girl named Sally. When Chrome-Tusk wasn’t pinching Sally’s backside, he kept pulling her back as she attempted to walk away and not spill the bottles and mugs on her serving tray. Making matters worse, drek-head’s buddy, a human with spikes on his head trying (and failing) to be a mohawk, kept

putting his leg out to block her path, laughing the entire time.

Growling under his breath, Marv downed the rest of his beer. Then, in a smooth motion that belayed his troll size (and age), he rose up from his seat just enough to get a proper angle ... and whipped his mug across the room. The heavy glass projectile ricocheted off the side of Spike-Boy’s head before slamming square into Chrome-Tusk’s mouth, sending both of said tusks flying. Before either of them could react, two troll-bouncers swooped in and removed them both from their seats. Spike-Boy initially tried to resist, but it’s hard to do anything when a troll with muscle-augmentations palms your face. Chrome-Tusks (now minus tusks) did nothing but dribble blood as the other bouncer literally dragged him out. And as it all went down, the music never stopped and the dancers on stage kept gyrating.

Just another night at Platinum Trollgirls.

Sally stood there for a few moments and looked back at Marv. She smiled a bit before mouthing “thanks, boss” and hurrying back toward the kitchen. Marv nodded before he sat/fell back into his seat, a bit harder than he intended. The small hand-painted sign hanging above that proclaimed “Marv’s Seat” bounced a bit as his mass settled. Marv grimaced at the pain in his lower back and now his right shoulder. But he sat there stone-faced and resisted the urge to massage either. He had a rep to maintain, or he was just that stubborn. Probably both.

“Nice shot there, boss-trog.”

Marv side-glanced to his right as Wendy (a.k.a. Windy Storms) pulled up a chair, reversed it, and sat beside him at the table. A fellow troll and former dancer/street samurai, Wendy had taken over as manager a couple years back.

Marv just grunted. “That was one of my favorite mugs.”

Wendy chuckled. “As I recall, you have several ‘favorite mugs.’”

Marv shrugged, and even that hurt a bit. “That one was my most favorite.”

Wendy rolled her eyes and shook her head playfully. “Boss, your only favorite mug is a full one.”

A few moments later, Sally deposited a frosty mug and a quadruple shot of bourbon for Wendy on the table before moving on to nicer customers. For a couple of minutes Marv and Wendy simply stared at the mostly empty tables and chairs in the room. It may have been just another night at Platinum, but lately business had sucked dragon-hoop. Ever since the Ares soldier-boys and gals arrived en-masse in the Detroit sprawl for the so-called “forces upgrade program” announced months ago, business had steadily declined. Officially, most Ares employees were forbidden to patronize Platinum—something about the place not exactly fitting Detroit’s “corporate image” or some such drek. That didn’t always stop them, mind you.

But having what amounted to an entire regiment (or more) of corporate soldiers occupying the sprawl was enough to not only keep the more adventurous wageslaves away but also make the club’s regulars nervous about venturing out. Couple of weeks ago, a shadowrunner chum of Marv’s told him that she couldn’t spit in Detroit anymore without hitting an Ares trooper or a Knight Errant flatfoot. Now, only the dregs and desperate were daring to venture out. Or worse, the corporate-backed types who thought they had free rein.

Still, Marv knew there was more to it than a simple upgrade program. He might be ancient for a troll with a body kept together by ’ware and sheer stubbornness,

but his mind was still as sharp as it ever was (take that for what you will). Despite being a strip club owner and (mostly) retired shadowrunner, Marv still had his huge foot in the shadow-biz with a few decent contacts and allies, like Wendy—and a few others.

Ever since the first troops arrived, rumors had been flying fast about what Ares was really up to. Things intensified when Ares started sectioning off entire areas of the sprawl and creating No-Go Zones. Everywhere in the city, people were on edge, as if they could literally feel the tension and pressure in the air. And with pressure, at some point, it would continue to build until something, or someone, popped.

Marv knew that for now, watching and waiting was all he could do.

Or ... he could just forget the world existed for a few minutes and enjoy the large, frosty mug in front of him. Marv grabbed his beer and raised it toward Wendy, who raised her own oversized shot-glass in return. But as they clanked their glasses together, several dull explosions were heard, pushing through the club’s pulsating bass. Both trolls stopped and listened intently as several more explosions sounded. Wendy signaled the DJ to kill the music and raise the lights. Now the explosions could be clearly heard accompanied by several alarms going off.

Patrons began scrambling for the exits while employees ran backstage or into the basement. Marv was already in motion, bounding up the back stairwell heading toward the roof, ignoring the increasing pain in his knees as he took several stairs at once. Out of habit, he reached into his vest and quick drew a massive, custom heavy pistol. Affectionately called the “Troll Cannon,” he had it ready as he opened the roof door. Explosions and steady gunfire in the distance could be heard, along with multiple aircraft and drones overhead.

The sounds of battle were coming from the north and were at least five kilometers away. Stepping out onto the roof, Marv felt Wendy and several bouncers—each one armed with a rifle—come up next to him. He stood there, watching the flashes and listening to the thunder in the distance. Someone had started a shooting war on the streets of Detroit.

Marv reached down and pulled out his commink, but all he got was a “No Matrix Signal” indicator, same as Wendy and the others. Letting out a long breath through his nose, he muttered “Guess it’s time” before turning to Wendy. “Get the civvies accounted for and into the shelters. Then get the block locked down and open the vaults. Then fire up the shortwave radio and set the frequency to preset ‘Bravo.’ It’s go-time.”

<<<ATTENTION: INCOMING ENCRYPTED AUDIO MESSAGE FROM INACTIVE USER>>>

****Security Scan: Complete/No Threats Detected****
 ****Decryption: Complete****

To: Admin JP-01
From: Account User JP-0354
Subject: Keep eyes on Detroit
Sent: 07-29-80/0734:01 Zulu

<<<BEGIN MESSAGE>>>

Hoi Glitch. I don't have time to get into any kind of teary reunion or "how ya been?" drek, I've got people watching me. Since my sending you those audio files a few months back, I've been forced to go deeper into the shadows than I've ever been in order to keep tracking my prey. And I've gotten so close, but I've also seen what Ares is really doing in Detroit. Call it a moment of clarity, or sanity, but I've seen the bigger picture, and I know it's not just about my target, not anymore. Oh, sure, he'll still die, but I've waited this long, so what's a bit longer? Things are already in motion in Detroit, and I don't think they can be stopped, but maybe they can be survived. So all I can tell you is: Be ready.

- Sticks

<<<END MESSAGE>>>

///SECURE CHAT ROOM #61-51-88/4,
 VPN: JACKPOINT, 07-30-80/0414:34 ZULU
 ...PASSWORD ACCEPTED/ACCESS GRANTED...///

CURRENT USERS:
 GLITCH <ADMIN>
 ORBITAL DK <AUTHORIZED USER>
 POLARIS <GUEST/USER>

- > How long until your birds are in position, DK?
- > Glitch
- > Not long. Polaris?
- > Orbital DK
- > First satellite, designated Alpha, will be over target area in exactly ten minutes, twenty-five seconds. I will notify when Beta, Gamma, and Delta are within five minutes of observation position.
- > Polaris
- > Good. But frag it all, I should have been paying more attention **before** I got that message.
- > Glitch
- > Paying **more** attention? We've been monitoring this ever since Sticks started paydata on Ares' shenanigans. What else can we do? We're runners, not an intelligence agency and definitely NOT cops. We react, to see if it will affect us or our biz, that's it! Sometimes all we can do is survive.
- > Orbital DK

- > Funny, Sticks said something similar. And I thought the same thing right before Crash 2.0, and look at what that cost me. I'm just tired of being blindsided.
- > Glitch
- > Fair. But right now, we're doing everything we can do.
- > Orbital DK

...BULL <ADMIN> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > I was just about to dive into a forty-one-year-old bottle of single malt scotch when this insanity started. Someone is gonna pay for that.
- > Bull
- > Anything new?
- > Glitch
- > Diddy and squat. The few contacts I had within Detroit went dark same time the city's Matrix grid did; funny, that. Anyway, I've made the usual inquiries, but so has everyone else. Now that word is spreading, everyone's clamoring for information. And even more interesting is that there's still nothing official from the city government, DeeCee, or even Ares. Speaking of, have you heard from Fred? I've pinged the dip-frag six times already and got nothing.
- > Bull
- > Not since I sent the messages to the other data havens. But I'm not worried about him right now.
- > Glitch
- > So what's our play, then?
- > Bull
- > Polaris and I have accessed some weather-sats about to pass over the Great Lakes. We're going to re-direct their cameras and sensors, get a good look at what's going on in Mo-Town. Depending on what we see, we go from there.
- > Orbital DK
- > How long?
- > Bull
- > Satellite Alpha will enter optimum observation range in seven minutes, sixteen seconds.
- > Polaris
- > Until then, we wait to see who else shows for this party.
- > Glitch

...CAP'N KLUDGE <USER/GUEST>
 HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

...PERI <USER/GUEST> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

...EARTHER <USER/GUEST> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

...OPERATOR BASTARD <USER/GUEST>
 HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > Sorry for taking so long, Kludge and I are the only ones from Denver who can respond ATM. Long story for another time.
- > Peri
- > Ditto for me and Bastard from Frozen Shadows, minus the Denver thing. We have confirmation on **anything** yet?
- > Earther
- > Yeah, my in-boxes and messengers are filling with inquiries and data requests.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Okay, we're not going to wait for Slamm-0!. Approximately two hours ago, the regional Matrix grid that services the Detroit sprawl and much of the surrounding area went dark, as in complete lights-out; no Matrix traffic in or out. No one's been able to confirm if it's an attack, catastrophic failure, or something else. But DK and Polaris are working to establish an image-link from some co-opted weather sats as they pass over. And while I can't confirm, I think all this is related to the current movements of Ares' military forces. Over the past several months, Ares has moved most of said forces into and around Detroit. The official PR line is that it's part of some massive "forces upgrade program," but that's likely drek. But the fact that this blackout is happening could be the indication of major development, or the beginnings of a new crisis.
- > Glitch
- > Playing devil's advocate here, but isn't it early to pull that trigger?
- > Cap'n Kludge
- > Chicago, Renraku Archology, Crash 2.0, Jormungand, The New Revolution, Aztlan and Amazonia, CFD, Boston, and then Chicago again; need I go on? We don't know what, but something **is** happening. We need to get out in front of this. Additionally, I got a message from Sticks three hours before the grids went down, trying to warn us.
- > Glitch
- > Wait, the same Sticks that ghosted months back? The one who's become unhinged, per your own JackPoint files? And you **trust** this message? How do we know it wasn't some kind of trap or counter-op?
- > Operator Bastard
- > It may be bait, but that's part of biz. We still can't ignore the message or what's happening.
- > Glitch
- > Agreed with both of you. We need to proceed, but with caution (obviously). Side note, though—ever since the bombing and Knight taking full control of Ares, KE and the corp military have been cracking down on any and all criminal activity in Detroit. Biz there has slowed to a trickle—unless you've got an Ares Johnson, that is.
- > Earther
- > Still, there was a noticeable uptick in job postings and fixer requests for shadow talent in the past few weeks in Detroit. I'm starting to wonder how many of those jobs were prep work for whatever's going on.
- > Cap'n Kludge
- > **Attention:** Satellite Alpha will be in position in thirty-two seconds. I have secured an image link, but I have also detected other Matrix users in Alpha's vicinity. I do not know of their intentions, but I recommend defensive posture.
- > Polaris
- > I got it. Firewalls and defenses are active.
- > Bull
- > I have linked with Alpha; standby for incoming data.
- > Polaris
- <<<SECURE CONNECTION/ALPHA ESTABLISHED. IMAGE FEED ACTIVE/ DATA DOWNLOAD COMMENCING>>>
- > Holy Mother ...
- > Earther
- > Is that tracer fire? What in Ghost's name is happening down there?
- > Peri
- > Something big just exploded in Pontiac. And is something wrong with the imagers? Some of the feed looks fuzzy.
- > Operator Bastard
- > On it, I have some custom imaging software from a run a few ... never mind. Give me a few seconds ...
- > Cap'n Kludge
- <<<OPENING IMAGE FILES. CKLUDGE367 #01-15>>>
- > No ...
- > Bull
- > Oh, frag me sideways, those are airborne bug spirits. I'm IDing multiple bug types, including wasps, mosquitos, and several unknowns.
- > Cap'n Kludge
- > No ... nonononono ...
- > Bull
- > Bull?
- > Peri
- > **Warning:** I am detecting a weapons lock on Satellite Alpha; initiating data dump now.
- > Polaris

- > What?! NO! FRAG, GET OUT OF THERE!!!
- > Orbital DK

- > Where's the attack coming from?
- > Operator Bastard

- > There, back up six seconds from current image feed that's ... what is that?
- > Earther

- > That's a Space Rescue Service vessel; the **Reliance** I think.
- > Glitch

- > Why is an SRS ship targeting weather sats?
- > Operator Bastard

<<<SECURE CONNECTION/
IMAGE FEED: TERMINATED>>>

- > Polaris?
- > Orbital DK

- > **Polaris?!**
- > Orbital DK

- > Still here, although I do not enjoy the sensation of dumpshock. I was successful with obtaining an additional 1.3 mp of data. I will download it to the shared server. I have also lost contact with all other satellites.
- > Polaris

...SLAMM-O! <ADMIN> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > Sorry for being tardy to the party, but Glitch and Bull pinged me while I was raining missile **hell** on some newbs in **Mechanized Warrior: 3150**.
- > Slamm-O!

- > Nice that you've got your priorities in order.
- > Operator Bastard

- > First, frag off. Second, I got a hot tip on Detroit. So frag off again.
- > Slamm-O!

- > Oh, you arrogant little—
- > Operator Bastard

- > Can we at least **pretend** to be professionals here?
- > Orbital DK

- > Agreed. What do you have, Slamm-O!?
- > Glitch

- > A message from our decker chum Electric Blue, piggybacked and hidden among some Ares military chatter and re-routed to one of my game server accounts. According to the message,

Ares corporate military troops have engaged targets all across Detroit, and KE has declared martial law. He's going to try and get more data out, or as he put it, "keep a door open for me."

- > Slamm-O!

- > Damn, I'm actually impressed. How does he know all this?
- > Earther

- > Blue may be a hyperactive, sometimes annoying little drek, but he's a Detroit local with some serious connections.
- > Slamm-O!

- > Fine, you're not completely worthless. So what now?
- > Operator Bastard

- > I'll tell you what **I'm** going to do. I'm doing whatever I can to help. Drek is already hitting the fan, and it's going to splatter in all directions. It's also going to be a mad rush for data, and you can bet that Ares or the UCAS is going to do everything in their power to shut people like us down. I'm going to do everything I can to prevent that, to prevent another Chicago. Rest of you can help or get out of my way.

- > Bull

- > Throttle back there, Bull. We're behind the curve, but not for long. First, we need to start collecting and organizing paydata. Then, we each have to decide how much we're going to get into this. But I'm with Bull on this, and JackPoint is going to assist.
- > Glitch

- > Frag it, Asgard is in.
- > Orbital DK

- > Ditto Frozen Shadows. Detroit is a bit too close to our backyard for my comfort.
- > Earther

- > Nexus is in, although our situation in Denver is precarious, to say the least. We'll do what we can, just don't lean too heavily on us.
- > Peri

- > Fair enough. Okay, we're going to need a place to catalogue and distribute whatever data we get on a system that can handle the data, but also the Matrix traffic. I'll make the space, Bull will make sure data flows properly. Then, we see where the drek lands—hopefully not on us. Objections? Or better ideas?
- > Glitch

- > Are there any other sats in the area we can gain access to? We're going to need eyes on Detroit.
- > Peri

- > There may be one, but ...
- > Orbital DK

- > I object, we cannot ask him to jeopardize his existence on such a hazardous endeavor.
- > Polaris

- > Polaris, I understand, but we need Benny's help. We'll make sure he knows the risks when we ask him.
- > Orbital DK
- > I still do not like this idea, but I will ask.
- > Polaris

...POLARIS HAS LEFT THE CHATROOM

- > Okay. Do we want to know what that was about?
- > Earther
- > No, I'm already bordering on breaking a promise. But if this works, we'll have eyes in orbit again.
- > Orbital DK
- > All right, then! This is a great plan; I'm excited to be a part of it! I'll get to re-arranging!
- > Slamm-0!
- > We've got work to do.
- > Bull

<<<CHAT ROOM CLOSED>>>



WELCOME TO THE WAR ROOM

///REQUESTING ACCESS: SECURE NODE 78-22-54/4(A) 'WAR ROOM'/FLASHPOINT: DETROIT///

...USER NAME/PASSWORD ACCEPTED /ACCESS GRANTED...

///DATE/TIME: 07-31-80/1138:34 ZULU///

MESSAGE FROM THE ADMINS <STICKY>

If you're reading this, you've been vetted and/or have information pertinent to the ongoing insanity currently happening in Detroit. This node represents a joint effort primarily between JackPoint, Asgard, Nexus, Frozen Shadows, and several smaller VPNs/data havens, affiliates, or individuals. Our purpose here is to act as a clearinghouse of paydata, collecting and organizing it to the best of our ability. But as we've seen, the situation in Detroit is fluid and ever-evolving. We're doing our best to give up-to-date and accurate data, but sometimes that's impossible. Paydata that's less than an hour old can quickly become obsolete as new info comes in. We'll be going a bit old-school here and adding some date/time stamps in Zulu time (a.k.a. GMT) to all data postings (excluding comments, because you fraggers are chatty) in order keep things relevant and help new users keep track of data as it comes in.

We're also working to get rid of obviously false or junk data. But that process takes time, and sometimes we can't verify every bit of info; especially in the comments. Keep that in mind when operating off of anything you see here. We are not responsible for anyone's lack of due diligence or legwork. Also, as the situation develops, we may add additional sections or move files around as necessary.

Finally, we're allowing biz to be conducted here; all normal rules and protocols still apply. However, users given access to the War Room who are discovered to be a security risk will have their access immediately revoked and all pertinent passwords and codes locked. Those deliberately planting false data, planting any kind of malignant codes/programs, using the room to target specific users/groups, generally acting in bad faith, or actively working against us—you will be blacklisted, and appropriate action will be taken with extreme prejudice. Want to know what that is? Try us.

MOTOR CITY SITREP: THE BARE-BONES BASICS

POSTED BY: BULL <UPLOADED 07-31-80/2151:33>

All right people, listen up: here's a quick summary on some of the things we've been able to confirm so far from a trusted source on the ground

in Motown, key word there being *confirm*. We've got plenty of chatter for conjecture and speculation. And of course, there're private chats and the comment sections, so go argue among yourselves or post your two-yen there.

JUST THE FACTS ? SO FAR

On July 30 at approximately midnight, the regional Matrix grids servicing the Detroit Sprawl and the surrounding areas went completely offline. The how and why are still unknown, but neither Ares nor the UCAS government (local or federal) have said a damn thing about it. In fact, DeeCee seems oblivious to the situation.

At the same time as the Matrix blackout (for lack of a better term) began, Ares Corporate Military Forces (ACMF) began engaging in military actions throughout the Detroit Sprawl. Images obtained from weather satellites—before they were destroyed—confirmed the ACMF was in direct confrontation with what appeared to be large numbers of insect spirits, most likely a hive.

Yeah, that's not a typo.

Knight Errant Security officers and ACMF reserve forces have also enacted martial law throughout Detroit and have sectioned off key areas. All air traffic has been (and continues to be) suspended and/or diverted, while security checkpoints have been erected on all main roads and highways, with drones supplementing the boots on the ground. *Some* ground traffic is being permitted in, but barely anything or anyone is being let out. For all intents and purposes, the Motor City has been locked down; but not as tight as one may expect.

And if this sounds familiar to anyone reading this, you're not alone. And even if it isn't and you're still not worried, then you aren't paying enough attention.

- > It still surprises me is how little news this is generating. To the general public, this is coming across as nothing more than a simple power outage. There's next to nothing about fighting in the streets, let alone bugs.
- > John Q
- > You honestly think DeeCee is gonna let anyone use the "B" word, let alone actually inform people of a bug war? Because mass panic and chaos are **exactly** what they need at this point.
- > X-Prime
- > Are we even sure DeeCee is in on this?
- > Pistons
- > Maybe, maybe not. Ares may be using pages from the '55 Chicago playbook, but they've updated it. One of the biggest issues they had back then was the amount of data getting out, especially stuff from people like us. It looks like one of Ares' key objectives this time around is to control the flow of information



to their advantage. Of course, we all know what happens when those in the shadow community are told we can't do something ...

- > Data Bandit

ROAD TRIP

◀POSTED: 08-01-80/0930:01▶

Multiple Mr. Johnsons are seeking qualified individuals for travel to Detroit, UCAS, to provide up-to-date information on current events. Interested parties can be of any background but must be able and willing to undertake possible long-term work under uncomfortable conditions. Those with survival, infiltration, communication, or a combination of any said skills will receive special consideration. Some essential gear will be supplied, but those able to provide their own will receive greater consideration. Timing is critical; this offer is only open for twenty-four hours after initial posting. For details and/or possible interview contact: LTG# NA/UCAS/CLE 614 (48-4867-9018)

- > If anyone's looking for a ride, send me a message. Have t-bird, will travel!
- > Osprey
- > Good luck with that—Ares' soldiers aren't fragging around. A courier associate of mine tried to slip into Detroit via the river and got deep-sixed. I tried to slip a few drones in to get some battle footage. Two out of the three never made it past the I-75 checkpoint three kilometers from the city limits. They're shooting first and **maybe** asking questions.
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > Ares SOP.
- > Scattershot
- > Ares is also deploying powerful area jammers in strategic locations along the sprawl's borders. It's not total coverage, but it's funneling any infiltrating drones into specific travel corridors, making it easier to intercept and destroy them. It's not perfect, but the overlapping security has been more effective than I want to give Ares credit for.
- > Clockwork
- > So here's a question: What about all of Detroit's runners? No way **all** of them were taken out of action. Some working for Ares; okay, sure. Some of them geeked; yeah, that I buy. But not all of them are going to sit on the sidelines, especially if there is a way to make some cred no matter what side they're on.
- > X-Prime
- > Correct. Details are sketchy, but there're reports of runner activity. Exactly what, we still don't know, as we're still trying to get reliable lines of communication active.
- > Orbital DK

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Okay, a wise person (or fortune cookie, I don't remember) once said to understand the present, one must know the past. In this case, we may be able to glean some data by looking at some of the significant events of the past few months, even years. Some of you may have already seen this data, specifically from JackPoint's *Cutting Aces* and *Dark Terrors* files, but others new or just joining us might not. So here are some critical high points.

- > And full disclosure, because some have raised concerns privately: Those files I mentioned were compiled by Sticks, the bounty hunter who used to be one of Ares' go-to shadow assets. I know his rep with many people here is questionable at best, but so far, he's been on-target.
- > Bull

Most of this goes back all the way to 2055, during the whole Bug City event in Chicago. Specifically, there was this uber-bad member of the Universal Brotherhood Chicago Chapter named "Brother" Otto Hendricks. Seems he's a powerful bug shaman of (still) unknown type that was a bit of an expert with bug merges. Everyone thought he'd been caught and executed by the UCAS in 2058, but in fact been he'd been rescued by none other than Damien Knight. In return, Hendricks (now known as Otto Stevens, Senior VP of Special Projects) has been assisting Knight for the past couple of decades on something called Project: Pyro. Along with its sister project, Avalon, Pyro was supposed to allow Ares to "end the bug threat once and for all." How Knight got Hendricks into such an arrangement is unknown, and to be honest it's baffling. But who knows how megacorp CEOs or bug shamans think.

- > The promise of power combined with the illusion of control clouds the perception of reality.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > Hendricks/Stevens also raised holy hell down here in DeeCee not long ago. He got the Black Lodge, some local shedim, and local bug hives going against each other. A whole lot of political movers and shakers ended up being targeted or caught in the crossfire. Not quite sure what it was all about, but the politics are **still** in full damage-control mode.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > That may explain a lot.
- > Sunshine
- > Hendricks was coordinating with one of his top people in DeeCee, Derrick Stokes, helping recruit or just outright kidnap new "volunteers" to help bolster his test subject numbers under an operation called **Gentleman Caller**. Thankfully the FBI found

out about it and now Stokes is number five on the Most Wanted list. Bounty also currently stands at 30K.

- › Agent X
- › Aren't you supposed to be dead?
- › Kay St. Irregular
- › I got better.
- › Agent X

Reports of Ares bug experiments leaked as early as 2062, but it wasn't until 2074 when Roger Soaring Owl, Damien Knight's right-hand-man, abruptly resigned from Ares amid rumors of a "falling out" with Knight. At about the same time, additional rumors circulated within the shadows about Ares becoming "infested," with corp employees at all levels being merged.

Additional rumors also began to circulate about a potential schism forming within the ranks of Firewatch (Ares' version of Delta Force, SEAL Team Six, or Spetsnaz, specializing in anti-bug ops, for all you newbies). Apparently, some weren't kosher with the direction Knight was taking with regards to the bug threat *and* the experimental projects being conducted. Even staunch Knight/Ares/"Kill All Bugs *now*" supporter and Firewatch hero of Chicago, Colonel Anne Ravenheart of Ares' Special Investigations Division of Knight Errant Security started to question some of the corporation's official lines and practices. Eventually, things came to a head in 2079 when for unknown reasons, members of Firewatch began coming down with a severe case of dead, supposedly on orders from Knight. Over the next few months, bounty hunters, professional assassins, and shadowrunners were let loose on certain Firewatch members now branded as "renegades, rogues, and traitors." Those lucky enough to survive went deep into the shadows, but still their numbers dropped.

At about the same time, Ares began what they called an "upgrade program" for all of their corporate military forces. Approximately eighty percent of the ACMF was re-deployed to the Detroit sprawl to implement said upgrade. Detroit was already a Bastion of Corporate Benevolence, but

with the scores of corporate troops there, the city looked like a military occupation. Then the ACMF, backed by Knight Errant Security, cordoned off six sections of the sprawl for what they called "staging areas" but what the locals called "No-Go Zones."

Questions and protests were initially raised as people and businesses were pushed out. But once Ares started handing out payoffs and ACMF troops started pumping stupid amounts of their pay into the still-open local businesses, the locals and the local government shut the frag up. To no one's surprise, these No-Go Zones are the same locations where the ACMF kicked off their operations.

- › So wait, Detroit still has a local government? I thought Ares was in charge?
- › Treadle
- › Because Ares owns most of the real estate and thanks to the wonders of extraterritoriality afforded by the Business Recognition Accords, this means that Ares technically controls most of the city because it's private property. But those few areas of the sprawl not owned by Ares are still governed by a duly-elected local government. But ever since Ares moved in, the Detroit Mayor's Office has been more than happy to be a rubber stamp. Because of this corporate/political symbiosis, it's easy to be confused.
- › Legal Eagle
- › Still doesn't explain how KE, not the local or UCAS government, declared martial law, but the corps never really cared about things such as habeas corpus or due process when it goes against their interests anyway.
- › Old Crow
- › Under their contract, KE has the right to declare martial law in case of emergencies for up to forty-eight hours. The mayor can then choose to either end or extend that status. But like I said: rubber stamp.
- › Legal Eagle

Three days into the upgrade, there was an explosion at the Ares HQ tower in Downtown. The blast killed scores of Ares employees and eliminated the board of directors, save for one Damien Knight, who assumed complete control under emergency corporate bylaws and provisions. Amid the investigation (and as Knight personally vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice), the ACMF upgrade continued. Months went by, and Detroit found itself with a new normal. Then things went black, and as of this posting, we find ourselves in the current situation with the fighting still ramping up.

- › Thing to note: Board member Arthur Vogel called the emergency meeting the same day of the bombing. Before calling that meeting, he'd been seen meeting with a shadowrunner and

DETROIT, MICHIGAN, SPRAWL 'NO-GO ZONES': CURRENT LOCATIONS AS OF 08-02-80

- Zone One:** Detroit, Highland Park Area
- Zone Two:** Detroit, Martin Park/University District 2
- Zone Three:** Pontiac, Northwest Area, along US 24
- Zone Four:** Dearborn, Miller Rd/Southern Ave
- Zone Five:** Grosse Pointe, South Area along Lake St. Claire
- Zone Six:** Zug Island

former CATCo intelligence agent from Seattle named Rex Simmons. What Simmons was doing in Detroit is unknown. But given how Simmons and his former(?) Seraphim compatriots from the defunct Cross Applied Technologies have been very active lately, the timing is a bit interesting.

- > Fianchetto
- > Something not covered in the Detroit newsfeeds: Several mid to high-level Ares managers turned up dead **before** the bombing, eleven in total. According to KE reports, four were classified as suicides, three victims of “random street crime,” one ODED on BTLs, and the rest of “natural causes.” I’m still working on the details, but the blackout has cut me off from my partner in Windsor. But each one of them had a connection to Otto Hendricks in some way.
- > Det. Gumshoe
- > Additionally, a large number of wetwork contracts dealing with non-Firewatch Ares employees or associates, even family, posted about that same time. And before anyone asks who put out the contracts, I’m a professional and know when to talk and when to keep my soy-hole shut.
- > Balladeer
- > Just got a new data packet from our friend Electric Blue, who’s right in the heart of the Motor City. Looks like things may be worse than we thought.
- > Slamm-O!

HELLO FROM THE FRONT LINES OF HELL

BY ELECTRIC BLUE

POSTED BY: SLAMM-O!

UPLOADED 08-06-80/0651:13

Wish I had a wiz one-liner to bust out like in an action trid. But I’ve got nothing—still a bit freaked out by everything. A lot of drek went down, is still going down since my first message, and the result is a lot of chaos and death on the streets of the Motor City.

Strange thing about a war, it brings all sorts of people together. Right now, I’m huddled in the back of my chum Johnny’s van with a street cook named Jami, her kid Clay, a go-ganger from the 275 Slayers (no name given), an Arabic dwarf/chef who demanded to be called “Jonesy,” a blind elven adept named Walker, and her pet dog named Tofu. At least I *think* it’s a dog ...

Oh, I’m composing this as we go, stream-of-consciousness style, so forgive me it gets a bit choppy.

About two hours after all this kicked off, Johnny and my other chum Lotus pulled my skinny backside, along with aforementioned company,

out of a nasty bug rampage at Vendor’s Row on 8-Mile. We’ve picked up a few more along the way because Johnny doesn’t leave people behind if he can. And having a tricked-out rigger’s van with heavy weapons helps facilitate that philosophy.

Ghost, I’d kill for an energy drink or seven.

Matrix is still offline, so I don’t know how much of this will get out, but I’ll do what I can. Even my previous trick of hacking Ares’ tactical network won’t last. I’ve been subtle, but eventually someone is going to find out and shut me down. And we’ve been constantly moving, which makes it more difficult to find a strong signal to piggy-back.

OPENING SALVOS

Whatever plan Ares launched on July 30, I think it’s safe to say it not only failed but backfired in spectacular fashion. Otherwise, we’d be talking about Damien Knight’s triumphant press conference on how “Ares beat the bug threat once and for all.” But when people on the streets heard heavy gunfire, it wasn’t a sign that the fighting had started, it was a sign that Ares had failed.

- > Interesting analysis from a decker with apparently zero tactical and strategic knowledge.
- > Rigger X

Aside from the gunfire that included heavy artillery and airstrikes, the first sign of some serious trouble (heh) for the rest of us was when the Matrix suddenly went dark and was replaced with some old-school Emergency Broadcast System instructions telling us to take shelter and adding that “more instructions will follow.” Useless drek.

Less than an hour later, that emergency message changed, saying that martial law was in effect. Everyone was to “return to their legal residences or appropriate shelters immediately.” And if I might say: KE was most helpful in getting people to safety; the tear gas was quite motivating while the pepper-balls were invigorating.

Then things went from bad to worse.

From what we’ve learned from firsthand accounts and found commlink footage, the operation actually began six hours earlier. Like I said before, we knew things went to drek when the fighting in the No-Go Zones wasn’t being contained and the big guns started up.

From what we’ve learned, Ares units in No-Go Zones 1, 2, 5, and 6 held it together and fell back in well-organized, fighting retreats despite massive casualties, keeping bugs at bay and giving as much as they got before they regained their footing and counter-attacked. AFAIK, those lines are still active with fighting, but to their credit, Ares’ soldiers are holding on by their fingernails.

Other units weren’t so lucky. The troops in Zones 3, 4, and 7, along with units covering their

flanks, were slaughtered wholesale. A merc Johnny knows gave us a commlink he found that apparently belonged to an Ares trooper in Zone 4. And from what we saw, they did any and everything they could just to escape the carnage. I won't say they just turned coward and ran, and I wouldn't blame them if they did. I did the same until ... not important. Anyway, it looked like a complete bug breakout from those Zones was imminent. And there were dozens of reports and eyewitness accounts indicating that scores of bugs did in fact make it past Ares and into the sprawl.

- > I've got a bit of an update—more of a confirmation, really. Zone 3 in northwest Pontiac is no more. A massive underground explosion was detected, leveling everything within a radius of approximately 1.3 kilometers. Orbital images now show nothing but a crater and collateral damage. There's been no activity in that area since, or at least none that I've detected.
- > Orbital DK
- > It really **is** Chicago all over again.
- > Brutus Ex-Mechina
- > There's something odd about all of this. Knight isn't the kind of person who's prone to such ... failures. Even Chicago is considered a strategic victory, depending on how you look at it. This is something new.
- > 2XL
- > Cards don't always come up in your favor, even for someone like Knight. Sometimes all you can do is fold.
- > Cool Hand Duke
- > Yeah, but Knight is the kind of bloke who stacks the deck. Or cheats.
- > Chainmaker
- > I get what everyone here and Blue is saying, but it's only been **three days** people. This is far from over, and Knight is known for playing the long game.
- > Danger Sensei
- > Someone is paying attention. Everyone here is assuming that Knight had or has direct command of this operation. Planning for sure, but educated guess is that someone in the direct chain of command or intelligence-gathering section fucked up big time, which resulted in big chunks being taken out of an assembly of asses. Question now is how many more asses are gonna get bitten off before it's done?
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Has anyone stopped to think that maybe things actually are going exactly as planned? We've all heard the rumors that Ares has been infested by bugs at all levels for Ghost knows how long! We've already seen Ares try to take out Firewatch, their best weapon against the bugs. Who's to say this isn't some elaborate

false flag or smoke-and-mirrors op to finish the job, take away our last line of defense against the bugs in lieu of an invasion?

- > Plan 9
- > Really? Got anything to back that up?
- > Flash-Banger
- > Stepping in before this becomes a flame war. Yes, citations and confirmations are important here, but this is **also** a place for ideas and discussion.
- > Glitch
- > I'd like to point out that during recent events in Chicago—for which I place blame for squarely on Ares' (read: Knight's) shoulders going all the way back to '55—they did nothing but cause problems and then abandoned that city **twice**. Ares and Firewatch aren't the only bug-fighters out there, not anymore. We need to quit thinking that Ares is the only one that can do it; they are not our saviors against the bugs.
- > Old Crow

And while the horror was absolute inside the Zones, just outside was its own special kind of hell. Those who weren't dodging KE's "assistance" had to worry about what was under our feet. And this I experienced firsthand.

I was one of the "lucky" few to come face-to-face with some nightmare-inducing bugs. As mentioned, I was at Vender's Row on 8-Mile munching on some soy-pork dumplings when I heard shots in the distance. Like everyone else, I pulled my 'link and tried to get some footage, but noticed the Matrix was offline. A couple minutes later, the ground opened up not twenty meters from me. Three massive bugs burst out amid a hail of gunfire, arms and legs covered in curved blade-like spikes easily as big as my head. Those things were at least troll-sized. They started tearing up anything and anyone unlucky enough to get in their path, sending ruined carts, vendor's stands, and bloody body parts flying in every direction.

I'm not gonna lie, I pulled my L-36 and emptied the mag as fast as I could while running away even faster. And one of them *still* almost got me, knocking me down and nearly stomping my face into paste. Last thing I remember from my panicked haze was someone, I think maybe in mil-spec armor of some kind with a logo of a Grim Reaper and the number "61" on the arm, blasting one of those walking nightmares with a heavy combat shotgun before pulling a glowing sword and finishing the job, separating bug head from body. I don't know who that was, but I owe them one. Maybe someday I'll get to return the favor.

But I still see that head with its large segmented eyes, horns, and mandibles bouncing on the pavement whenever I close my eyes.

Okay, okay ... focus.

- > Anyone have a possible ID for what I'm guessing is a unit insignia? Maybe we can use that to track which Ares unit that is.
- > Bangswitch
- > Not a bad idea, newbie. But after a quick search, I can tell you that it's not an Ares unit. Data search shows a defunct mercenary unit from the 2050s, the 61st Independent Rangers. Come to think of it, that's a bit odd.
- > Cap'n Kludge
- > *chuckles* I'm not surprised.
- > Doc Fangs
- > You know, it's really irritating when people post vague hints or snide comments but not any real paydata.
- > Rigger-X
- > I think that's confirmation that at least one other unit, maybe mercenary, is also operating in Detroit. Speaking of mercs, anyone heard from Picador? This would normally be her shtick.
- > Danger Sensei
- > You forgot, didn't you? Picador's unit is currently under an Ares garrison contract. I tried reaching out to her, but no reply. If this gets any worse, I wouldn't be surprised if the 77th is deployed to Detroit.
- > Hard Exit
- > At the Outpost, there've been constant inquiries from merc units and independent operators to the IMA (International Mercenary Association) about job postings in and around Detroit. Official word from the IMA: There are none.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Official **sanctioned** jobs, or the other kind?
- > Scattershot
- > I don't know what you are referring to, nor would I care to speculate.
- > Colonel Cobra

Anyway, we got out of the area, and I got my initial message out. We've been moving since and picked up our current band of stragglers, hooked up with other runners, parted ways with others, and generally tried to stay out of the line of fire. But it's still not easy. From what we've seen, actual damage to the city has been relatively light so far (heh). But the bodies, or what's left of the bodies, are everywhere—and the smell ... well, that's one reason why we need to keep moving. When you're not dodging creepy-crawlies, KE and the Army slags have developed itchy trigger fingers and are shooting anything that moves and isn't one of theirs, *especially* if they try to leave the city. Guess they figure it's better to kill someone than risk a bug getting out. Which, in a fragged-up way, I can't blame them for. Twice we've had to fight our way out of what we thought were

safehouses (natch) because of unwelcome visitors of the insect kind.

Things seem to have calmed down now. The weapons fire isn't so heavy right now, with what Johnny tells me are "minor skirmishes" flaring up. The aircraft and heavy artillery strikes have stopped, too. There's kind of an eerie quiet thing going on. I'm not sure what is scarier, because I'd much rather deal with modern guns than bugs. Which, to be honest, seem to be everywhere. You never know where they're going to come from until they're practically on top of you. In the past two days, I've seen the ground open up under people so mandibles can drag them under, or one of them silently swoop down and eviscerate its victim. I've also seen one of the biggest, baddest street sams I ever met (all muscle and chrome) ripped in two as he squared off against a horde of ants so we could get away.

Frag, I need to stop here for now. I can't think about it anymore—my hands are shaking so bad, it's messing with my AR gloves. Sorry for not having that much hard data, but I wanted to share at least a piece of what's going on out here. Oh, one more thing—Johnny just learned about a meeting of shadow-types. Not sure what the deal is, but supposedly it's big news regarding biz in the shadows. And I'll be honest, at this point, anything is better than—well, literally anything going on in the sprawl.

Signing off for now. Hope this isn't my last message.

- > Blue wasn't the only one to get messages out. Those with sat-links got messages out before the sats were overwhelmed, or GOD shut them down. Most of the people sending them had no idea where their messages were going; they were desperate to get hold of **anyone**. This particular one I happened to intercept before the sat I was using got nixed. But by my estimates, there are hundreds of similar messages that went out and were never answered.
- > Netcat

««OPENING MESSAGE FILE: NETCAT #221-01»»

If anyone receives this ... my name is Amanda Wright. I'm a communications tech ... for the City of Detroit. Myself and ten other people are currently trapped in the basement of City Hall. We took shelter here as per our protocols after we received the emergency order to take shelter. But there was ... explosion above and now all exits are blocked. We're trapped here. Worse, we're also hearing some kind of scratching and ... chittering coming from the walls. And it's getting closer, louder every minute. I've jury-rigged a tap into our building's satellite antenna ... through the emergency transmission system here in the basement. But I don't know how long I can maintain this connection. Power is failing ... getting harder to breathe. We're begging anyone who gets this message to please send help! I have a six-year-old son who's out there. I need to get to him. Someone, anyone please send help soon. The noises are getting lou—

- > Not to sound cold, but we must keep moving forward. Right now, there is a battle brewing in space. Satellites are currently the only link that the people in Detroit have, and we to them. Scattered messages are getting out, but the system is being overwhelmed. Additionally, there has been outside interference from persons unknown. GOD seems not to care, but at least they aren't getting in the way. A few hours ago, I received a private message from a Johnson looking to hire individuals to "facilitate and defend the flow of orbital communication" to and from Detroit. While this is mostly aimed at deckers and perhaps technomancers, there are also opportunities for other specialists and professionals should direct action in the meat world become required. To anyone interested, message me.
- > Heimdall-R
- > In related news, I went over the original images from 7/30 because something Electric Blue said caught my attention. Using some custom imaging-enhancement software, I took a closer look at some shots from just outside of Zone Two, which is only a kilometer from 8-Mile. And sure enough I found a few dead bugs that match his description. They're big, ugly, and most of them have the curved spikes as described. According to my research, it doesn't match any known bug type. On top of that, this particular bug and others in the vicinity also appear to be wearing mil-spec grade torso and thigh armor. Images on request.
- > Cap'n Kludge
- > Say what again?
- > Scattershot
- > Yep. That bug is wearing genuine, current-issue Mark II Ares "Bug Stomper" armor. That model isn't even six months old. It would be ironic if it wasn't already more than a bit disturbing. And if I'm not mistaken, there is something that I would swear is some kind of unit insignia tattoo or something on the thing's upper arm ... area. But even with the enhancements I can't make it out, except for the 'A-0325' on the back.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Basic description also matches something Sticks mentioned from earlier files when he was in Chicago tracking Anne Ravenheart. Thing nearly killed everyone there; most of them hardened Firewatch vets.
- > Glitch
- > I went back and gave those files a quick peruse, and I saw more than a few mentions of Project: Pyro. Anyone else think we may be seeing some of the results from it?
- > Old Crow
- > I don't know how much relevance or credence this has, but a couple of weeks before all this started, a friend-of-a-friend of mine got *ahem* tight with an ACMF officer stationed in Detroit. Got the fragger drunk at a place called Platinum Trollgirls and took him in the back. But instead of having the usual good time, she used her magic and got some paydata off him; the booze

supposedly lowered his resistance. Unfortunately, the fragger turned out to be a lightweight—he kept mumbling about being attached to something called "Apex."

- > Rambler Rose
- > Whatever's going on, it's shaping up to be good for business. I've been fielding calls from multiple Johnsons requesting individuals for work relating to Detroit in some fashion. And I'm running out of people to refer. I've also seen an uptick in direct hire ads.
- > The Mechanic
- > Really? That's what you're taking from all this?
- > Pistons
- > Hey, biz doesn't stop, even during a potential apocalypse. I can make some 'yen **and** help out. Besides, you're more likely to get better help when you can pay good cred for it.
- > The Mechanic

LET NOTHING GO TO WASTE

<POSTED: 08-03-80/1130:11>

Employer is seeking individuals to recover exotic biological materials from within the Detroit Metropolitan area. Looking for very specific materials, though opportunities also exist for data regarding said materials. Employment opportunities range from short- to long-term, and pay is based on the rarity and viability of materials recovered. Exceptional bonus starting at 20,000 nuyen for living samples recovered. Interested parties contact Mr. Johnson at: LTG# AF/MOR/CAS 112 (39-0001-9338).

- > *sigh* In case you can't read between the lines on that job posting, Johnson here is looking for bug samples fresh from Detroit. He's specifically looking for something called a "super" bug. We got in easy enough, actually lucked out and found exactly what Mr. J wanted just outside of Pontiac. Ghost, it was uglier and bigger than I imagined. Glad it was already dead. Thought we had the angles covered, but on the way out, my Banshee took a missile up the backside. I managed to punch out, but now I'm down a t-bird, a payday, and chummers.
- > Osprey
- > Hmm, a new species of bug or something Frankensteined by Ares mad scientists? Either way, consider me interested. Anyone who wants to go hunting, give me a ring while I see what Mr. Johnson is offering.
- > Moreau
- > Yeah, have fun with that. I've gotten no less than six job offers to get people and/or supplies into Detroit; all of them with a LOT of zeros attached. But still not worth it until I know I can get out with my backside intact. I'll help if I can, but not gonna be a martyr.
- > Turbo Bunny

- ▶ Depending on how long this plays out, perishables and other essential supplies are going to quickly become hot commodities as they are used up and Ares keeps everything locked down. Now that I think about it, I might need to start organizing some food drives into Detroit.
- ▶ Old Crow
- ▶ Before you plan anything, you may want to scan this first.
- ▶ Glitch

WELCOME TO THE RESISTANCE!

BY ELECTRIC BLUE

POSTED BY: GLITCH (UPLOADED 08-04-80/0651:13)

In our last episode, you may recall we were on our way to a super-secret shadow-meeting. I personally had no idea what would happen, but Johnny trusted the message, so off we went. And imagine my surprise when we arrived and it was at a frigging strip club! And not just *any*, but the legendary Platinum Trollgirls! I've passed by this place so many times but never had the guts to actually go in, even with fake IDs.

So here I was on the main dance floor converted into a meeting area with Johnny, Lotus, and Walker. Yeah, she and Tofu stayed with us along with the ganger, who finally introduced himself as Steel Horse; the rest were taken to a shelter in the basement for food and medical care. The dance floor/meeting room was filled, at least a hundred people total, with all sorts of local runners, assorted professionals, a few more gangers (who traded murder-eyes with Steel Horse), and even a rep or two from the Detroit Mob. I almost felt like an imposter being there.

About fifteen minutes after we got there, our hosts made their appearance.

My jaw dropped when I saw who it was. Given the situation, I shouldn't have been surprised to see Colonel Anne Ravenheart, but I was. Scanned a lot about her from old JackPoint files and should've figured she'd be here fighting the bugs like she'd done back in Chicago. The guy to her right wearing urban camo fatigues and the darkest pair of smartglasses I'd ever seen was introduced as Colonel Nathan "Rifleman" McCord of "Bravo Company"—just that identifier, nothing more. But what got my attention 'bout him was the Grim Reaper/#61 patch on his arm. Maybe I'd get to give my thanks after all. To Ravenheart's right was a bald, dark-skinned dwarf in a suit that looked sharp enough to cut through tungsten. She didn't give a name, just told us to call him "Ringmaster." She then pointed to a huge, ancient troll sitting near the back wall, a sign that read "Marv's Seat" hanging above him.

Guess his name is Marv. He simply gave a meaty two-finger salute.

Then it hit me. I should have seen it coming a kilometer away. This wasn't a meeting, it was a *meet*, and these were our Johnsons.

Ravenheart went into this passionate pitch about Ares (Damien Knight specifically) putting all of metahumanity at risk with this ill-conceived, ill-executed attack against the bugs; something that he'd been orchestrating for years. She went on to say that we all needed to coordinate our efforts to basically save everyone. She wanted to bring the local shadows under an umbrella of a unified command made up of her Firewatch personnel, McCord's unit, the local shadows, and anyone with the skill and guts to help.

I'll admit—I liked her pitch.

But then, I noticed that next to me, Tofu was getting anxious and eyeing a bearded street-sam near the back. He looked like pressed drek and was sweating profusely when he suddenly reached into his pocket. Then all hell broke loose.

Sweaty-Sam pulled a vial from a compartment in his cyberarm and was about to smash it into the ground, but Tofu fragging bit the slag's hand off and held the vial within it. A heartbeat later, Walker was on her feet and threw her cane like a javelin, drilling Sweaty through the eye. Of course, that triggered the response one would expect from a room filled with on-the-edge shadow-types.

Another sammie tried to shoot Ravenheart with a cyber-handgun as she prepped a spell, but McCord put three in his forehead. I heard someone yell "*Grenade*," and saw a flash, but there was no boom. Which was a good thing.

People squared off, ready to fight or fly. A few blows were thrown, a few weapons pulled, all sorts of fun stuff. But then from the back there was a massive BOOM. We all stopped and looked back at Marv, who was just sitting there, holding the biggest frigging handgun ever up toward the ceiling, smoke still wafting from the barrel and the sign bouncing slightly above him.

His voice growled like a truck's engine brakes. "You fraggers realize this is exactly what the opposition *wants* us to do, right? But tell you what. Anyone who wants out, leave. Anyone who wants in, stay. Anyone starts any more trouble, next bullet is for you."

Only five people left. We then had an alliance to combat some bugs, with or without Ares' help or blessing.

Colonel Ravenheart took overall command while Ringmaster coordinated operations, evaluated all relevant data, and handed out assignments. Colonel McCord is the field commander and head troubleshooter. My chum Johnny Redline was made liaison to the local shadow community to help coordinate things after Marv declined ("frag no" was the direct quote). But already some run-

ners are balking at the idea of taking marching orders. Speaking of Marv (a.k.a. Marvin Castle Sr.), he's literally turned Platinum Trollgirls into a combination fortress and HQ for us. Turns out he also owns the entire block and all the businesses there, and he refurbished the old tunnels underneath, connecting everything together.

First time in days I actually feel safe.

Oh, I almost forgot! Important bit of data here: Platinum is also acting as an aid station and is taking in a limited number of displaced people. Basically, we're a safe area; some are calling it the "Platinum Zone." Expect to be checked thoroughly on arrival and don't start anything; they take zero drek here. But if you can offer some means to help, they ... we'll find a way for you to do so. Wow, I can actually say "we"!

Well, that was four hours ago, I just got out of a much-needed shower, and apparently Colonel Ravenheart and Ringmaster want to see me. Why does this feel like I'm going to the principal's office?

- > Now that the cat is out of the bag, I can share this. Twelve hours ago, I was asked by Colonel McCord to send this to a select number of individuals and also widely distribute wherever, whenever I saw fit. Here you all go—enjoy and good luck. You're going to need it.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Yeah, baby! Who wants to go splatter some bugs?!
- > Bangswitch

NEED FOR REINFORCEMENTS

<POSTED: 08-05-80/0000:01>

If you're receiving this message, then you're on the short list for this job offering because you have skills we require and/or have a reputation as being reliable and professional. If you're not already aware, Detroit is under siege and in danger of falling to a bug threat the likes of which not been seen in over two decades. Complicating matters is the way Ares Macrotechnology is handling the situation. And as of this posting, they are on the verge of a complete rout that could lead to an uncontrolled bug breakout.

Because of this, I am acting on behalf of private entities looking to defend Detroit and eliminate the bug threat here. This will be considered a heavy combat/hazardous duty contract. Base payments will start at 75K per month with the option to re-negotiate based on evolving factors and circumstances. Also, this contract does fall under IMA guidelines. An attachment will be included with this message complete with instructions on how to make contact and where to report for those interested. <attachment here>

—Colonel Nathan J. McCord, Commanding Officer, Sixty-First Independent Rangers.

- > I'd be interested in seeing how exactly this contract legally fits within IMA guidelines.
- > Legal Eagle
- > Kind of wondering why McCord and not Ravenheart is posting this.
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > Dunno, but the 61st is currently listed as an active merc unit with the IMA and is likely using their status as a way to protect people operating in Detroit.
- > Scattershot
- > Okay, I can kind of see that, but most IMA contracts need (among other things) a client. If Ares or the UCAS isn't backing or sponsoring the contract in Detroit, who is?
- > Legal Eagle
- > The shadows worrying about legality—now I've seen it all.
- > Red Flag
- > This is some fraged-up timing. Thirty minutes ago, I got something hot off the data trails. I've been wondering when DeeCee was going to respond to Detroit, and now every UCAS Army base along the Eastern Seaboard has gone on high alert. Satellite imagery also shows a massive mobilization from each of those bases, with armored columns already moving out. I also happened to intercept some tidbits from the Pentagon, and they're sending a task force to Detroit. And for the record, they really need to update their encryption protocols.
- > Orbital DK
- > Oh **frag**, that's sure going to be fun. Why not throw some more gas on this dumpster fire? Or why not just start lobbing some nukes while we're at it?
- > Bull
- > Is there even going to be a city left after this?
- > Earther
- ...15.56 MP MOVED/AUTHORIZATION:
ADMIN-05 <08-09-80/0500:13>...
- > Okay, I've moved the data concerning a UCAS Task Force heading toward the Motor City to another area. If you have any pertinent data, go there. Now back to the original insanity in Detroit, already in progress.
- > Orbital DK
- > Couple of hours ago, I got this data pack supposedly from Julia Pesina, the daughter of a late friend of mine. Seems she wants to follow in her dad's footsteps by making her way into Detroit and playing battlefield correspondent. Now, some of the data was corrupted, but I called in a marker with Icarus who got it mostly cleaned up.
- > Sunshine

THIS JUST IN: MOTOR CITY MAYHEM!

BY JULIA 'DEADLINE' PESINA

POSTED BY: SUNSHINE

UPLOADED 08-10-80/0214:59

Not really sure how this is supposed to go, but what the hell. I'm only in the middle of a bug war, so rules go right out the window, I guess.

For the record, my name is Julia Marie Pesina and I'm reporting from the embattled streets of the city of Detroit in the UCAS. Five days ago, a Matrix failure engulfed the city with rumors of major fighting leaking out. Approximately two days ago, I hired a group of professionals (who will not be named to protect their identities) to get me past a Knight Errant cordon of the city. My goal is to get a *real* look at what's happening inside the city. My camera drone "Grover" and I will be doing our best to get at the truth, and maybe not die in the process.

I honestly don't know how long I'll be here, let alone if I'll survive. But my father Charles—or Chuck as he preferred to be called—wasn't afraid to put his neck out to get a story. And neither am I. My reports <<<ERROR .05mp data corrupted>>> as I can get them out. I may compile some first, then see how things go from there. But anyway, time to get to work.

STORY 001: FIRST DAY

This is Julia Marie Pesina on the outskirts of <<<ERROR .15mp data corrupted>>> ***multiple unidentified sounds detected*** where there's nothing but gunfire and chaos as a group of Knight Errant officers are engaged with a group of bug spirits! Less than five minutes ago, we came across two patrols of KE cops who were attempting to clear out a group of civilians they claim were looting, but in reality the civilians were checking identities of fallen <<<ERROR 0.03mp data corrupted>>> clearing the streets!

After only one warning, KE officers opened up with gas grenades and what I think are weapons loaded with some kind of stun munitions. But instead of clearing people out, the KE officers attracted a group of what I'm guessing are wasp insect spirits that swooped in from out of nowhere to attack ...

unidentified noises detected

Ghost! I need to get out of here! The wasps have just carried off the last KE cops and a number of civilians! ***Sound of explosion detected***

Oh frag! Some old man just pulled out a rocket launcher and turned a couple of wasps into paste! Now he's reloaded <<<ERROR 1.07mp data corrupted>>> torn to pieces! <<<ERROR 0.05mp data corrupted>>>

<unidentified voice> *Run, dammit!*

unidentified noises detected

<505 second pause>

Okay, safe for the moment. My escorts put down some covering fire and some of the civilians in the area guided us and other survivors to a nearby warehouse. They say it's safe, but we'll be moving soon regardless. They say we can't even trust the ground beneath our feet.

What started out as wanting a story on how the regular citizens were dealing with the fighting in Detroit quickly became a snapshot of the fighting in Detroit. I've ... I've never seen actual combat before, let alone people just getting ... torn apart like that. I don't know what happened to the man with the rocket launcher, but I don't see him anywhere. I think we owe him our lives. Signing off for now, I'm being signaled that it's time to move. I should really concentrate on that.

STORY 002: A VIEW FROM BEHIND ARMOR PLATING

This is your roving reporter Julia Pesina, still in the heart of the Motor City. It's only been three days since I've arrived, and already I'm exhausted. Not having stopped moving except for a few minutes here and there will do that to you. But my escorts and I have made contact with a group <<<ERROR 0.19mp data corrupted>>> makeshift fortifications throughout the building. Someone has even rigged crude seismic sensors to detect what they tell me are bugs tunneling under the streets. These are just a few of the jury-rigged defenses that have been put into place here and—from what I've been told—throughout the city. Although I've also been told that this area is close to one of the No-Go Zones and has fared worse than areas farther away.

Already basic items such as food, medical supplies, weapons, and ammunition are becoming prized commodities as more citizens are becoming displaced or fleeing combat. Makeshift scouting parties occasionally venture out to scavenge, but too often they come back with little to nothing to show for it, and usually minus one or more party members. Most of these people have never even thrown a punch, let alone used a real weapon outside of an online game. But they know the neighborhood and are determined to survive, even though the odds seem stacked against them.

Fighting also seems to ebb and flow when Ares, or whoever, actually engages the bugs openly. It's fast and brutal one minute, then absolute silence the next. Approximately two hours after arriving here, I saw a group of heavily armed individuals, but definitely not Ares military. I'm certain they were shadowrunners, and they engaged a group of armored beetles. I'd compare their skills to an

action trid, but that would be insulting to <<<ERROR 2.5mp data corrupted>>>blew one to bits but not before their partner <<<ERROR 1.05mp data corrupted>>> some kind of combat spell that completely <<<ERROR 0.65mp data corrupted>>> if not for my window being covered by what I think was once an armored car door I would have been <<<ERROR 1.35mp data corrupted>>> didn't know you could pack that many weapons into a delivery van.

But such combat has become the new normal here. In addition to the scene I just described, I've heard at least three additional skirmishes in the distance, including an artillery strike. I asked one of my escorts if they wanted to go and help, and was met with a very firm "no." As my lead escort said, their job "is to protect my skinny hoop, not play hero."

He has a point. And on a personal note, maybe I'm a coward or greedy for saying this, but I'm glad they're here to protect me specifically. Signing off for now—Grover needs to recharge, and I need to ration what battery power I have left in the charger.

STORY 003: ROAD RAGE!

sounds of gunfire detected

elevated sounds of vehicle engines detected

This is Julia Pesina, and I'm coming to you from the back of *Roadbuster Five*, a tricked-out Dodge Stallion that *used* to belong to Knight Errant but now is in the service of a Detroit rigger collective known simply as the Garage. We're run and gunning it along I-75 with four other Garage vehicles, having just blown the living hell out of a wave of bugs and some of their—if you can believe it—metahuman allies. Seems the fraggers were trying to overrun a makeshift hospital ne—<<<ERROR 0.81mp data corrupted>>> helpless in their beds!

The Garage riggers were originally on their way to the hospital to drop off some much-needed meds and supplies when they saw a red flare, which (as I've learned) has become the universal signal in the Detroit sprawl for assistance! What was supposed to be a mission of mercy has become a race against death, as we're currently engaged in a fighting withdrawal, having either blasted the living drek out of the bugs or pissed them off enough to get them to chase us! I even got two with a grenade! Woooo!

And believe it or not, this has become a common occurrence all over the Detroit sprawl as people from all across the metahuman strata—regular people, criminals, gangers, shadowrunners, even a few displaced Ares troops—have started to fight back in their own way against the bugs! Additionally, local non-affiliated strike groups are forming in different neighborhoods on their own to hunt down or defend against the bugs wherever and

however possible, with our without Ares or even the UCAS' help! Because the question on everyone's mind here in Detroit is: Where is Ares and where is the UCAS Army? Even with the rumors of some kind of shadow coalition—*whoa!*

sounds of rending metal detected

unidentified sounds detected

<<<ERROR 1.77mp data corrupted>>>

That was close! Roadbuster Five hit *something* that just popped out of the ground in front of us head-on! Looked like a bug, but bigger than anything I've seen so far! We almost flipped driving over it, or maybe through it! Almost lost Grover! And, I may be crazy, but I swear I saw it stand up before we took that side street! Either way, I've still got bug guts all over me! We also seem to have lost our pursuers ... Wow, my ears are still ringing, even with the borrowed helmet. Roadbuster's driver is telling me that we're going to circle back, check on the hospital and see if they need any more help. Works for me, I've got another couple grenades left.

Oh, and for the record, after taking out those bugs, my escorts have given me what is called a "street name." "Deadline" sounds wiz as frag! WOO! This is Julia "Deadline" Pesina, signing off for now!

STORY 004: NO SECOND CHANCES HERE

This is Julia ... damn.

I didn't think I'd be doing another one so soon. We made it back to our safehouse, or rather what's left of it.

I ... we don't know what happened, but we can guess.

<81 second pause>

I'm currently standing in the middle of a former coffin motel just outside of downtown Detroit. Coffin motel ...

<64 second pause>

Over the last few days, dozens of Detroit's displaced found their way here. Nicknamed "Second Chance" by the occupants, <<<ERROR 0.12 mp data corrupted>>> combat drone crashed into the east side of the building, but it stood firm. Slowly, as more people came, like other places, they began to fortify. In only five short days, it became a small light of hope to the area. Built on a large bedrock slab, everyone thought it was safe from bug tunnels. They were wrong.

But now this refuge has become a slaughterhouse.

As I look around, into the open coffin rooms, I see ... remains. That's the only description I'm going to use. I'm not going to dishonor their memory by sensationalizing it. If you can't fragging figure it out ...

<51 second pause>

Despite the efforts of Second Chance's defenders, it looks like the insects simply bypassed the floor and came in through an attached building. It also looks like large sections of the building were simply ripped apart. I don't think I'll be able to stay in a coffin motel ever again.

There's not much more that can be said. Most of the people here were SINless, so we'll never know who died here, not that most will care. I've been told that explosives are going to be dumped in to drop the buildings as a sort of burial. I think it's more symbolic than practical, but maybe some bugs will get theirs. Some of the Garage riggers are already talking revenge, while others just want to get out of here. I'm definitely of the latter view.

Signing off.

STORY 005: OTHERS HUNT IN THE SHADOWS

This is Julia Pesina, coming to you from who the frag knows because I'm lost and in the pitch darkness somewhere in the back alleys of Detroit.

We'd gotten word of some big meeting at a place called Plat <<<ERROR 0.95 mp data corrupted>>> the Detroit shadows. But on the way we ran into a KE/Ares Army patrol slugging it out with <<<ERROR 0.32 mp data corrupted>>>and losing horribly! <<<ERROR 1.12 mp data corrupted>>> tossed from the vehicle, smartgoggles broken in the process. Glad my escorts insisted I carry a survival pack with me; a chem-light is better than nothing and at least got me out of the open. Also glad Grover is still intact—dinged, but functioning.

I was told that if this ever happened to not wander by night <<<ERROR 2.00 mp data corrupted>>> easier to find me. But that was two hours ago and based on my chronometer, I have at least three more hours before sunrise. I'm ...

<20 second pause>

voice level at 35%

I'm not sure, but I thought I heard something moving. Going too ...

Unidentified sounds detected

voice level at 145%

GET THE FRAG BACK!!!!

<<<sounds of gunfire detected>>>

unidentified sounds detected

<656 second pause>

sounds of heavy breathing detected

I'm ... I'm back. I don't know exactly what just happened. Something big tried to get me, and it wasn't ... a bug. It was massive, maybe a large ork or small troll. It, ah, had this sickly grey skin, dead eyes ... think it was a ghoul, but never seen one up close before. But it tried ... crazy thing, three smaller ghouls fought it off. One got ripped in half by the bigger one, but the other two ... took it down. Must have, because when I found my sec-

ond chem-light, they were the only ones still standing, ripped up as they seemed.

Thought I was lunch, but they looked at me, told me they were <<<ERROR 1.33 mp data corrupted>>> following and watching <<<ERROR 1.99 mp data corrupted>>> and how to get out safely. In exchange, I'm to deliver a message. Not going to go over that now, I'm going to get the frag out. I'll share the message if I get to where I'm going.

Fingers crossed. Wish I still had those grenades. Deadline signing off.

- > And that was the last entry in the data packet I got from Pesina. All I know at this point is that the data was uploaded and sent to me. She could have sent it, or someone else did for her; unknown at this point.
- > Sunshine

> I'm very interested in that last story.

> Hannabelle

...26.66 MP MOVED/AUTHORIZATION:
ADMIN-02 <08-27-80/0500:13>...

- > I know it's been a few weeks and change since Electric Blue and Deadline's postings, but most of the chatter here was chatter that broke down to "anything new," a lot of theories, and a lot of bull-drekkng. There was also the incident that resulted in the deletion of several **thousand** megapulses worth of deliberately false data from the slimes "Night Hunter" and "Data Ranger" (lame handles, BTW). Also, I'm very not sorry Hunter will need a drool cup and Ranger a wheelchair drone for the rest of their lives. To those who made those jobs happen (you know who you are), you have my personal thanks for taking on those rush-jobs. But on the upside, we have some actual new data. And (thankfully) it's not from Blue. Like the kid, but only in small doses. And this time, it's pretty much coming from the prime source.
- > Bull

DETROIT STANDOFF

BY RIFLEMAN

POSTED BY: GLITCH

<UPLOADED 08-27-80/0501:13>

First, I want to explain the radio silence over the past twenty-three days. After the incident at Platinum, Colonel Ravenheart, Ringmaster, and I felt it was necessary to exercise tighter information control to protect operational security. However, we've decided to resume informational updates. We've also been able to secure a stable Matrix connection that should allow regular communication, operational situation changes notwithstanding. So for the time being, I have been authorized by Colonel Ravenheart to give the following briefing.

And to ditch the pseudo-military-speak for a hot minute, what's happening here will have far-reaching repercussions. That being said, there needs to be a record of what happened, of what's happening, so that maybe, just *maybe*, those who've died here trying to fight this threat or were simply caught in the crossfire won't have died in vain.

I am personally aware of and have been witness to multiple acts of courage and valor by not only paramilitary forces (shadowrunners), but also average citizens in the face of the insect counterattack. When this is all over, their stories need to be told.

- ▶ There were also just as many acts of overt cowardice, malice, and outright treachery. We here in Detroit remember and will tell **those** stories as well.
- ▶ Shockwave

INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING

First, the “what is going on.” From what we've been able to determine, the situation we're dealing with here in Detroit stems from the attack initiated on July 30 by Ares Corporate Military Forces. This was the first wave of an operation we've since learned is code-named “Operation: Latvian Gambit.”

The primary target of Latvian Gambit was an insect hive beneath Detroit designated HV-927. According to our sources within the ACMF, HV-927 is a series of interconnected chambers and tunnels that, at estimates before Latvian Gambit launched, contained a *minimum* of approximately twenty thousand insect spirits, merges of various levels, and insect shamans; all of different types.

Yeah, let those numbers sink in.

- ▶ And as you let them think in, just think about the scale of coverup Ares was engaged in to keep all those disappearances from turning into mass panic.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular

These chambers and tunnels connected the underground areas beneath all six of the restricted areas the ACMF had cordoned off within the city, which the locals had nicknamed “No-Go Zones” (NGZ). Their true purpose was to act as staging areas and access points for the ACMF to assault HV-927 directly.

Latvian Gambit was simple: conduct coordinated, simultaneous attacks against HV-927 from multiple NGZs, cut off and isolate pockets of insects with new purpose-built elite assault teams supported by regular armored infantry and heavy combat vehicles/drones, and then destroy them piecemeal with “the latest in Ares hoop-kicking hardware.” These spearhead units, known as “Apex Teams,” were the culmination of two Ares special projects: Avalon and Pyro.

APEX TEAMS

The centerpieces of these units are known as “Alpha Merges” or simply shorthanded to “Alphas” (not to be confused with the Ares standard-issue assault rifle). Currently we don't have exact data on how, but we've learned they were created and bred specifically by Ares scientists for the sole purpose of defeating insect spirits, merges, et al.

While the Alphas come in multiple sub-variants, on average they're able to face and defeat multiple insects on an average ratio of four or five to one. They possess enhanced subcutaneous armor that's resistant to most small-arms fire, increased musculature that outperforms all but the most advanced muscle augmentations, and increased reflexes on par with SOTA enhancements. They also possess natural weaponry that varies by type, are dual-natured, and have enhanced senses above what we know the standard insect merge possesses. However, what sets Alphas above the already lethal standard insect is their heightened and enhanced aggression; which came into play during the initial assault.

I'll have more on that later.

Apex Teams also included conventional combat and support elements such as armored infantry, magic, drones, and armored vehicles. Alphas would engage the insects head-on, leaving mop-up and fire-support to the rest of the team. Ares (read: likely Damien Knight) thought they had the perfect anti-insect weapon at their disposal with the Apex Teams and planned to take full advantage of them. Of course, whoever was or is still leading Latvian Gambit forgot the first tenet of warfare: *no plan survives contact with the enemy*.

Although she didn't know about Latvian Gambit or the Apex Teams specifically, Colonel Ravenheart knew Damien Knight was planning the largest insect-eradication operation ever conceived, with Detroit being ground zero; Knight assembled the pieces of this operation over the past several years. Unfortunately, this plan included the culling of elements (read: certain members of Firewatch, the Ares Executive Board, etc.) within the corporation that could jeopardize said plans.

- ▶ Ya know, I wish I could say I'm shocked, but this is a move I can easily see Knight pulling. Man has zero problems with sacrificing as many pawns as he sees fit, as long as he gets his checkmate in the end.
- ▶ Pistons

As Knight was assembling and moving into position the final pieces of his plan, Ravenheart was doing the same, reaching out to various organizations, groups, and assorted select individuals to be on standby, ready to assist her and the “renegade” elements of Firewatch when, in her exact words, “Ares inevitably frags up because of Knight's arrogance.”

Personally, I wish she'd been wrong, but here we are.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

Without retreading too much data, Latvian Gambit stalled because of two key factors. The first was an intelligence failure that completely and grossly underestimated the number of underground tunnels in and branching out from HV-927 and into the surrounding metropolitan Detroit area. During the initial assault, these tunnels allowed the insects to completely bypass the NGZ cordons and flank ACMF positions.

The second key factor is the ACMF's Alphas themselves. From various ACMF accounts we've received, Apex Teams initially performed exactly as advertised, with Alphas racking up a six-to-one, sometimes ten-to-one kill ratios. But as enemy numbers dwindled and the Alphas had fewer insect targets, they turned their aggression on their metahuman Apex Team members, slaughtering them just as easily as the insects—if not more so. There're even reports that Alphas not yet deployed from their transports forced their way out and slaughtered ACMF troops not yet engaged in combat.

<<<OPENING AUDIO FILE MCCORD#636>>>

McCord: If you can, please state your name for the record.

Crandall: Lieutenant Sarah Crandall, Fifth Apex Team, Ares Corporate Mil ... *wheezing sounds*

McCord: Take your time, Lieutenant; we're not in any hurry.

Crandall: Thank you sir.

<35.2 second pause>

Crandall: I'm ready.

McCord: Please reiterate what you told my associate Freya yesterday.

Crandall: I'm ... was a team leader of an Apex Team, an elite unit ... created from Firewatch members and a new weapon from R&D, a bug-merge called Alphas created specifically to kill those fraggers. *chuckle* *deep inhale* We were assigned to assault HV-927 from Staging Point 3 in Pontiac as part of the second wave. First wave, Team Four ... was already engaged and by all accounts ... kicking ... serious hoop. But as the engagement progressed, we started to lose contact with them, and our Alphas in the Can were getting restless. I'd ... been told that they were aggressive ... eager to engage bugs, but that they weren't ... a safety risk to us. They were banging and clawing on the inside of their transport, actually ... rocking a ten-ton APC. They started going psycho ... tore their way out of the back of the Army-Master ... killing anyone they got their claws on. Oh, God! *sounds of sobbing/wheezing* so much death ...

Tried to fight back, but they were ... among us. Too fast ... too tough ... tunnels too narrow, no room to move. Then regular bugs started pouring in, forced ... up. Captain then called ... Broken Arrow, ordered retreat. *deep inhale* Tried to fight our way out, but Captain Behr detonated the device ... per ROE. Blast-wave got my command vehicle ... tunnel collapsed. Woke up here. I'm sorry, sir ... I failed, we failed...

McCord: No, Lieutenant, you did your duty. Get some rest.

Addendum: Lieutenant Crandall died of her wounds two days later on 08-09-80.

<<<CLOSE FILE>>>

The Alphas' hyper-aggression not only caused Latvian Gambit to stall and almost completely collapse, but it's also a major contributing factor as to why there wasn't, and still hasn't been, a massive insect breakout. By all accounts, Alphas seem to desire, almost crave combat for the sake of combat itself. They don't care who they fight, they only wish to *fight*. And unfortunately, unknown numbers of these Ares-modified insect killing machines, along with unknown numbers of regular insect spirits, were able to make their way past the ACMF—and Colonel Ravenheart's Irregular forces. These super-insects are now at large in the Detroit Sprawl.

- > Great, as if we needed **another** reason to fear what's hiding in the dark.
- > Wheeled Warrior
- > Cover if you want, but I see this as an opportunity to hunt. I'll be hooking up with Ravenheart and crew in less than twenty-four hours.
- > Brutus Ex-Mechina
- > It's only been about twenty-four hours and change since McCord/Ravenheart's call went out, but already the word is starting to spread among the shadows and the merc community, and "volunteers" are already making their way to Detroit.
- > The Mechanic
- > And of note, Ares seems to have adjusted its containment policy slightly and is actually letting limited number of enthusiastic individuals into Detroit. But the previous exit policy is still in effect, so plan ahead.
- > Hard Exit
- > That's okay, I just got me a new gig, new unit, and new bird. We'll be addressing that issue soon enough.
- > Osprey

BATTLE LINES REDRAWN

Another factor in halting the main bug advance was the timely intervention of Colonel Ravenheart's Irregular Forces (or, as we've quickly become known, Ravenheart's Irregulars, or just "Irregulars" for short). Not fond of the name, but I've heard and been called a lot worse.

- > That sounds a bit egotistical. Don't break your arm patting yourself on the back there, **Colonel**.
- > OrkCEO
- > Don't remember seeing your pampered hoop here in Detroit. Step up and nut the frag up, or **shut the frag up**.
- > Shockwave

Having learned beforehand when Latvian Gambit was about to kick off, Col. Ravenheart sent

the mobilization order to all of her current allies. We assembled at the Tactical Concepts armory in Northwest Ohio and from there infiltrated Detroit with some assistance from the local shadows. Per Col. Ravenheart's orders, we were only to operate as a reactionary force, assisting only if necessary because to be frank, the Colonel and her remaining Firewatch operators were still considered criminals and traitors in Ares' eyes and stood a good chance of being shot along with the insects.

When the time came and ACMF troops were being pushed out of the NGZs, Irregular forces were there backing them up, hitting the insects (and unbeknownst to us at the time, Alphas) precisely where needed. The only place we were unable to help was at Zone Three in Pontiac; our detachment of shadowrunners was unable to arrive there before the explosion. As of this briefing, there has been no sign of bug activity since the blast. Colonel Ravenheart has ordered Zone Three be monitored, but for now we are moving on to other tactical and strategic goals.

- ▶ Not to get ahead of you, Colonel, but do you have any data on what caused the explosion there?
- ▶ Glitch
- ▶ Nothing concrete. Interviews with the few survivors of Zone Three said that each Zone Field Commander was also tasked with "sealing and securing any potential metaplanar access points" once the primary objectives were completed. But only field commanders and their direct staff had access or information on how to accomplish this. My guess is another fun toy Ares R&D cooked up that we haven't encountered yet. After-action reports from our runner detachment in Pontiac said that the explosion in question occurred underground, and any clues were likely buried. Only three ACMF APCs managed to get out of the immediate blast zone but were partially buried. The surviving crews still suffered critical injuries and died days later. Only oddity detected was a high background count and what our detachment's magicians described as "massive mana warping." Three of them got violently ill when astrally projecting in the area. Ringmaster and I would like to investigate, but we're resource- and manpower-thin at the moment, and we're getting reports of Alphas congregating in the area. Picking and choosing our battles here.
- ▶ Rifleman

BATTLES ON TOO MANY FRONTS

Something I share with Col. Ravenheart is the frustration at not being able to provide a unified front against the threats here in Detroit; which tactically speaking would be ... nice. After the initial fighting began, Col. Ravenheart attempted to reach out to the ACMF field commanders, offering assistance and cooperation to the beleaguered officers, only to be rejected—in some cases with extreme prejudice. One Ares general commanding

a detachment outside Zone Two pulled his sidearm on Colonel Ravenheart and informed us that "If you or any of your people come within a kilometer of mine, I'll personally nuke your traitor asses, you goddamned arcane whore." Similar replies from other ACMF commanders have been less colorful, but the message was still the same.

According to current data, Latvian Gambit's overall commander, General James Danforth, has since issued standing orders that anyone working in conjunction with "traitorous elements" is to be relieved of duty immediately and placed under arrest. We've even heard reports of at least two Ares field commanders shooting subordinates who have tried to accept assistance from or give assistance to Irregular forces. Ares seems bound and determined to lose this fight by any means necessary, as most of their military leadership remain stalwart company soldiers.

Thankfully for our forces, not *all* ACMF members have followed those orders. In the field when you're facing death, or worse, at the hands of an insect, one tends to take whatever assistance is offered, no matter the source. Some ACMF troops have even "defected" to our side; most of them from the near-shattered units assigned to Zones Four and Six that received the heaviest losses.

- ▶ Let me guess—a lot of NCOs and grunts, maybe a few junior officers smart enough to follow their sergeants?
- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ Winner, winner, chicken dinner.
- ▶ Rifleman
- ▶ They usually have the most common sense. And loyalty often goes out the window when your corp and commanders don't care if you live or die in some bug-infested hell. Funny, that.
- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ I can only imagine what would have happened had that UCAS army group showed up. Looks like you all dodged a bullet or thousand there.
- ▶ Scattershot

CURRENT TACTICAL SITREP

I can only describe the tactical situation in Detroit as a complete Charlie Foxtrot. Or, for those of you who don't speak military: cluster frag (and of the highest order).

ARES CORPORATE MILITARY FORCES

At best estimates, the ACMF has lost approximately forty percent of their combat forces since Latvian Gambit began. General Danforth has ordered all of his remaining forces (estimated to be just under two divisions worth of troops), to dig



in and reinforce the NGZs while ACMF reserves supplemented by Knight Errant officers patrol and contain the outer and inner- to mid-perimeters.

As already stated, the ACMF sends patrols into the city (reinforced by Knight Errant security officers) and the insect tunnels, but their primary focus is more about detection and security rather than enemy neutralization.

That particular task has been taken up by the Irregulars.

- > Things may be worse for the ACMF than we realize. According to reliable sources, Brigadier General Lloyd Ritter, Danforth's second in command, has been practically begging for reinforcements, which Danforth has flatly rejected.
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > Interesting, because Danforth is a military doctor, specializing in experimental biological weapons, not a field commander.
- > Butch
- > Fun fact: Hendricks was also Danforth's direct supervisor at Ares Special Projects.
- > Glitch
- > Someone at Ares Tower must have heard Ritter, because I've learned that two mercenary units under Ares contract have

just gotten orders to quietly deploy to Detroit and reinforce Danforth's forces. One of them is Hasting's Guardians; the other is the oty-Seventh Independent Rangers.

- > Colonel Cobra
- > No wonder Picador has been radio silent. She and McCord are tight. This is a messed-up situation to be in.
- > Danger Sensei
- > I wonder how her much valued and flaunted code of honor is going to deal with this little situation? Professional integrity versus personal attachment, place your bets!
- > Clockwork
- > You're disgusting.
- > Netcat
- > But I'm also right.
- > Clockwork

RAVENHEART'S IRREGULAR FORCES

For obvious security reasons, I won't disclose details regarding the number and current composition of our forces. But we're made up of at least one mercenary company, at least a company's worth of current and former Firewatch operators, numerous individuals made up from the local

shadowrunning community, and scores of Detroit civilians willing to step up and help fight for their city, even in the face of insects.

- > Yeah, I know that last bit sounds like it came directly from a recruitment ad, but it's accurate. I've also learned that the Motor City has some rather capable and creative individuals residing here.
- > Rifleman
- > You military types are always thinking mission. We've also been reaching out across the sprawl, to SINners and SINless alike, to not only fight, but provide whatever care or support they can, which is a battle on its own. And to be perfectly blunt, everything we're doing wouldn't be possible without them.
- > Windy Storms
- > They're our eyes and ears out there, best intelligence we can get under the circumstances. Most can't fight, but they let us know where all the hot spots and new bug hives are.
- > Johnny Redline

Originally, our mission was to assist the ACMF, with Colonel Ravenheart hoping that said assistance would be accepted. However, we planned for the possibility of rejection. As such, we've since re-focused our objectives to identify, locate, and neutralize all threats associated with HV-927 within Detroit.

Initially, our losses were proportionally equal to the ACMF because of the unique threat the Alpha merges presented. So far, we've adapted our tactics and are seeing improvement. But it's a bloody battle of attrition, and we don't have the numbers long-term, even with the steady influx of volunteers.

- > Colonel, send me a message. I may have something to show you regarding that problem.
- > Glitch

And to be blunt, the greatest threats we're facing are shadowrunners hired by either Ares Johnsons or Otto Hendricks. It's easy to fight an enemy that you can identify, be it by flag or uniform. While I have great respect for those runners who've fought and died alongside us, we'd be foolish not to recognize the sometimes-fluid nature of some shadowrunners' loyalties. Opposition runners have infiltrated our ranks multiple times (or just took better offers) and caused a lot of damage. Our teams continue to be hunted or ambushed in the field, while our observation posts and supply caches are sabotaged and/or booby-trapped. Worst of all, civilians willing to help us are also being targeted.

It's Terrorism and Insurgency 101.

- > Hey, it's just biz, just like it always will be. And no one asked any of you to play hero.
- > Red Flagg

- > Oh, it's just biz? Like how you and your crew been bird-doggin' for the bugs?
- > Junkyard Dawg
- > A thought just occurred to me—Ares obviously has resources, and Hendricks apparently does as well. But who's bankrolling the Irregulars? I know McCord owns Tactical Concepts, but no way does it make enough 'yen to fund this level of warfare.
- > Mr. Bonds

BOUNTIES IN DETROIT

◀POSTED 08-16-80/1345.00▶

Mr. Johnson is looking for uniquely qualified individuals to seek out and neutralize targets currently operating in the City of Detroit. Compensation varies depending on target. Applicants must be completely self-sufficient. Contact at LTG# NA/UCAS/TOL 419 (22-0681-0938).

REGULAR INSECT FORCES

Normally insects make a poor army, especially in terms of working in conjunction with other insect types in any coordinated manner. But apparently Otto Hendricks has somehow made it work. While insects continue to act like insects, the insect shamans have taken on a greater role, often acting as handlers. Hendricks is the lead handler and overall commander, for lack of a better descriptor.

We're still unclear how this fits in with the traditional insect hierarchy of queens being in control, but so far the shamans have been the closest analog the insects have to officers and field commanders. Our current SOP is to target the shamans whenever possible.

Strategically, the regular insects have pulled back to the inner recesses of HV-927, forcing their enemies to come to them and thus creating a siege situation between them and the ACMF. We have no way of evaluating insect combat losses, but their current strategy implies either a wait-and-see doctrine, or they are simply replenishing their numbers before launching a counter-offensive.

Or, to be honest, I could be completely wrong, and they have something else in mind.

ALPHA MERGES

I've included the Alpha merges as a separate faction because of the disproportionate threat they pose to everyone in the Detroit Area of Operations. Over the past few weeks, numerous Irregular missions have been compromised and units suffered increased casualty numbers simply because of inadvertent Alpha arrival and intervention.

Alpha merges have also been frequently spotted engaging regular insects. Based on after-action and field reports, Alphas have been observed bypassing

potential non-insect targets in favor of regular-insect ones, until the insect targets are eliminated. And yes, Irregular forces have used this to our advantage on multiple occasions. It's one of the few advantages we have. The only other advantage with regard to the Alpha merges is that they appear to be operating with no sense of coordination or purpose, merely seeking out targets of opportunity.

Unfortunately, Detroit is a target-rich environment.

SUMMATION

As of this posting, the situation in the Detroit Area of Operations has become something like a four-way standoff, with each faction waiting to see what move the others will make while attempting to replenish respective forces and probing for any potential weaknesses to exploit. Until then, all we can do is wait until the other proverbial shoe drops.

...31.06 MP MOVED/AUTHORIZATION:

ADMIN-03 <09-01-80/0500:00>...

- > Just some more housecleaning. Gotta use the downcycles well, so we're ready for things to get nuts again.
- > Slamm-0!
- > Attention! I have just intercepted a communication from what I think is an Ares black site located just outside of Chandler Park. I am also detecting movement around that area.
- > Heimdall-R
- > See? Here we go.
- > Slamm-0!

<<<BEGIN FILE DOWNLOAD:

HEIMDALL-R#0221 09-01-80/0245:21>>>

Unidentified Speaker #1: Emergency! Emergency! This is Chandler Park Maintenance; we are Code Omega, repeat we are Code Omega! Primary containment protocols have failed, repeat failed! Attempting secondary protocols, but they are not holding! All on-site response teams are no longer responding to communication! Do you copy?

Unidentified Speaker #2: We copy, Chandler Park, scrambling response team now. Can you initiate Hades?

Unidentified Speaker #1: We've tried, system not respon... *static* <Signal terminated at source>

- > Confirmed, multiple ground vehicles staging in the area. They seem to be arrayed around ... explosion detected, one hundred meters northeast. Vehicles now moving toward that location; multiple unknowns moving from opening in ground created by blast.
- > Polaris

- > Whoever they are, they better move their asses. Unidentified VTOLs just lifted off from Windsor International. Sucker bet on where they're going. Opening image link now.
- > Orbital DK
- > Damn! Scratch one whirlybird! I do so love rocket launchers!
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Make that two, spirits and VTOLs don't mix. Those slags on the ground came prepared.
- > Lyran
- > Hey! What happened to the feed, DK? It was just getting good!
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Sorry, thought I saw a GOD agent lurking. Figured it was a good time to bail. We've seen enough anyway.
- > Orbital DK
- > Riiiiight.
- > Turbo Bunny

...31.06 MP MOVED/AUTHORIZATION:

ADMIN-03 <09-12-80/0500:00>...

- > More housekeeping. *sigh*
- > Slamm-0!
- > I know it's been kind of eerie, last week Motown was rocking, hoop-kicking all over the streets. But HEte=aas8 hawsh new has=qi43n\$ ****ERROR****
- > Brutus Ex-Mehehasgeg ****ERROR****
- > Hey, anyone else getttttttttttttt ****ERROR****
- > H4ugaw ugasgggggggggggggg

<<<<WARNING: SYSTEM ALERT!!!>>>>

<<<<UNAUTHORIZED USERS DETECTED!!!>>>>

- > **Drek!** Attention, all users, we have a security breach in progress! Initiating emergency security protocols!
- > Slamm-0!
- > Oh frag no you don't, not on **my system!**
- > Glitch
- > What's going on?
- > Pistons
- > Direct attack, someone is trying to crash us!
- > Bull
- > Getting multiple attacks on all fro28'4hhggg ****ERROR****
- > Operator Bastard
- > wiy39Q\$633agsg
- > Eearrrrrrrrhahssssss382y342\$#\$\$%

- > Okay, you mother-fraggers... take **that!**
- > Glitch

<<<INTRUDER COUNTER-MEASURES: ACTIVE>>>
<<<UNAUTHORIZED USERS: REMOVED>>>

- > Hope you enjoy the dumpsho....eEyuasy673#^4
- > Glitch
- > Overconfident old fragger. You think it would be THAT easy? Enjoy. *gives middle finger*
- > ???Unknown User???

<<<<WARNING: VIRAL CODE DETECTED!!!!>>>

- > I can say the same to you. You got it DK?
- > Glitch
- > Got your six!
- > Orbital DK

<<<...EMERGENCY DATA PURGE: ENACTED...>>>

- > Catch us if you can Mutha
FRAGGGGAAAAA!!!!!!!!823H3w!!!eAse\$76!!!!111!1
- > Glitch

...SYSTEM SHUT DOWN IN 5...4...3...2...

<SYSTEM OFFLINE>

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

<<3...\$AWT644DGETEAT7...\$DDD>>

<<<SYSTEM RECOVERY: ACTIVE>>>
<<<REINITIALIZE SYSTEM Y/N?>>>
...<<<BEGIN SYSTEM RESTORE,
DATE/TIME: 10-01-2080/1919.31>>>...

'HAVE A NICE DAY!'

- > Well, that was the most annoying thing I've ever had to deal with.
- > Glitch
- > Damn! I thought JackPoint was gone for good!
- > Danger Sensei
- > JackPoint going down was one thing, but when the rest of the data havens went dark, I had a bad feeling.
- > 2XL

- > Well, on a side note, that kind of worked out for us. Old Pale Scale back in Denver thinks we're all dead and gone. We've now got some breathing room.
- > Peri
- > Still, only took us—what, nineteen days to get back up and running? I have to give DK some mad respect for literally saving us at the last second.
- > Bull
- > You wrote the program; Asgard simply had the space to spare. You really should clear your data caches more often.
- > Orbital DK
- > What **was** all that? And how are you—we—even back online? Is the rest of the data still intact?
- > X-Prime
- > Should be, I'll check to make sure and clean up all the error code.
- > Bull
- > Leave the ones for this section. I want anyone who reads this to see our battle scar.
- > Slamm-0!
- > To answer: Simultaneous attack by several independent hackers. Don't know the why, but educated guess is that we became too big a thorn in someone's side. The how is a special program I cooked up after Crash 2.0, to prevent another Jormungand from taking so many lives. Hoped I'd never have to use it, but ... here we are, still kicking.
- > Glitch
- > But we weren't the only ones hit. In honor of our grand re-opening, I've got a new data packet with stories going back to just before we went off-line that I'd like to share. And they're from someone I'm also glad is alive and kicking.
- > Sunshine

THIS JUST IN: BATTLES OF DETROIT!

BY JULIA 'DEADLINE' PESINA

POSTED BY: SUNSHINE

<UPLOADED 10-01-80/1115.58>

STORY 006: SMALL VICTORIES

This is Julia Pesina reporting from Platinum Troll-girls, the unlikely HQ of the group known on the streets as the "Irregulars." Made up of mercs, shadowrunners, and a host of civilians, the Irregulars have been fighting their own battles against the bug menace here in Detroit since fighting first broke out.



Their primary focus thus far has been search-and-destroy missions against errant bugs that have slipped past Ares' military lines. From what I've been told by Irregular CO Colonel Anne Raveheart, progress against the bugs has been "tedious and brutal" because of the difficulty in locating them, let alone eliminating them, in the often-ruined landscape of the Motor City.

But while this has become a bloody battle of attrition for the Irregulars, there are still small victories to be had. For example, last night at approximately 0300 local time, an Irregular strike force was able to free approximately two hundred captives from a local organ-legging ring. Suffering from a host of serious medical conditions, the freed captives are currently undergoing evaluation in the small hospital in Platinum's basement.

While I have been unable to interview the captives, I briefly spoke to one survivor who was with Colonel McCord and only identified herself as "Ellis." The good colonel declined to comment, and all Ellis was willing to say was, "We are glad for our rescue and wish to help our liberators in any way we can."

With everything that's been going on, it's nice to see the good guys get one in the win column. This is Julia Pesina, signing off.

- > Time, day ... I didn't want to push it before, but methinks that Rifleman and company got more than just some average citizens out of Chandler Park.
- > Turbo Bunny

- > All information regarding current operations is classified. Sorry (not sorry).
- > Rifleman

STORY 007: NO GOOD DEED GOES UNPUNISHED

sounds of gunfire detected

This is Julia Pesina, still at Platinum!

sounds of gunfire detected

Where we are currently under siege by Ghost knows how many bug spirits and their shamans! The attack occurred at 0300 local time when insects attempted to make entry through underground tunnels and at street ... *clink* Damn! Need a reload!

sounds of gunfire detected

But we got early warning before the attack and are now executing a counter-ambush. Technically I shouldn't be doing this, but I might as well try to get one last story done before I die! As one of the mercs here likes to say, "They may take my life, but they'll have to climb over a mountain of brass to get to it!"

STORY 008: ARES VS. BUGS: ROUND TWO

This is Julia "not dead yet" Pesina reporting from a rooftop approximately one kilometer from what is called "Zone Two," next to the Martin Park Uni-

versity District. Ten hours ago, a bug assault was launched on Irregular HQ at Platinum Trollgirls. At the time, we thought we were the main target. But it turns out that we were merely one part of a greater offensive.

sounds of distant gunfire and explosions detected

In the distance, I'm watching as Ares military forces and their new mercenary reserves engage once again in direct combat with multiple insect swarms. Up until now, I have yet to fully grasp the true scale of all-out warfare, and I feel like anything I say won't do it justice. But I'll do my best.

I'm no military expert, but I know what a rout looks like. Here in Zone Two, I'm watching as armored infantry is swarmed by insects, leaving nothing but carnage in their wake. I'm watching as heavily armored vehicles and transports are desperately trying to lay down suppression fire and hold the line but are still being slowly pushed back.

At the beginning of the battle, artillery was used, but too often it resulted in friendly-fire incidents, the same with fighter-bombers. I believe the term is "danger close." Gunships and aerial drones attempted to intervene but were forced back by swarms of flying insects.

<121 second pause>

And speaking of, I need to sign off and get moving. Elements of the battle are starting to drift my way and I don't want to be ...

sounds of unidentified engines detected

<<<WARNING! NOISE LEVELS EXCEEDING SAFE LEVELS!>>>

Holy frag!

Aircraft from the southeast have just roared overhead and ... they're heavy transports and they're dropping some of the biggest armored vehicles I've ever seen! I'm seeing some markings on the sides ... MET2000?

unidentified noise detected

One of those heavy vehicles just literally *squashed* a three-meter-tall beetle-looking thing and a host of smaller ones. I felt that impact in my bones! Others are simply blowing the bugs out of their way with their vector-thrust engines before annihilating them with concentrated heavy machine gun fire! I'm also seeing scores of armored infantry inserting into the battle via parachute and some kind of jet-thruster packs, mopping up in the wake of these behemoth tanks! Most of them have a color scheme similar to the MET panzers, but I'm also seeing various others; including what looks like some blue-lightning theme. They are moving into position alongside Ares military forces ... and my God, they're starting to push the bugs back!

<501 second pause>

sounds of gunfire detected

sounds of unidentified cannon detected

Looks like the artillery is being called in! Wow, that one was close!

Bugs are now scattering ... and ... spirits are now manifesting and driving into the bug ranks

And wait ... frag!

faint sounds of gunfire detected

unidentified sound detected

Frag me with a chainsaw, that was close! A wasp just landed less than two meters from me, shot down by a drone that just wagged its wings at me as it flew overhead.

sounds of gunfire detected

Double-tap to the head, just to be sure you ugly fragger. I learned that the hard way yesterday. Things are starting to really heat up—time for this reporter to find a better vantage point.

This is Julia Pesina, singing off.

STORY 009: BATTLE AT ARES TOWER

Julia Pesina here. I'm still on the battlefield, but this time, I've made my way into Downtown Detroit a scant 0.75 kilometers from the massive Ares Tower. Five days ago, I thought I'd seen what a real battlefield looked like outside of Zone Two, but as the old saying goes, "I ain't seen nothing yet!"

Fighting has been raging throughout Detroit for the better part of a week, kicked off by either a new bug or Ares offensive—I'm not sure at this point, and I'm not sure it really matters. But what is of significance is that a splinter group of Ares forces, led by General Lloyd Ritter, has broken away from the rest of the ACMF and has sided with Colonel Ravenheart's Irregular forces. I can't confirm, but I've been told that after an initial battle with bugs near Zone Six on Zug Island, a group of mercenary reinforcements refused to fire on Irregular forces, who had come to the aid of the beleaguered Ares task force, which was about to be overrun by some new kind of "super bug" known as an Alpha. Also according to this rumor, General Ritter broke the deadlock, ordering the Ares forces to stand down on his own personal authority.

Similar scenes played out across the sprawl, too many to mention, with combat raging everywhere. But the common thread was the splintering of ACMF forces, with some adhering to Ares General Danforth's standing orders and others siding with the Irregulars under Ravenheart.

For days, sections of Detroit have endured brutal street fighting as Ares forces began a fighting withdrawal toward the Ares Tower, all but abandoning their positions in favor of defending their corporate HQ as insects poured out of Zones One, Two, and Four. The status of Five and Six are unknown.

The streets and most of the buildings within a half-kilometer radius of Ares Tower are a complete ruin; the tallest building in my immediate vicinity is the one I'm standing on right now, at only three stories tall. The chaos around Ares Tower is too vast, too complicated to fully describe. But what I can see are Ares forces backed up by defenses from the Tower itself, holding firm on a defensive line while Irregular forces pound them with heavy panzers, magic like



I've never seen before from both sides, hit-and-run lighting strikes from motley crews of modified vehicles, and drones striking at six-meter-tall bugs.

I don't know whether to be in awe or completely terrified. But for now, I'm staying right here, good or bad. I've got Grover set to auto-transmit all of my remaining files should something happen to me.

Wait, I'm seeing something ... something in the sky ...

<70 second pause>

It looks like ... it looks like a massive tear of some kind is opening up just over Ares Tower. I ... I don't know much about magic, but it reminds me of images from the Watergate Rift. Wait, something is happening ...

Something just launched from Ares Tower, like some kind of rocket engulfed in green energy! It's ... there's some kind of glow forming between us and the rift ... what is ...

unidentified sound detected

<<<WARNING! EXTRME NOISE LEVELS EXCEEDING SAFE LEVELS!>>>

AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!

<2034 second pause>

unidentified sound detected

What?!

Damn, I ... I don't know how long I was out, but gunfire has just started back up. As I'm look—ugh, that hurt—looking over the side of the building, I'm seeing ... I'm seeing what looks like Ares and Irregular forces conducting mop-up operations! There are dozens of bug corpses scattered everywhere, some are fleeing, and a few have gotten away, but it looks like the combined forces are starting to contain, corral, and eliminate ...

<34 second pause>

sound of cheering detected

Wait, I just got an AR message from Colonel McCord and General Ritter. They've issued a "stand down" order. My God ... the battle is over!

STORY 010: TO THE VICTORS ...

<<<WARNING! NOISE LEVELS EXCEEDING SAFE LEVELS!>>>

This is Deadline Pesina here back at Platinum Trollgirls for what is the most *insane* victory party *ever!* Behind me, the band Trolling Thunder is blasting away on the main stage, threatening to demolish everyone's eardrums! All around me, Irregular and Ares military forces are celebrating the victory against the bugs!

Six hours ago, new Ares CEO Arthur Vogel, who was thought killed in a terrorist bombing months ago, issued the stand-down order to all Ares forces, effectively ending what many are already calling the Battle of Detroit. Since then, clean-up operations have begun, but for those who fought on the front lines, we are celebrating!

I've been told that tomorrow morning, Vogel is going to make an official statement of some kind, likely about his new status and the status of former CEO Damien Knight.

But until then, those of us who've survived are remembering the dead, and living the life we still have. I don't know what the future may hold, but right now, in this moment, life is good.

This is Julia "Deadline" Pesina, singing off from Platinum Trollgirls in Detroit.



GHOST ARMY

“Sir, you need to see this.”

Lieutenant Matt Douglass let out a soft sigh and pinched his nose. This was the fifth time in the last hour that Tech Sergeant Dani Monroe had uttered that exact phrase to him. It was bad enough that he'd been stuck at the Fort Hamilton Ops Center for the past fourteen—make it fifteen hours tracking III Corps' progress as they made their way toward Detroit, with only the worst soykaf in the world to keep him going. But worse, he'd been forced to spend all that time with “Monotone” (or “Monotonous,” take your pick) Monroe. The tech sergeant was excellent at her job, but it was said that her personality had been surgically removed to make room for her military-grade control rig implant. Douglass was convinced that this was some sort of non-judicial punishment, or an experiment to see if boredom could be weaponized.

Even so, they were still technically on high alert. But “high alert” could only be physically maintained for so long, especially in a ten-by-ten

sealed-off room. Douglass wasn't sure what was going on—all he was told was that the Ares corporate forces were slugging it out with some unknown threat—openly, mind you—on the streets of Detroit, and the fighting had started almost a week ago. So now III Corps in its entirety had been scrambled and was hauling ass toward the Motor City.

Personally, Douglass liked the idea that the UCAS Army was riding to a corporation's rescue. But like any emergency military deployment, there'd been problems from the word “go.” The problem he specifically had to deal with was the communications issue III Corps, call-sign Peacemaker, had been experiencing since crossing the New York–Pennsylvania border. Comm problems, Matrix connection problems, even the GPS system was acting up the closer they got to the Ohio border. Additionally, Monroe felt the need to inform Douglass of every damn issue, glitch, or anomalous reading she got, no matter how fragging minor—all in that flat, robotic voice of hers.

But as watch officer, it was Douglass' duty to evaluate every report.

Downing the last of his long-cold soykaf, he tossed the styro-plastic cup into a nearby trashcan and walked the three meters to Monroe's station.

"Okay, Monroe, what's it this time?"

With that faraway look she always had, Monroe's hands kept moving slowly, manipulating several AROs as she spoke in her usual monotone, "Sir, I've lost complete contact with Peacemaker."

"Wait, what do you mean, *complete* contact?" Douglass said, his hand reaching into augmented reality and grabbing the main Ops ARO. According to the system, they'd lost contact with every single unit that was a part of Peacemaker. They were just ... gone. Even the GPS systems were offline. "Run diagnostics, this can't be right."

"Already running, sir. But all indicators are coming back green. Peacemaker is simply off the board."

That couldn't be right. Communications failure for some, or even a majority, of the units would be one thing, but everyone, even personal commlinks? "What was their last known position?" Douglass asked, already requesting access to the satellite imaging array through the Operations C&C.

"Sending you coordinates now, map designation: Area Twenty-Two."

Douglass entered the coordinates into the sat-relay. It took six minutes for the array to realign and images to come back. But when they did, they revealed ... nothing, not even the small town that was supposed to be there. He stood there for a moment, his mouth going a bit dry before he opened a communications link with command.

"This is Lieutenant Douglass, OIC at Comm-Ops. I need to speak with Colonel Bancroft immediately."

Adrenaline pumping, Tigman let out a howl of joy as he sped along I-80 through the warm, late-summer night, wind whipping over the contours of his face and horns. The Scorpion, modified for his troll frame, growled beneath him as road dust billowed in his wake. He leaned into one turn and then quickly accelerated out of another with an expertise not normally associated with a rider and bike so large. Grinning with satisfaction, he was about to let out another howl, but a thick blanket of fog suddenly engulfed him. Momentarily panicked at the sudden blindness, he tried to brake. But before he could, something hit his front tire and launched Tigman into the air. The last thing he remembered before being claimed by unconsciousness was his prized bike being taken from underneath him.

Tigman awoke to hear the ticking of the bike cooling several meters behind him. His eyes flick-

ered open. Through a break in the fog, he saw the stars arrayed above him. Except ... the stars were wrong.

No Big Dipper, no Orion, no nothing. Tigman knew the sky as well as he knew the roads and the land. Wait, where were the roads? Placing his hand on the ground, he felt nothing but the raw soil of bare earth. The road had somehow disappeared. A small warm but cooling spot glowed in the distance. Body aching, he limped over to examine it.

His eyes scanned the earth. There were no tracks, but up ahead was a deer cleanly cut in half. No, that wasn't quite right. No blood had been spilled, and there was no sign of violence. It was as if the carcass' blood and guts were just—never there.

Tigman had to make a choice: Go back the way he came, or make for the Swope farm about a half-kilometer ahead. Maybe he could find help there. Limping back toward the motorcycle, Tigman pulled mostly intact gear from his saddlebags.

Walking back ten meters into the darkness, he fiddled with the electronics in his smartgoggles. Readouts indicated "system failure." The fog, or maybe the impact from ditching his Scorpion, was somehow messing with the optics. Only thing left functioning was his goggles' thermographics. But even then, he didn't see a fragging thing, not even random wildlife. He reached for his commlink, but that was gone.

The deafening lack of any sound, other than the ones he made, grated on Tigman's nerves, and his mind created false noises to distract him. He looked over his shoulder for the hundredth time, but nothing was there. Nothing was ever there.

That couldn't be right. Tigman knew that he should at least be close to the outskirts of town by now. He dropped a few old-fashioned road flares to keep from getting lost and clicked on his flashlight. Still, fog was so thick ... Tigman checked the ground for tracks, for the road, for *anything*, but still there was nothing.

No. Wait, there was something. On the ground, about three meters to his right, were a pair of five parallel lines on the dirt. Tigman lowered himself to the ground. Two sets of five lines scratched into the earth for three meters. He wasn't sure what to make of them. And then he saw them: ten meta-human fingernails broken off in the dirt. These weren't like the deer from before; these had been removed the old-fashioned way. But the scratch marks stopped and went nowhere. In desperation, Tigman moved the fingernails and frantically dug into the earth. Everything felt wrong, and he knew he should leave, but he didn't. He wouldn't. Around him, the fog and air felt heavy, like it was pushing against him. Tigman began to dig with a frantic, almost animalistic need, one he'd never felt before. Then he found the answer to all his questions. It was right there in front of him. If only

he had paid attention to the clues. That was when it hit him, and he understood everything. Giggles erupted from his chest, and then a full laugh.

And finally he howled.

The first rays of light peeked out over the horizon, but this time they came from the south. The fog had started to clear some, but all it revealed to Tigman was a barren landscape. The sun then broke the horizon, its rays dissipating the fog as they went. The rays crept toward the crazed, howling troll. But by the time they arrived at where he'd been standing, there was nothing to be found.

All that remained was a horn adorned with the carving of a wolf.

///REQUESTING ACCESS: SECURE NODE
78-22-54/4(B) `WAR ROOM'/GHOST ARMY///

...USER NAME/PASSWORD
ACCEPTED/ACCESS GRANTED...

///DATE/TIME: 08-13-80/1018:54 ZULU///

WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE YOU AREN'T

POSTED BY: ORBITAL DK
◀UPLOADED 08-11-80/0501:33▶

- ▶ Given the current situation in Detroit, I was ready to just lump all this data in the previous Detroit file and forget about it. But as more data came in regarding this little incident, I started a separate file so the data specific to it doesn't get lost in the shuffle. Not gonna lie, this one creeped me out just a bit. I'll get this party started with a summary of what I have so far. If anyone wants the raw data, PM me.
- ▶ Orbital DK

Okay. On August 8, at approximately 0343 Eastern Time, I began tracking units from the UCAS Army III Corps deploying from bases along the East Coast. Sources told me that this was part of an emergency deployment order that came straight from the Pentagon. Twenty hours later, III Corps' various elements rendezvoused at a staging area twenty kilometers from the Pennsylvania border before charging off toward Detroit. My guess is that DeeCee finally decided to put foot to hoop. But on August 10 at approximately 0013, all communication—short-wave, wireless, even GPS—went dead. But that's not the freaky part. Literally all traces of this military force went missing, as in completely disappeared. From my estimates, an entire UCAS corps worth of personnel and materiel just pulled a ninja vanish.



- > Wait, are we sure? Can this be some new tech or something, like a cloaking device of some kind?
- > Wiz Bang
- > Chum, you been playing way too many games. Ain't no such thing. And even so, UCAS ain't got the juice to develop it. One of the megas, maybe.
- > J-Hammer
- > Yeah, and seventy-ish years ago there wasn't any magic, either.
- > Wiz Bang
- > Focus, you two. I think we need to keep feelers out and scanners active on this one. But we have some additional data on this. Longtime associate of mine, Jim Striker (a merc turned runner and Asgard regular), sent me a message about ten hours ago. I've tried to reach back out to him to see if he has any additional info, but so far, zilch. I'm guessing he and his team have gone to ground, or at least gone radio silent for whatever reason. So if anyone has any leads as to where or how I can get in touch with him, or anyone on his team, pass along my request, will ya?
- > Orbital DK
- > If they're not already dead.
- > Shockwave

««OPENING MESSAGE #05221
/SENDER: J. STRIKER
/USER ID: 060644»»

Going to get right to the point and keep this short for now—something fragged up is going down in Pennsylvania. I'm not exactly sure what, but I'm thinking we barely missed being caught up in it.

Approximately sixteen hours ago, my team and I got the call for reinforcements from Rifleman via the Outpost and decided to answer. Payment terms were better than my last two Desert Wars tours combined. And besides, I owe Rifleman and Bravo Company one. So we got our drek together and headed out from our temporary HQ on the East Coast and start traveling west. Along the way, we picked up on a massive UCAS regular army convoy moving west along the old 80 turnpike. Obviously, we didn't want to get in their way. But it also didn't take a tactical genius to figure out where they were going. So I got on the horn to Rifleman to let him know to expect some more company. He then ordered us to shadow them and keep him and the coalition updated.

And just like that, we were on a recon mission.

At first it was easy. The UCAS Army grunts seemed more interested in getting somewhere as fast as an entire army corps can move than they were in operational security. But we quickly realized they were having comm and wireless problems of some kind—all transmissions we intercepted were garbled and full of static. We

even tried to see how close we could get a spotter drone, but once it got within two clicks, it started having issues, so we backed off and relied on visual means alone.

That was until they ran into some nasty fog just outside some small town called Dutchville off 80 about fifteen clicks from the OH-PA border. That's when we lost visual contact for about five hours, so we decided to try to get ahead of them and double back. We waited for another twelve hours near Youngstown before deciding to go hunting for them.

Then we got to Dutchville—or where our GPS said it should be.

What we saw was nothing, literally nothing. For at least five kilometers in all directions, everything was gone. Dutchville was gone, all buildings, all flora, all fauna as far as we could tell, even the damn stretch of highway was gone. The people were gone. Even the grass was gone. Only raw earth was left.

Recon on foot revealed more of the same. We found some odds and ends scattered about, but very little of what could be described as tracks of any sort. TJ, my team's street sam, found the remnants of a standard-issue UCAS Army rifle, but it had some kind of odd damage. Best way I can describe it was that somehow, something scooped a good chunk of the weapon away, as if it was never there. It's hard to describe and a bit unnerving. Even though there's nothing around, I can't help but feel like we're being tracked by someone—or *something*.

We're not going to stick around much longer. This whole area feels wrong, and my team magician is anxious to leave. We're going to check another half-click before heading back. Check back when I know more.

Striker, out.

- > Anyone know anything about this Dutchville?
- > Stone
- > Small Pennsylvania town, population apparently was about ten to fifteen thousand. Whole area is a large agricultural zone, lots of old-school farms still exist there. It was incorporated more than twenty years ago, when a Wuxing subsidiary opened an intermodal hub in 2058. The town just kept slowly growing. Nice place to stop and rest, but that's about it.
- > Traveler Jones
- > How do you lose an entire army corps? I did a Matrix search. That's almost 100,000 people.
- > Svetlana Mankin
- > They didn't lose III Corps. That's not possible. My understanding is that they simply had to help re-establish command and control.
- > Hans Erik Jonsen
- > And how much deepweed have you been smoking? Are you not playing attention?
- > Cayman

- > All of this is still unconfirmed. I have yet to see any real evidence.
- > Hans Erik Jonsen
- > There's one in every crowd ...
- > Star Duster
- > I can confirm at least a few things. After reports of fighting in Detroit were finally "confirmed" (take that for what you will), President Colloton ordered the mobilization of III Corps under the call-sign "Peacemaker" with orders to "bring Detroit under control by any means necessary." Rules of engagement also stated: Eliminate all non-UCAS combatants.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Frag. That would lead to a lot of horrible ramifications for the UCAS had Peacemaker made it to Detroit. The IMA and the CC would have had a fit.
- > Hard Exit
- > I'm getting the distinct impression that Colloton doesn't give a frag anymore. Detroit may be owned mostly by Ares, but it's still technically UCAS territory. And she's still slotted about Ares repeatedly turning their backs on the UCAS. Sounds like payback to me.
- > Scattershot
- > Anyone want to lay odds on how long the UCAS will try to keep this thing under wraps and what kind of spin they're going to put on it? Contact me via PM, and we'll get the betting pool started!
- > Cool Hand Duke
- > UCAS Central Command didn't waste time; less than six hours after they lost contact with Peacemaker, they deployed a Pennsylvania National Guard Reserve unit to find them and re-establish contact. Below is a communications transcript between Cent-Com and the Pennsylvania First Recon squad that I ... found. But it is incomplete, with several mp of data corrupted. I've taken the liberty of removing the corrupted parts.
- > Torrent

«« AUDIO TRANSCRIPT FILE
 DOWNLOAD: COMPLETE.
 OPENING, FILE #TR/69313»»»

0605 HOURS

"Testing one, two, three. Did you catch that?"
 "Roger. We are live, First Sergeant. Over."
 < Image link enabled, sending: First Sergeant R. Branson *confirmed*>
 < Image link enabled, receiving: Sergeant First Class D. Hefflinger *confirmed*>
 "You want me to hunt down Three Corps, Top?"
 "We lost radio contact. Find them for me, Sergeant."

"What aren't you telling me, First Sergeant?"
 "Just do your job, Sergeant."
 "Dammit, First Sergeant! I'm short."
 "You know what's at stake, here? If this is any way connected to what's going down in Detroit, then consider that we are less than one hundred clicks from our homes. You do this, and you're helping protect our families. And this order comes straight from Cent-Com."
 "Don't ask this of me, First Sergeant. I've served twenty-three years. My time is up in six days and a wake-up."
 "You're my best recon spotter. I need those finely tuned assensing skills of yours. Find III Corps by scouting their last known whereabouts designated Area Two-Two. Comms will be intermittent. Report everything you can. Move out with your squad by 0640. Embrace the suck, Sergeant."
 "Roger, wilco ..."

0654 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"Command, this is Recon Two-Zero, we have crossed into area Alpha Twenty-Two. The fog is still quite thick. I smell fresh-turned soil. I'm walking on bare dirt. The road is gone. Farmer Swope's barn and home are missing. Over."

"Copy Two-Zero. What is that we are seeing up ahead? Over."

"I see a ... looks like a wrecked motorcycle. Troll-size boot tracks lead to the edge. They return and head into the double deuce. I see—"

<End transmission >

0744 HOURS

<Begin transmission >

"Command, this is Two-Zero, if you're still reading me. It's so quiet, so eerie. Just a light breeze humming through my gear. With comms down, all electronic chatter has ceased. I hear the eight soldiers behind me scuffle at times. I'm signaling a stop every couple hundred meters to stare through binoculars that seldom work. An unremitting wasteland. We are ..."

<SIGNAL LOSS>

"Sergeant, this is Command, do you copy? Over? He's gone again, sir ..."

< End transmission >

0804 HOURS

<Begin transmission >

"This gear is fubar."

"Two-Zero, you are transmitting. Over."

"Sorry, Command. I have no functioning navigational equipment. Going old-school. Hold on ... <fifteen-second pause> I've pulled out my survival knife. It has a compass in the handle. Dammit! No reading. Over."

“Be more specific, Two-Zero. Over.”

“The compass is spinning like an insane top.”

<Thirty-two seconds radio silence >

“Two-Zero, I say again ... Two-Zero ... Sergeant?!”

<Heavy breathing. Garbled voices in the distance.>

“Down. Everyone down. Slovenski, report!”

“Something’s out th—”

<End transmission >

> What is this drek?

> Grollin

> Not sure, but Recon Two-Zero—a.k.a. Sergeant First Class Donald Hefflinger—served under me in 2065 when we were both still regular Army. Squared-away soldier who knows his business.

> Major Hazzard

0945 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“Bravo wun tre this is echo too fower, over.”

“Bravon wun tree this foxtrot Zulu wun wun.

What’s your twenty, over?”

<Thirty seconds radio silence>

“Bravo wun tree what’s your 20, over?”

<Forty-five seconds radio silence>

“Alpha squad, what are your impressions from the III Corps transmission?”

“Say again? What transmission, Command?”

“Stand by ... we will analyze the signal. It sounded faint and distorted. Go to—

<End transmission >

1001 HOURS

<Begin transmission, image link established:

Subject: Hefflinger, D.>

“Command, I will now scan astral space, over.”

<Image link terminated, audio: active>

“What happened to Sarge?”

“Don’t touch him! *Medic!*”

“Give him room! He’s breathing ...”

“Why is he crying?”

“Get him some—”

<End transmission>

1006 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“I’m back, Command. Don’t make me go there again.”

“Stay on mission, Two-Zero. What did you see, over?”

“Something bad happened. Astral space is tainted with it. I can’t go back. Don’t make go back!”

“Mission parameters require you to proceed dual-natured. Over.”

“Astral space is distorted. There is a random quality to it. I think ... I think I saw something in there.”

“What did you see, Two-Zero, over?”

“First squad, circle up. Maintain unit discipline. Return to defensive positions. I’m going dual. Wait, I’m only seeing seven, not eight, heads. Where’s Private Orvath?”

“Alpha Two-Zero, this is Command, maintain communications protocol!”

“Visual scanning the dirt. All I see of her is a final set of bootprints. Corporal Reeth initiate a search for—”

<End transmission >

1122 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“What are you not telling me, Command? Over.”

“Stay on mission, Alpha Two-Zero, over.”

“Look, I don’t—”

<End transmission >

1154 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“What was the status of the transmission from III Corps? Over.”

“That transmission was logged in at 1846 by PFC Greenbolt. Over.”

“Command, don’t understand, over.”

“Neither do we, Two-Zero. Proceed on heading two-niner-eight. Over.”

“I always know my way, Command.”

<End transmission >

1303 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“Command, image link is out, going to narrate. We are moving slowly, hyper-alert. My soldiers’ heads are on swivels, fingers tight on triggers. Not good. But what can I do?”

“Facts only, Two-Zero, no editorializing, over.”

“Fine ... copy, Command. I see an object breaking up the cool lines of the area, which I can describe only as desolate. I’m moving closer. It appears to be a series of objects.”

<Thirty-eight-second pause>

“At one hundred meters, I am seeing more than a hundred combat boots. I scanned nothing astrally, though I seem to be acclimating to local astral space. I’m motioning my soldiers to fan out. We are surrounding the formation of boots. I’m exploring the area. No tracks other than the ones we just made.”

<Seventy-eight-second pause>

“Command, there are seven rows of boots. Thirteen pairs per row. Meter intervals. Each scuffed in its own way. Treads worn. Some brush-polished. Others spit-shined. All standing neatly at attention facing east. One hundred eighty-two boots. Empty. Command I don’t know what, wait ... *contact left!*”

<Sounds of automatic gunfire detected>
<End transmission >

- > Area 22 is now the land of weirdness.
- > Road Dog
- > Wonder if there's anything valuable there?
- > Flipper
- > Are you even paying attention?
- > The Kingmaker
- > No guts, no glory.
- > Flipper
- > I want to know what that "contact" is.
- > Moreau

1355 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"I'm back, Command <heavy breathing>. Sit-rep is red, repeat *red*, and as follows: Private Orvath and Sergeant McCullen are both MIA. Corporal Yonders has a broken arm. We have expended several clips, but no contact, I repeat, *no contact* with hostile since initial sighting. Squad morale is low. There's something out there. Over."

"Please be more specific, Two-Zero, over."

<High-pitched laugh detected>

"No idea, Command. We have—"

<End transmission>

1454 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"There's an astral signature out there, Command, over."

"What do you see, Two-Zero, over?"

"Spread out. Eyes open, squad."

<Twenty-two-second pause>

"We are clear. Command, we have a dead body. Blood is still pumping. Look sharp. She is a dwarf. Armor jacket. Shotgun. Cybereyes, datajacks, obvious cyberarm. Over."

"Any idea of how she died, over?"

"I'll take some footage and send. But it looks like a bite and some tearing. Some sort of animal, maybe."

<End transmission>

- > Oh, frag. That sounds like Holly Terror, one of Jim Striker's crew.
- > Ms. Abrams

1533 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"I think I'm losing it. I saw a coyote a half-click back. Grey, mangy-looking cur. We walked up to within five meters from him. He just sat there. Looked at us all with them baleful eyes. No fear.

And then he was gone like a puff of smoke. No tracks. Just gone. Over."

"Say again, Two-Zero, what's the problem, over?"

"I'm the only one who saw him ... over."

"Two-Zero, adjust bearing to—"

<End transmission >

1600 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"Bravo wun tree. CDC, come in bravo wun tre. Over."

"PFC Greenbolt this is Sergeant Hefflinger, over!"

<Forty-five-second pause>

"Command, are you getting all this, over?"

"Loud and clear, Two-Zero. We believe that is an old transmission. We will confirm that, over."

"We are coming from—"

<End transmission >

1622 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"Command, we are taking a break. My soldiers are fatigued and there is a huge emotional toll here. This is worse than the desert. There is some contour, but nothing to grab one's attention. It seems so alien. There are no signs of life, but it always seems there is something going on just out of sight. Over."

"We copy that. We believe your dead body was killed by a lion, over."

"Repeat that?!"

"A lion, Two-Zero. We want a—"

<End transmission >

1711 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"Command, we spotted a variation in the land about fifteen minutes ago. It appeared to be water. As we moved closer, I recognized the stream from some fly fishing I've done in the area. The problem is that it means that even though we've been walking nine hours, we haven't traveled a corresponding distance, over."

"Are you sure about that, over?"

"This is the first terrain feature we've encountered. I *know* these waters."

"Cool it, Two-Zero. I meant no offense. Over."

"We should arrive at the stream in approximately seven minutes."

<End transmission >

1721 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

"No. No. No. No. I'm standing by the stream. It's ruined. No vegetation. No fish. Rocks all gone, over."

“Settle down, Two-Zero. What else do you see?”

“In astral, the stream looks somehow *wrong*. And the water is flowing in the wrong direction ... *hey!* Get out of the stream bed, DH. Someone help me get him out of there. DH, you with us? Crap. Elevate his feet and warm him up, he looks shocky.”

“Get off me, Sarge, I’m fine! I felt like ... like I was getting sucked into some sort of void. Felt like I was pulled away ...”

“What were you doing, Two-Zero? Report, Over!”

“There’s something odd about the water. I think it was an astral phenomenon. When I stop assensing, there is no water. I don’t know what this means.”

<End transmission >

1755 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“Can you hear me ... Can any one hear me? Where did they go?”

“Command, did you read that? The voice sounded familiar, over,”

“Where are you, over?”

“Stand by, trying to ... hold on.”

<Ninety-three-second pause>

<Screams, automatic, and small arms fire detected>

“*Contact right, contact right!*”

<Forty-five seconds muffled yelling>

“Cease fire! Cease fire! Command, we have suffered two casualties! We have made contact with the hostile. Jesus, what was that thing! It came so fast. Look what it did to Manuel! Where did it come from? How many more are out there?”

“Two-Zero, *Sergeant!* Focus on my voice. What did you see, over?”

“It was ... it is ... I don’t know. It’s back!”

<Automatic and small arms fire detected>

“It’s this beast, Command. It has the head of a lion. Body of a shark. The markings of a cheetah. It moves like it’s swimming through the air. I see it astrally and normal vision. It seems to assense like sort of like a spirit, but not quite.”

<Automatic, small arms fire, and screams detected>

<End transmission>

> Holy drek. Is that the first recorded sighting of a chiark?

> Two-Gun Charlie

> Dunno, only heard about those things as legends and myths.

> Moreau

> Contact of mine in the DIA says there’s additional footage First Recon never saw.

> Torrent

> Was it me, or did anyone else hear some kind of faint language in the background, almost like an echo?

> Elijah

1822 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“They are gone. They are all gone.”

“Command, repeat that, over.”

“That was III Corps. It’s General Tordahl, over.”

“Can you locate him, over?”

“Negative, Two-Zero. That’s not a live broadcast.”

“Frag me ...”

<End transmission>

1856 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

<Sporadic small arms fire detected>

“Command, we are being stalked! What aren’t you telling me? The mission brief was bullshit. You never meant for us to get out alive! What have you done to us?”

“Focus, Two-Zero. Stay on mission. You will get out of this!”

“I lost another soldier. We are almost out of ammo. We have hit nothing. What do I tell my people? They are looking at me for answers I don’t have!”

“Stay on mission. Find III Corps, focus. You are 100 kilometers from home. Let’s save our families, Sergeant, over.”

<End transmission >

1927 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“I think we’re close, Command. The sun is starting to go down. This shouldn’t have taken all day. We’re tired. The landscape is still wide open and barren. I’ve found the troll’s tracks. They lead to a small hole and a troll horn. Wait. I’m picking it up. It’s etched with a ... wolf?”

<End transmission>

2021 HOURS

<Begin transmission>

“What’s that? My God, no! They are gone. They are all gone.”

“Two-Zero? Sergeant, are you still there? *Sergeant?*”

<End transmission>

> And that’s the last bit of paydata we’ve gotten since. Wish I had more, or something profound to say. But like I said before, this one gave me a few chills.

> Orbital DK



BLACKOUT

“I would like to say once again to assure your viewers, Sam, that the situation in Detroit is under control. We have already mobilized a relief force to deal with the unfortunate failure of public services and provide for the basic needs of all UCAS citizens.”

Senator Lance Kittering (R-MI) smiled into the lenses of the small camera drone hovering a mere meter from his face, hoping to project stalwart confidence he most certainly did not feel as he addressed reporter Sam Bluestone of the trid news show, *DeeCee Now!* In fact, Kittering could feel the bile inching up the back of his throat as his stomach lurched yet again.

But the one skill Kittering knew he could count on was his ability to lie and look good while doing it.

“I see, Senator. But what about the vast number of corporate citizens in Detroit? Will they be receiving aid as well?”

Kittering nodded and pressed his lips together slightly, trying to look like he was seriously pondering the question. In reality, it was nothing more

than a stall tactic while he tried to compile an answer. So far, Bluestone had kept to the script, giving softball questions designed to help Kittering sell the idea to the average UCAS citizen that the situation in Detroit was nothing more than a power outage, an outage that might be a massive inconvenience but would be addressed and eventually solved in due time.

But that damn dandelion-eater of a reporter just blindsided him with a question that put him in a very awkward position, given his current ties to Ares Macrotechnology. The question might as well have been “Are you a loyal UCAS citizen or a corporate sell-out?”

Behind the camera-drone, Kittering saw Maggie Henderson, his chief of staff, already texting away, a furious look on her face. Kittering loved that look—it usually meant someone was going to get their hoop reamed, which was one of the reasons he hired her.

“First, Sam, I want to say that any metahuman suffering of any kind within our borders is pure-

ly unacceptable. However, as you may well know, the current law can make things tricky with regards to corporate extraterritoriality. We would never knowingly turn a blind eye, but we cannot simply ignore Ares' sovereignty over their private property. They have rights that must be respected. Now, if Ares would advance a formal request for assistance, I would be the first one to spearhead such a measure through the proper governmental channels. We are not heartless here in the United Canadian and American States, but we are a nation of laws."

Bluestone looked for a few seconds like he was about to reply, but then he cocked his head a bit to the right, as if listening to something carefully. With practiced ease, he maintained his stride and said "Well, thank you, Senator Kittering, for your time. We will return in a few moments with Artie Jones and his editorial on ..."

Kittering didn't bother to listen to the rest, disconnecting the link. The small camera drone slowly drifted down to its recharging cradle. The senator then swallowed hard, forcing the chicken marsala he'd had for dinner back where it belonged.

"My apologies for that, sir. I was assured Bluestone was reliable."

Kittering waved Henderson's concerns away. "It's not your fault; people are fallible. But I would like some assurances that this will not become some kind of impediment."

"Already taken care of, sir. The Firm has been contacted, and appropriate actions will be taken."

Kittering nodded, enjoying for a moment the knowledge of the power he wielded with just a commcall. It was a delicate time right now. If he were to survive it, he needed to stay ahead of anything that could potentially cause him any problems. That was what politics was all about, after all. Kittering was about to offer Henderson a token platitude of praise when an ARO window opened in the corner of his vision. The words froze in his throat as he recognized the incoming commcode.

"Ah, good work, Margret. That will be all for now. Get some rest—we have the subcommittee hearings tomorrow and I'll, ah, need you rested."

Henderson stood there for a moment, a slight confused look on her face, but she accepted her boss' orders without question, as she always did. With a nod, she backed out of the office.

Rubbing his face, Kittering mentally accepted the incoming call. A familiar female silhouette greeted him.

"Your answer to Bluestone's question was ... satisfactory. But it never should have come to that. Should I worry about you, Senator? You have been making a lot of statements of late, not all of them conducive to current needs." The voice delivering the message was slightly modulated.

"N-no, not at all. It's being handled as we speak. And I have no plans to speak publicly in the near future, but I needed to give certain reassurances to

others in order to keep things moving."

"Very well, because we'll be in need of your services very soon. We'll send more detailed instructions. Be sure that all objectives contained within are completed—they must be in place by the specified times."

"You realize that I'm already under a lot of scrutiny? I can't maneuver the way I used to."

"Are you backing out?"

"What? No, *no!* I just need, need to let things settle a bit."

"Not an option. You knew what you might have to do. Oh, and if you think too much more on this and contemplate ending our friendship, know that I've just placed 1.5 million nuyen in a Carib League account and set up a data trail leading back to you. Cause me any concern again, and those trails will be exposed. Am I clear?"

"Yes. Crystal."

"Good. Enjoy the nuyen."

And with that, the commcall terminated. Kittering calmly walked into his bathroom and relieved himself of the night's dinner.

///REQUESTING ACCESS: SECURE
NODE 78-22-54/4(C) 'WAR ROOM'/BLACKOUT///

<<USER NAME/PASSWORD ACCEPTED/
ACCESS GRANTED>>

///DATE/TIME: -05-80/1146:21 ZULU///

- > Things are not looking good for the UCAS right now, with the fighting in Detroit still going on and the UCAS suddenly losing a third of their army. Screamsheets and news outlets are doing their best to quell panic and chaos, but methinks we're a little past that now. Still, I asked Kay St. Irregular in DeeCee to give us the paydata on what's going on in the Federal District of Columbia and keep an eye on things as they progress.
- > Glitch

PANIC ON THE POTOMAC

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR

<UPLOADED 8-15-80/1245:00>

The headline about sums it up.

When the Matrix went dark in Detroit, the UCAS government initially took it as nothing more than a massive failure of services rather than a full-blown crisis. In the first few hours, there was even talk in certain government circles about whether the UCAS could sue Ares for all the damage the Matrix blackout caused.

It didn't take long for reports and images of the open fighting in the Motor City to make it back to the FDC. For their parts, the Pentagon, FBI, CIA, NSA, and every other alphabet agency were completely blindsided and not sure what to make of

things. But it didn't take President Colloton long to fire a great number of high-ranking officers and intelligence department heads. Then I'm guessing about thirty seconds later she ordered the mobilization of III Corps. I even have it on good authority that before she gave that order, Colloton actually banged her fists on her desk—not in frustration but in joy at being able to, and this is a direct quote, “Stick it to Ares for once.” And let's not forget her infamous orders to III Corps CO, General LaShonda Hobbs, about bringing Detroit under control “at all costs and by any means necessary.” But it wasn't until III Corps, a.k.a. Task Force Peacemaker, went missing that things went truly sideways.

- ▶ The loss of III Corps is going to be remembered by history as a massive military blunder. You don't send an entire corps in, even on a “recon in force” mission; that's what drones, Special Forces, and dedicated recon companies are for. Nope, this was Colloton trying to show that the UCAS was still a power to be reckoned with *and* settle a twenty-plus-year-old grudge. Of all people, she should have known better than to let her ego get in the way.
- ▶ Colonel Cobra

Concerned this could be the first wave of an attack similar to the New Revolution's attempted coup almost twenty years earlier, Colloton placed the rest of the UCAS military, all federal agencies, and even local law enforcement contract providers on alert and deployed them in defensive positions throughout the country to “shore up key strategic positions.” I'm no military man, but I know what that means: that the military was being positioned to protect some areas (like DeeCee) while leaving the rest basically unprotected—sacrificed, if needed. When asked about the fighting still continuing in Detroit, Colloton reportedly looked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff directly in the eye and said, “Let Ares deal with it.”

- ▶ Don't get so uptight about it. It's basic military doctrine. For those of you not familiar with that, think of it as triage. Sacrifice a limb to save the body, or at least the head.
- ▶ Scattershot
- ▶ I'll bet that's a great comfort to those chosen to be sacrificed.
- ▶ Old Crow
- ▶ And that's funny coming from a confederate. Wonder how you'd feel about it if Atlanta were under attack?
- ▶ Ecotope
- ▶ Nice try, but it takes a lot more and better bait to hook me. And for the record, I'll care as much about something as someone pays me to, no more or less.
- ▶ Scattershot

There was a predictable level of panic all over

the UCAS, as one would expect when the populace thinks they are under threat of attack. To their credit, the authorities (mostly) showed a great deal of restraint when dealing with it; the damage across the country was described as “mostly minor.” There were also reports of various political and neo-A groups using the opportunity to strike at opponents or targets of opportunity.

- ▶ One of the biggest of those incidents came from Cincinnati where some Humanis-affiliated gangers torched a Mothers of Metahumans free clinic. The attack left ten dead and fourteen injured. Needless to say, the response from the shadows was swift and ... efficient.
- ▶ Pistons

Around the world, all UCAS government employees and their families traveling abroad were ordered to report immediately to their designated safe locations and await further instructions. About eighty percent complied, but some elected to return to the continental UCAS, while others remain unaccounted for. Those missing officials appear to be a low priority at present—to be brutally honest, the UCAS seems to have written them off entirely. .

MISSING PERSONS

◀POSTED 08-13-80/2316:11▶

I represent several prominent individuals and influential families from the United Canadian and American States who have relatives abroad whose whereabouts cannot be confirmed. These individuals and families are offering considerable compensation to suitable professionals for the return of, or at least information leading to the return of, those missing. Last known locations include Aztlan/Central America, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the Trans-Siberian Regions, and Southeast Asia. Contact LTG# NA/UCAS/FDC 222 (19-5501-9311) for more information.

But as quickly as the “Detroit Problem” got everyone all riled up, the sense of imminent threat and danger faded. A week later, the alert issued by the White House remains in effect, but the UCAS has settled into a sort of new normal, waiting for the other shoe to drop or for the all-clear to be given. People only stay freaked out for so long when there's apparently nothing to be freaked out about.

The federal government, on the other hand, (specifically the White House) is still riding that horse hard. Sources indicate that Colloton calls for hourly updates on the Detroit situation. Additionally, numerous attempts to contact Ares via regular channels and reportedly various irregular



ones have met with nothing but consistent failure, rebuttal, or outright apathy. Not only has this deepened the ill-will (if such a thing was possible) between the White House and Ares, but I've also heard rumors that certain elected officials with ties to the megacorp have been unofficially told to find a way to make some traction with them or face serious repercussions.

- ▶ Quick addendum: I'm still working on that angle, but given the climate here in DeeCee, I have to tread *extremely* carefully. Three of my personal sources have been found dead, and two more have gone dark. If anyone wants to help, you know how to get hold of me. I have enough of a slush fund to make it worth your time and effort.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular
- ▶ I've also heard a rumor that no one from Ares is speaking to the UCAS—not because they don't want to, but they literally have nothing they are allowed to tell them. If this is true, then Knight must have kept the Latvian Gambit close to the vest.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ Couple of sections ago I talked about Ares employees dropping like flies due to various causes. As it turns out, there may have been more truth to that statement than I intended. I finally got word from my partner, who got hold of an unofficial and later amended autopsy report that indicated that one of the murder victims was in fact one of those high-grade bug merges. Maybe part of the Latvian Gambit was to clean house internally.
- ▶ Det. Gumshoe

And according to one of my still-available personal sources close to White House staff, Colloton has ordered the Joint Chiefs to start drafting plans to send UCAS spec-ops or “trusted assets” into Detroit to determine what the frag is going on. So for now, the UCAS is in sort of a crisis holding-pattern. Fingers aren't exactly on any triggers, but a lot of those fingers are still rather itchy.

- ▶ Colloton and the Pentagon are getting tunnel vision and need to keep an eye on their borders, especially their western ones. Over the last couple of weeks, the NAN have been quietly shuffling troops in that direction. Nothing overt so far—a few units here, an extra patrol/maneuver there. But they and other governments are probing and gathering intelligence.
- ▶ Colonel Cobra

BACK FROM THE DEAD

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR

UPLOADED 9-10-80/1245:00

- > I knew things had gotten a bit quiet around here, but looks like that's over now and whooo-boy! Still, all things told, I'm personally glad Vogel is back. First, the official word from the man himself, then I'll toss in my two yen.
- > Kay St. Irregular

- > Ho-lee-frag. Did anyone else hear the bombshells that just went off?
- > Slamm-O!
- > This is going to be a gold mine for the shadows. I need to find me an Ares Johnson *today!*
- > Wiz-Bang
- > Not just Ares—a lot of other Johnsons are going to be salivating over this.
- > X-Prime
- > In other news, the Pentagon has issued “stand-down” orders to all military forces. Most of them are going to remain on station for the time being, but they're no longer on high alert.
- > Colonel Cobra

ARTHUR VOGEL MAKES FIRST STATEMENT POST-DETROIT CRISIS

DETROIT FREE PRESS (AN ARES GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY AFFILIATE)

<Begin Transcript>

Vogel: Hello and greetings. This will be what I hope is as brief a statement as possible concerning the recent events surrounding not only Ares Macrotechnology, but the events that transpired in the city of Detroit and announcements concerning the future of the corporation. Again, this is a statement only. I will not be answering any questions at this time. Any inquiries can be directed to the public relations department.

First and foremost, people may be wondering why I am making this statement and not CEO Damien Knight. It is my sad duty to inform the world that Mr. Knight is dead, having been killed during the recent fighting at Ares Tower just hours before the overall fighting in Detroit came to an end. As per Corporate Court law, specially certified medical examiners have performed the required DNA identification and certified Mr. Knight's death. As Mr. Knight has previously directed, as the sole surviving member of the Ares Board of Directors, I am taking control of the corporation as CEO. However, unlike Mr. Knight, I will be assembling a new board post-haste. Also, we are working to re-establish Matrix access within Detroit, but we have found out that the local grids were more damaged than originally anticipated.

Second, I wish to move forward with rebuilding this company after horrific recent events. But I know that there will be serious questions regarding my apparent death that will distract from those efforts. So let me set the record straight on what transpired and why. On December 10, 2079, a bomb planted by a dangerous anti-corporate, neo-anarchist terrorist group exploded in the board room of the Ares Tower in Detroit, killing all of the board members except myself and Mr. Knight; he was in his office two floor above and was shielded from the blast, while I was in the executive elevator. The fact that we were both running late saved our lives. I sustained significant injuries and was taken to a secret, Ares-affiliated medical facility, where I was placed into a medically induced coma in order to recover. For my protection, Mr. Knight used my apparent death as a cover story. Twenty-nine days ago, I was deemed well enough to be revived, but I stayed hidden for medical as well as security reasons, considering the attacks that began on

July 30, 2080.

Third, the attacks that began on July 30 were perpetrated by the same anti-corporate forces that attempted to decapitate Ares' leadership weeks earlier. Their goal was nothing less than the complete destruction of Ares as a corporate entity. When their bombing attempt failed, they bolstered their numbers and resorted to targeting our corporate military forces while they were in a vulnerable state as they were undergoing a lengthy refit and modernization program. What we did not know—what we had not been warned about by the UCAS government—was the scope and scale of this terrorist organization, the lengths they were willing to go to in order to accomplish their goals, and the weapons of mass destruction they had managed to obtain. Ares corporate forces were initially surprised by these terrorist attacks that unfortunately took the fighting into the streets of Detroit—fighting that I will remind everyone lasted for over **months**. Eventually, Ares forces—without the aid of the UCAS military—were able to mount a successful counter-offensive that culminated in the destruction of the terrorist threat in Detroit; although I have been informed that this still unnamed organization still exists, albeit in a diminished form. I also have information that UCAS intelligence agencies had prior knowledge of this terrorist group and the threat level they posed. Yet, for reasons unknown and despite being properly informed of the situation, the UCAS leadership chose not to disclose this information to Ares or anyone on the Corporate Court, which could have saved countless lives and prevented so much loss in Detroit.

And finally, because of the damage inflicted on Ares' assets in the city of Detroit—and because of the UCAS government's willful and blatant failure to protect its citizens and a valued economic partner—I am announcing that Ares Macrotechnology will move its corporate headquarters to our new permanent home in Atlanta, Georgia, of the Confederation of American States. I have already spoken with the CAS government, and arrangements have been made for the new Ares board to relocate within one week. A program for the complete withdrawal of all Ares corporate assets from the UCAS has already begun and will continue until said move is complete.

That is all for now. As I said earlier, any questions or inquiries should be directed to Ares' Public Relations division.

<End Transcript>

Yeah, Vogel's statements are a bit of a surprise. And I'll admit, I was just as stunned by his return and subsequent announcements as anyone else. But with all that aside, his announcements and proclamations have unleashed a political firestorm in DeeCee and raised a drek-ton of questions, and very few satisfactory answers have been given. Of course, the White House was quick to fire back.

UCAS RESPONSES

To say that the response to Vogel's announcements garnered a swift and savage response from the White House is an understatement. I could post mega-pulses of analysis, comments, rebuttals, and talking points that have been put out over the last several days until your brain melts. But it boils down to a few key points. **Note:** This is the narrative that Ares, the White House, and the UCAS government are pushing, so set your bulldrek detectors accordingly.

First, the White House vehemently and categorically denies that UCAS intelligence agencies knew about the "terrorist attacks" Vogel described. They also deny that any such group exists. Of course, in the realm of spin this has actually helped Ares, who're painting themselves as victims. And the more the UCAS protests, the guiltier they look in the court of public opinion.

- > Colloton's quote of "Let Ares deal with it" with regard to Detroit made a great headline for all the screamsheets, not to mention her fist-banging moment. Those make her look like she abandoned Detroit to settle her beef with Ares/Damien Knight. Both became rallying cries for the pro-Ares factions. And according to the latest polls, almost half of the UCAS citizenry are siding with Ares.
- > Sunshine
- > Doesn't hurt when you've also got Horizon spearheading your PR and information initiative. News stories, e-articles, and social media are blitzing the masses with pro-Ares messages.
- > Doc Spin
- > What about actual battle footage from Detroit that clearly shows all of the bugs?
- > Treadle
- > Some of it has been leaked, but "experts" are quickly debunking it, calling it doctored and an attempt to smear Ares by "taking advantage of the tragedy in Chicago" and creating a false narrative to "distract from the truth." This slots me off on so many levels. After all these years, no one learned a damn thing.
- > Bull
- > We could show a bug carcass on live trid and no one would believe it unless some so-called authority told them to.
- > Old Crow

- > Yeah, funny thing that. A lot of us here in Detroit are kind of slotted that **our** tragedy, **our** homes, **our** loved ones are being used as a pawn or talking point in this farce. Frag them all.
- > Johnny Redline

Second, all of this is undermining the UCAS' legitimate efforts to get any real information out of Ares regarding what happened in Detroit, as there were numerous UCAS citizens involved, not just corporate ones. Senator Lance Kittering (R-MI) has been appointed head of a special investigative commission, but so far, Kittering has described the Ares reps as being "less than enthusiastic" to share information. So far, at least two hearings have been convened, but no official Ares employees or representatives have shown. And those who *have* testified, their testimony has been little more than "I can't confirm, but this is what I've heard." As of this posting, the UCAS has formally petitioned the Corporate Court in an effort to force Ares execs, including Arthur Vogel, to testify.

One can guess how well that's going.

- > Many more credible witnesses have also refused to testify, risking contempt charges. It may have something to do with John Harriman and Lucy Blackridge, two Ares contractors set to testify on what they were contracted to do regarding the blackout in Detroit. Blackridge was found doing the permanent backstroke in the Potomac—the autopsy said he had a blood alcohol level of 0.556. Meanwhile, shredded remains found in Baltimore were DNA matched to Harriman.
- > Det. Gumshoe

And third, everything is at a standstill at this point. As of this posting, Ares is continuing with their move as the new board is in Atlanta, settling into their new digs while simultaneously stonewalling any attempt to answer any serious questions about Detroit. Only thing I have left to talk about is that I've learned through the FDC grapevine that an emergency session of Congress is set to be called in three days, the purpose of which I have no idea. But as soon as I know, I'll share.

UCAS DROPS A NUKE (METAPHORICALLY)

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR
<UPLOADED 9-12-80/1341:55>

If you haven't seen any of the headlines, go look, then come back and read this, because I'm on the move and only have time to make a quick post.

Frag, I've never seen a government move so fast before.

Earlier today in a closed session of congress, the UCAS government put forth and passed a resolution that terminated the UCAS' involvement with the

Business Recognition Accords, claiming that the actions of Ares Macrotechnology in particular and the Corporate Court in general violated multiple articles contained within said accords. Therefore, the UCAS is declaring the accords null and void within all UCAS territories and protectorates. For those of you who don't know what that means, the UCAS just basically told the corps to go frag themselves by revoking their extraterritoriality within the UCAS.

And I just found out that Colloton has officially signed it into law. Total time to make this happen: six hours and forty-three seconds.

This is ... frag, I don't know what this is. On one hand this is one of the gutsiest moves I've ever seen a country take against a corporation and the CC to exercise their sovereignty. On the other hand, I'm firmly entrenched in reality and know ... who am I kidding, I know frag-all what this means or where this will take us. But I do know that in some ways, this is going to be painful.

I'm also going to sign off for the foreseeable future; I need to cover my own six. This isn't like Denver where I had an out, a place to bolt to. No, this is on a whole other level. As greedy as this may sound, I need to keep my own skin intact first and foremost.

Only thing I can say at this point is ... good luck and ghost-speed.

- > Holy frag on a pogo stick.
- > Stone
- > Kay isn't the only one going dark. A lot of my DeeCee sources have also bailed. I'm even canceling plans to head to the FDC myself and staying where I am. Guess I better get comfortable.
- > Sunshine
- > Who says governments can't get anything done? Do we know how the vote count went? Was this a landslide, an overwhelming majority, or a down-to-the wire vote?
- > Peri
- > The newsfeeds are giving conflicting stories. Some are saying it was a massive majority in favor, while others are saying it came down to a mere handful of votes in the Senate. But the government isn't releasing any numbers, which is also kind of scary. There are groups and pundits already calling for transparency, saying that voting in such a way violates jurisprudence and due process; but technically, under UCAS law, it doesn't. *shrug*
- > Legal Eagle
- > Not sure how to feel about this. UCAS stands up to the corps but still keeps its dealings in the dark. Frag it; I'm going to get some popcorn and see how this shakes out. I can't wait to see how the Corporate Court deals with this!
- > Old Crow

- > Granted, I'm not in North America, but from what I'm hearing over the past few days since the UCAS' announcement, people in the FDC and across the country are (generally) falling into three camps. First are the ones cheering the decision, making statements like "take our country back" and all that. The second I'm calling the Doomsayers—they're the ones on edge, like Kay. Can't really say I blame them. The third group is saying that Colloton et al have made a huge mistake, but those folks are usually shouted down as being corporate-bootlickers. Speaking of, the CC and other corps have been relatively quiet about all of this—anyone hear any word?
- > Fianchetto
- > Those with interests in North America have condemned the new law. S-K, Renraku, and now Spinrad Global specifically have issued statements calling the UCAS' decision rash and uninformed, among other adjectives. They have also warned all UCAS law enforcement and military that they still consider the BRA to be in effect, and any intrusion onto their territory will be met in kind by necessary force.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > Both DocWagon and Lone Star are particularly slotted about this. They may only be AA, but both have declared themselves "on strike" in all UCAS cities where they have contracts.
- > Hard Exit
- > And here I just upped my DocWagon contract to platinum. Fan-fragging-tastic!
- > Cayman
- > Better stock up on med supplies. I'm about to see an uptick in business.
- > Butch
- > Anyone seen the attached CC release? Looks like the CC is finally voicing its opinion on the matter. Took them long enough.
- > Operator Bastard
- > I'm surprised how relatively quiet things have been the past two weeks. I've only had to shoot two people breaking into my house, and only one mugger!
- > Danger Sensei
- > I think people are too scared to do anything at this point. And not knowing who is hiding the heavy hardware helps, too—no one wants their home to become another Detroit.
- > Pistons
- > I'm honestly amazed that Seattle hasn't exploded by now.
- > Bull

OFFICIAL CORPORATE COURT PRESS RELEASE

◁POSTED 10-28-80/15:00:01▷

To be distributed to all news outlets

Over the past sixteen days, the Corporate Court, in conjunction with the United Nations, has been reviewing the situation regarding the decision by the United Canadian and American States to unilaterally and abruptly declare the Business Recognition Accords null and void within their territories. While we are reviewing the legality of this decision in accordance with international law, the Court and UN have decided to provisionally recognize the UCAS' resolution. Our response will depend on the results of that review.

All corporations of AA-rating or higher that are providing necessary services such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and vital infrastructure services have also pledged to the Court to uphold their contracts until this matter is resolved. This is being done to maintain law and order as well as prevent unnecessary loss of life and property. In return, we ask that the UCAS allow said corporations to continue unabated with their business dealings.

We recognize that the UCAS may have legitimate grievances with Ares Macrotechnology in particular and the Court in general, but we are disappointed that proper channels and procedures were not followed. The Court is still willing to address any issues the UCAS may have and work toward a mutually beneficial agreement.

We await the official response from the UCAS government.

◀◀◀30.66 MP MOVED/AUTHORIZATION:
ADMIN-03 ◁10-29-80/2300:13▶▶▶

- > No one freak out—I've archived the following mega-pulses of speculation and bull-drekkng.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Anyone know anything about Philly? I've just gotten word that there was some kind of weapon detonation over the city! I've heard that there was some kind of flash over the city, then lights out!
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Matrix check, Philadelphia grids are offline.
- > Glitch
- > Confirmed, just got a bird over Philly—the entire city is dark. Anyone else getting a sick sense of déjà vu?
- > Orbital DK
- > I don't know, but we're now twenty-four hours in, and Baltimore is now dark.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Updates: Newark, Halifax, and Bangor have also gone dark. Reports from surrounding areas indicate a massive flash seen over each of those cities before everything technological in the area went dead, same as Baltimore and Philly.
- > Slamm-O!

- > It's Detroit all over again!
- > Wiz-Bang
- > It's ... close, but definitely on a bigger scale.
- > Peri
- > Not only that, but at least forty percent of our user lists here are now listed by the system as "inactive" after I sent out emergency update messages. Anything I send is either sent back, or I get a non-delivery error message.
- > Glitch.

CITIES GOING DARK!

POSTED BY: ORBITAL DK

◁UPLOADED 11-06-80/0013:55▷

Just when you thought that the insanity might end after the fighting stopped in Detroit and things seemed to calm down between the UCAS and the Corporate Court, a brand-new cluster-frag has landed on our doorstep! For those of you not paying attention, approximately five days ago there was a mysterious flash over the city of Philadelphia, followed by a blackout. Then, twenty-four hours later, same thing and result over Baltimore followed in kind with Bangor, Halifax, Newark, and now Providence and St. John. In response, the UCAS is staying true to form. Don't need to get too detailed, but suffice to say chaos and rioting have already begun. Martial law was declared across the country three hours after Baltimore went dark.

At this time, all we know for certain is those cities were hit with something that sounds a lot like an electro-magnetic pulse, even though EMPs stopped being a threat to modern tech at least a decade ago. As far as we can tell, all tech of any kind has been knocked out, along with the Matrix grids servicing those cities.

And before anyone asks, yes, there are some similarities with what went down in Detroit, but there are also some differences. For instance, the flash that precipitated these blackouts was not seen in Detroit. Secondly, there were a lot of people trying to get information into and out of Detroit, but with the Matrix down and sats being overwhelmed (or destroyed), it was like a massive information bottleneck. This time, we don't have that problem, and there's almost too much data coming out through scores of sat-links across the country. We're trying to bring order to the chaos here, but it's like trying to fight a fire with a squirt gun—in other words, not gonna happen. So we're going to open the floodgates and post whatever comes in as it comes in (post sec-scan, of course).

- > There are lots of ways to generate power off the grid, but none of them are easy to sustain over the long haul.
- > /dev/grll
- > I'm just here to pile on the drek, because Bismarck, Lexington, and St. Louis just went dark within three hours of one another, with the same flash over each city. The UCAS military is once again scrambling, but there's no way they're going to be able to handle all of this.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > Drek, add Toronto to that list as of two hours ago.
- > Operator Bastard
- > As if it hadn't already been through enough, Chicago has gone dark, sort of. The entire city went down just like the others, but within five hours, huge sections of the city at least regained power. I'm sure the fact that those are many of the corp reclamation areas means nothing at all, nor do the barriers that are going up between the "corp zone" and the rest of the city, along with a near-army of corp security going active.
- > Det. Gumshoe
- > Corps protecting their own interests and leaving others to suffer. I'm shocked.
- > Old Crow
- > Speaking of adding insult to injury, I've just learned that Ares has ordered all KE departments to activate what is known as an "ejection clause" in their contracts. At midnight today (11-07-80), they're under orders to cease all law enforcement activity and proceed to designated areas to—damn, this is a dick move—"secure key Ares property and personnel and facilitate its relocation from areas in and around Detroit and the surrounding area to the CAS border." Holy frag, that's stepping on the UCAS' throat!
- > Hard Exit
- > Got word from Kay—who says "hi" but is still lying extra-low—that he's still got feelers out and that he's got word that President Colloton has officially requested U.N. aid in light of the recent events taking place across the UCAS.
- > Sunshine
- > I've heard something similar, but I've also heard that the U.N. isn't exactly rushing to mobilize a relief force. In fact, instead they're forming several action committees to evaluate the "best way to mobilize and render aid." News like this makes me honestly weep for the unfortunate in the UCAS.
- > Fianchetto
- > Okay, crew, we're all trying to figure out what the frag happened last week. Blackouts, dead Matrix connections, people collapsing in the middle of the street ... it's been utter chaos out there, and the rumors have been flying fast and furious. Getting the truth hasn't come easy. Or cheaply. Take a look at some data.
- > Glitch

<<< FILE GLITCH#593 UPLOADED
FROM LIBERTYNET 11-19-80/0745:13 >>>

- > Are we on? Anybody know what happened?
- > Hotstuff

...ECTIO ... PROCE... .. LOGIN V...

- > Hello? Anybody?
- > Hotstuff

<<<LIBERTYBELLE <ADMIN> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > Sweet jumpin' Jesus, what was that?
- > LibertyBelle

- > That's what I want to know! The night lit up and the city went dark!
- > Hotstuff

- > Getting multiple logins now. Looks like it went off square downtown.
- > LibertyBelle

- > "Went off"? Like a bomb?
- > Hotstuff

- > Maybe. Too early to know yet. Lone Star's going ape right now.
- > LibertyBelle

<<<TATERTOT <USER> HAS ARRIVED IN CHAT.

- > <Error: Renraku Babylon is offline>
- > TaterTot

- > Hey, Tot! No Mandarin right now. Looks like Babylon's down.
- > Hotstuff

- > Screw that! My *arm* shut down!
- > TaterTot

- > Wait, your arm? Did you get caught in the explosion?
- > LibertyBelle

- > What explosion? You mean the fireworks? All sizzle, no boom boom. And, trust me, I know from fireworks.
- > TaterTot

- > We don't know! There's a whole section of the city that just went dark!
- > LibertyBelle

- > Yeah, I was there. I saw the sparks up in the sky in the mirror, right? Then the booms? That's when everything started dying ... lights, street signs, billboards, cars ... Charlie's sitting in the street right now. I can't get a signal from him ... I can't get a signal from myself right now. This isn't even my commlink; I had to snag one from a vending machine. Arm might be dead, but it's still metal, right?
- > TaterTot

- > Hang on. It blew up your arm?!
- > Hotstuff

- > Negative. Arm's still there, just limp. No feeling at all. Doesn't respond to anything, but the manual release is still good, so instant metal bat. When I get home, I'll slap another on and start diagnostics. Everything else? Commlink, glasses, you name it ... just done.
- > TaterTot
- > I'll shift astral in a bit, see what I can see.
- > Hotstuff
- > Be careful, kid. We don't know what this is yet.
- > LibertyBelle
- > Oh, come on. It's only Devil's Night. What could go wrong?
- > Hotstuff
- > Hey, just had an emergency transmit hit the com. Something about ... Oh *****Translation failed*****
- > TaterTot
- > Sorry, still no Babylon. Say again?
- > LibertyBelle
- > The Zero! The Zero went dark! They're breaking out!
- > TaterTot
- > Jesus! Tot, you gotta ...
- > LibertyBelle
- > SE sector blacked out. I'm NW. Still, I'm gonna shut down so I can focus on moving.
- > TaterTot
- > Stay safe out there.
- > LibertyBelle
- <<<15.56 MP DELETED/AUTHORIZATION: ADMIN-01 <11-27-80/0500:13>>>
- > Okay, ow.
- > Hotstuff
- > Kid! You okay? What happened?
- > LibertyBelle
- > The astral is a mess down there. I didn't see anything I could recognize, but the raw emotion is unreal. People are panicking, and the whole area is a giant feeding frenzy for spirits. All that energy is like a buffet for certain spirits, and even if it wasn't, the instant background count's like diving headfirst into a hurricane. The fireworks might have been magical, might not ... I can't get in close enough to find out. Nearly got ripped in half when I got too close.
- > Hotstuff
- > You remind me of why I'm glad I'm normal instead of Awakened. Meanwhile, Ares is mobilizing to the area. Bishop's calling up every Pawn in the area to go back the Star on this one. The Zero breaking open has everybody worried.
- > LibertyBelle
- > Yeah, understandable. Those guys are nuts. Of course, if it works, Bishop looks like the city's savior. That's a big PR win.
- > Hotstuff

<<<FILE CLOSED>>>

- > I'll drop some more in later but this is our first eyewitness account. Thoughts?
- > Glitch
- > What's the Zero?
- > Kia
- > The Zero Zone, the first barrens in UCAS. A whole section of the city walled off and used as a dumping ground for criminals, the SINless, and so on. It's where LA got the idea from and possibly where MCT did as well. Whatever goes on inside, nobody cares about. Supplies are dropped in daily, first come, first serve. It's hell on Earth.
- > Butch
- > Not as secure as they think. Tons of smuggling in and some, much more expensive, to get out. Ghouls handle most of that part. If you double-cross them, well ...
- > 2XL
- > The dead tech is interesting. I heard that there were several casualties in each city from cyber going idle. Heart stoppage, legs collapsing and people getting trampled, that kind of thing, but it sounds like it stayed dead even when they left the area.
- > Netcat
- > I can confirm that. Want to know the weird part? Half an hour later, my crew was riding in alongside Ares, but we didn't have any problems. I was ready to walk the boys through silent comm signals, but the trucks just pushed through the idled cars and never slowed down. Our commlinks stayed active, and Jake's cyber stayed on the whole time. I thought it was some kind of EM pulse but, nope—not a bit of residual radiation. The damndest thing I've seen in at least three weeks.
- > Stone
- > So it fried everything in the area but didn't stick around. Sounds like magic to me.
- > Riot
- > Maybe, maybe not. Is there some kind of recharge to the attack vector? But these all happened on the same night, an hour or so apart. Nothing happened in the daylight. Connected?
- > Glitch
- > Could be vampires.
- > Plan 9
- > Oh, here we go.
- > Snopes
- > I've got a list of suspects, but the fact that these attacks all hit at night moves the vampires up in my book. All that emotion being stirred up makes their meals taste better, they don't really care if all the cyberware in a city dies, and they work best in the dark. The evidence stacks up nicely.
- > Plan 9

- > Keep in mind, this isn't our only suspect. We're still gathering data.
- > Plan 10
- > Whatever it is, DeeCee is taking it seriously. They have a complete lockdown on communications in or out of the city, reserving all channels for emergency transmissions and the military.
- > Netcat

<<<KANE <USER> HAS LOGGED IN

- > They got Baltimore!
- > Kane
- > What? Who did? When?
- > Glitch
- > The fragging mimes, man! I told you they were up to no good! They just blew up Baltimore!
- > Kane
- > ... Mimes?
- > Glitch
- > I'll fill you in later. Kane? Blew up Baltimore? Are you sure?
- > /dev/grrl
- > The whole city just vanished! I'm anchored in the river and boom! No more city!
- > Kane
- > Did it vanish, or just go dark?
- > Kane
- > I didn't stick around to find out! The mimes ain't playing around!
- > Kane
- > Getting called up. Seems like it went dark but it's still there. Looks like my crew's gonna get another payday. Time to roll out!
- > Stone
- > All right, spread out, start getting some more data. We'll meet back here in twelve hours.
- > Glitch
- > So /dev/ is taking care of Kane (somebody's been hitting the rum hard this week), so they're out for now. What else do we have?
- > Glitch
- > Bismarck and Lexington. I heard Kansas City, but I've not found any confirmation on that one.
- > Plan 9
- > Can confirm KC wasn't hit. Anyone heard from Vegas?
- > Snopes
- > No problems in Vegas. Well, not beyond the normal weirdness.
- > Plan 10

- > Still no word out of Detroit, other than Ares in full retreat.
- > Riot
- > Ares is retreating from everywhere. Official word was something about not wanting to be held responsible under UCAS law should extreme measures be called for, so they're choosing not to engage.
- > Butch
- > Cowards.
- > Riot
- > Hey, take it from an old soldier—sometimes retreat is the right option.
- > Butch
- > Colloton's worried enough that she's called up the U.N. for aid. They're moving with all the speed of bureaucracy.
- > Bull
- > Ares assets across UCAS are getting bugout orders (no pun intended). They're transferring a small nation's worth of material from Michigan to Atlanta, and they need all hands on deck for it. Several regional offices are being closed down and given immediate redeployment orders as well. Ares is pulling out from the UCAS.
- > Icarus
- > More than just the Army. Ares is reallocating satellite resources as well. GPS is working for now, but the Air Force is going blind as all their spy sats switch from UCAS to ARES. Air traffic, NOLA, the works.
- > Hard Exit

TALES FROM THE BLACK

- > Still trying to gather facts, so here are some first-person anecdotes from people on the ground when the power went out. Clean from them what you can.
- > Glitch

THE JANITOR

(PHILADELPHIA)

I saw the flash, and that was the last thing I saw with those eyes. They weren't originals, natch. If they were, they'd have been fine. It happened because they were cyber. All around, people are flipping out because their commlinks don't work, and here I am with dead eyes! Could be worse. I used to run with this chica who had all her limbs replaced. Frag, I hope she was nowhere near the towns they hit. Do I still have her number? Don't matter, all my commlinks were bricked, too, and I don't back up my files on the Matrix like dumbass

SINners. She was a real badass, but if she was near one of those flashes, she's probably dead. Anybody know a street sam named Katydid? Anyway, yeah, cyber got wrecked. Like everybody's. I'd've been hosed, except I got the connection. I opened my other eyes, and I could still see with those. You can't brick my connection to mana. Know what's weird? I seen a few bombs go off, just for fun, you know? Biz, too. Not many mundies know this, but a bomb leaves an astral haze. Ivory-tower types call it a "background count." This happens even when you don't blow people up. I saw a lotta bad drek in the astral that day. People freaking out, death and destruction, nasty-ass spirits of every kind, people going all post-apoc, you know? It gummed up the local mana real bad, but at least I could see where I was going. That flasher, though? The big bomb thing that set it off? I got a real good look at it while I was trying to figure out what the frag I was going to do, and I didn't see no background count. That's how I know it wasn't a nuke.

- > I've had the opportunity to observe a number of specialized blasts from astral space—not recently and certainly unrelated to current events—and they indeed leave behind a background count, not unlike the results from a kinetic blast. They were relatively weak and faded more quickly, but they're impossible to miss. Are you certain you were looking in the right location? You may have been disoriented.
- > Black Andy

- > I know what I saw and where; plenty of landmarks to go by. And it wasn't weak background count. There was none!
- > The Janitor
- > Hey, Big J! Good to hear you're still kicking. Sorry about your eyes. Alpha-grade, am I right? I was safe and sound out of town, so I made it okay. BTW, your commlink backs itself up on the Matrix without bugging you about it, so you probably still have my number. Shoot me a message!
- > Katydid

NICODAEMUS

(LOCATION REDACTED)

I lived in one of the places that became a black-out zone, though I won't say which. I was in a local bar I sometimes frequent. I like the place because no one makes eye contact or attempts conversation. Suddenly, the power went out. Everything was dark and silent for a moment. We saw no flash and heard no explosion, but there're no windows, and we were outside the blast radius. Most of us left the building peacefully and went on our ways. As I returned home on foot, the effects of panic began to manifest. I saw the vehicular accidents and aerial drones littering the city with their corpses, reminiscent of dead insects. Many people were leaving their homes to find out what to do next. It didn't take long for violence to erupt, which added

to the hysteria. Most of the survivors were people who kept to the shadows and found a good place to hole up. I'm unashamed to admit that I found the circumstances more terrifying than I've ever experienced. There was no gunfire, but I heard distant cries in almost every direction, and the immediate area filled with the sound of desperately rushing feet. Sometimes individual voices would stand out, while others erupted into screams. Have you ever listened to the sound of thousands of terrified people suddenly screaming for their lives as they flee from a danger they're not prepared for?

Sometimes they were the result of a blind panic, but there were also real dangers. A lack of functional firearms or tasers made devil rats more than a nuisance. Metahumanity posed a more ubiquitous danger. Panicking masses of people are incredibly hazardous. People who tripped or were knocked to the ground rarely survived the experience. The mob kept running, swept along too quickly to be able to stop and help without also being trampled. It was madness. I've since heard stories of communities pulling together to help each other through the hardship, but I don't believe them. They seem like fantasies spun by Horizon's storytellers and completely inconsistent with my experience. It took me a very long time to carefully sneak my way to the city's outskirts, where I intend to stay—no more diving into inner-sprawl dangers for me.

- ▶ I was in a blackout zone. It was damned boring. Sure, the sounds were unsettling, but nobody tried to break in. Why would you go out in that mess instead of just hunkering down?
- ▶ Sai
- ▶ My guns worked just fine, but I carry an array of nineteenth- and twentieth-century revolvers. I made so much nuyen!
- ▶ Wolfsbane
- ▶ That was my plan A, but some people set my apartment building on fire with Molotov cocktails. Good call on the throwback firearms, Wolfsbane. Glad I specialize in archery. Many of my accessories were destroyed, but a bow is a bow. Same for crossbows.
- ▶ Nicodaemus

JAYRICKY

(LEXINGTON)

When the blackout struck, my team and I were working a long con at a hospital, which shall remain nameless to protect the innocent. It was inside the affected area, and all technology died at once, like everywhere else hit. I was surprised by the nursing and administrative staff's professionalism. They took charge of the situation and avoided immediate panic in a manner I found impressive. I won't underestimate anyone in their line of work again. For many patients, there was nothing they could do. I

was preoccupied with establishing contact with my team, whom I imagined might roll in weapons-hot to find me at any moment and cause unwarranted loss of life. I appreciate my compatriots, but I recognize their tendency to react with violence when presented with unpleasant surprises. I needn't have worried, though, as they rely heavily on tech and were as helpless as I. My cover was intact, but my skillwires, skillsofts, and headware that contained profiles of the hospital and staff were lost to me. I barely avoided having to explain my sudden lack of skill in surgery. The woman died on the table before I could concoct a plausible escape. We didn't realize this at first because she sat up, screamed, and turned on one of the nurses before we could react. If I hadn't been eager to leave, I'm certain we'd all have been killed. We did not impede her escape, and I used the opportunity to make my exit. As I left, I saw scores of people coming to the hospital, arriving on foot or on makeshift stretchers. There were more than the hospital could possibly help. If I remained, I would have been a liability. So I left with a heavy heart. I wonder how many of those nurses survived and how many people owe them their lives?

Thanks for letting me post this, Bull. I know a lot of people might consider heading into one of the blacked-out areas. If you're going in with ground vehicles, you need to be prepared. GridGuide will not function, and you'll also need to bring your own fuel and spare batteries. Even then, getting around is extremely difficult because of all the crashed vehicles. When the blackout struck, it destroyed pretty much every vehicle in the affected area. Vehicles in motion crashed, leaving roadways blocked or jammed — often still occupied with corpses. There's been no concerted effort to clear these, so you'll need to scout ahead. With no active Matrix, the range of most drones isn't likely to exceed 100 meters, even if you bring your own sat-link. The most effective solution I have seen is to employ outriders on motorcycles equipped with throwback radio transceivers and flare guns. If you have a t-bird, be aware that unauthorized aircraft are shot down immediately.

- ▶ You're not kidding about the crashes. I couldn't believe how long they carried on for. I had just got off the bus, and I lost count of how many times I was nearly killed before I could get indoors. Ironically, I was able to get into a place for shelter because a truck that almost killed me put a hole in the wall that was in my way.
- ▶ Calvin Moon
- ▶ You're lucky. I was in a t-bird on biz. We were flying nap-of-the-earth to avoid detection. I had almost no time to react before it crashed. If I hadn't had a few choice spells already active, we would all have died, though I saved three of us. I swear to never ride in a vehicle again without casting the appropriate spells and sitting within arm's reach of an exit with manual controls.
- ▶ Kass

- > Why would you want to go into one of those cities? They're a mess! No Matrix connection, dead bodies all over the place, and all the stuff you'd want to steal is worse than bricked!
- > Asino
- > I believe that's where our next runner comes in. August, go ahead and post your thing.
- > Bull

AUGUST

(ST. LOUIS)

When it happened in St. Louis, I was outside of the blast radius, but the flash was impossible to miss. It seems to me that the people who were harmed the most were those relying too heavily on megacorp products and luxuries. If people stayed calm instead of acting like rabid lemmings, the death toll would likely been in the hundreds instead of thousands or more. For people like us—the SINless who don't worship at the megas' altars—it was less disruptive. We don't seek guidance from the rich and powerful as if they possessed actual wisdom. The rioting masses were full of people who couldn't think for themselves and were desperate for an authority to tell them what to do next. When they received no such guidance, they became beasts.

When I saw the flash and the darkness that followed, I didn't know what had happened. I knew that I must use my power to help, and so I did. I summoned spirits, gathered reagents and what supplies I could carry, and entered the city. I saw many tragic sights and was in no small danger, but I also saw something I hoped for: people helping one another. Where I expected to find a looted Stuffer Shack, I saw a community gathering to distribute goods to whoever needed them. The clerks had made arrangements with a local gang to make the area around the shop safe and help people get what they needed, and no one was murdering each other over what might be the last microwave burrito. They were sharing things, providing medical care, asking around about people in the neighborhood who might need help. No one waited for corporate approval to release the food that would undoubtedly spoil without refrigeration. No one got stabbed over a bottle of water. The tension was there, people were still afraid and angry, but they helped one another instead of taking it out on each other. I'm not so naive to assume there were no unpleasant altercations over the duration, but it was much better than what I saw closer to downtown.

Many headed to the bright beacon of light in St. Louis: the ARCHology. Unlike everywhere else in the city, it appeared to have been shielded from the effects of the blackout. And so, like moths to a flame, the dispossessed gathered there and formed a refugee camp. The ARCHology's mas-

ters responded to the crisis exactly how you would expect those with wealth and power to react to the needy: They kept their doors locked. Never place your hopes in the hands of people who value wealth over all else. I don't believe it helped, either, as there were unmistakable signs of chaos inside the ARCHology.

I've spent the last few weeks moving about, in and out of the city. It hasn't been easy—the UCAS military seems to prefer interfering with relief efforts rather than assisting them—but I've found others with the means and inclination to help. When runners work together to provide aid, we will be remembered differently. When the politicians, soldiers, police, and corporate management abandon the people in need, we must be the ones who provide it. The world needs us, and we have precious few opportunities to prove it. If you are a magician, your skills are extremely valuable, because magic doesn't rely on the Matrix to function. Street samurai need to know that the blast seems to have been a brief event. Your augmentations are safe, and your weapons will be some of the only functional firearms in the area. Hackers, there is a great need for people to establish communication. The UCAS government isn't making any visible effort to restore Matrix connections, and neither are the megas. Your expertise is needed to set up satellite uplink points or establish daisy chains of re-trans units. Riggers! There are so many goods that need to be brought in to help people and avoid the authorities that interfere with our efforts. Faces are greatly in demand as well. You can make deals and coordinate people with potentially conflicting personality traits. Every kind of shadowrunner can chip in. To those of you who resist working for no immediate pay, I ask you to widen your definition of compensation. Forming a deep network of highly capable and connected people and hundreds of grateful souls knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that they owe you their lives may not buy you a soykaf, but it's extremely useful and enriching nonetheless. There are many lucrative looting opportunities as well if you know where to find them. Most of my best tips for good looting spots were provided to me by grateful locals.

- > Or if you have a decent fixer, you can make a lot of nuyen hunting down and taking out Matrix hotspots. They pay extra if you take out the techs that set them up as well. Frag me if I know why, but I have as much work as I can handle taking contracts that seem designed to prevent any relief efforts from being successful. I think I can afford to buy myself something really nice after this mess!
- > Clockwork
- > Piece ... of ... dreck!
- > Think Tank

OPPORTUNITIES IN A BLACKOUT ZONE

POSTED BY: CLOCKWORK

◀POSTED 11-22-80/2134.11▶

Since I'm in a good mood, I'll share some paydata. Some Johnsons in a Blackout Zone are likely to be offering these kinds of contracts. I'll even share how much they pay so you don't get ripped off by someone trying to low-ball you.

Matrix hotspot hits: These hotspots are usually satellite uplinks that have been set up to allow limited Matrix connections to an area roughly 200 meters in diameter. They're usually running silent and hard to spot, and the ones that restrict data flow to text-only are the hardest to detect. Still, they have to be exposed to the sky somehow. If you're really good at spotting hidden icons, you do something like this: Head to the general area Mr. Johnson sent you to (or just bum around looking for likely spots if you've got a bounty-style gig) and slowly sweep the area. I like to jump cold-sim into a small flying drone to be safe. If you aren't good at spotting hidden icons, look for high points with convenient spots to hide a satellite dish. Your target is likely to be guarded by at least one asshole of a decker. An even more serious threat is the likelihood that technomancers will be infesting the area looking for a fix, so don't forget to run silent yourself. You're likely to find a mage and/or some muscle guarding the place, but they're usually just local gangers. If you're smart, you won't need to engage them directly. The real trick is finding the satlink without getting spotted. Once you've done that, it's just a matter of briefly applied firepower. These jobs typically pay 10,000 nuyen, but you can usually get double this figure by offering to take out nearby tech support. You've got to weigh the pros and cons of this, because if you don't off the techs, they'll set up another target that you can get paid to take out. I've found there's plenty of work to go around.

Convoy intercepts: You can make some good money intercepting trucks carrying food and medical supplies. Most of the drivers are smart enough to turn off their vehicle's Matrix signal since GridGuide is gone. They often travel in small caravans, with a couple of bikers or a pickup truck scouting ahead for them and support drones. Roto-drones mounting assault rifles with underbarrel grenade launchers seem to be in fashion—a design choice I approve of, but you can't beat the MGL-12 for firing rate if you don't have to

be selective about your targets. If it's a pro team, there are going to be a couple of spirit escorts in astral space. Their summoner is probably riding in the most heavily armored vehicle, usually a Bulldog or a Roadmaster. I don't take these contracts often, because you really need a team to pull them off without losing too many drones. You can usually expect to be paid 10 to 15,000 nuyen total, with an option to sell the goods and vehicles you can recover back to your Johnson—getting twenty-five percent of retail seems about the standard, but if you've got a good face on your team (or dirt on Mr. Johnson), you might get as high as forty percent. I did the math: a single Bulldog or Eurovan moderately loaded with non-perishables and basic medical supplies should net you about 20k, counting the vehicle itself at the twenty percent rate. A Roadmaster and its cargo is probably double. The loot money has to be split, of course, so casualties on your team work in your favor.

Missing persons: The good news about this work is that there's a ton of it. Non-functional vehicles and no Matrix combine to keep people away from home and unable to call back. Throw on top of that the violence and destruction of the blackouts, and there are many who aren't where they're supposed to be, and others who are worried about them. The work is there, but the downside is that the pay often isn't. Not everyone who wants to find someone has extra cash lying around, especially with bank access becoming tricky. You may end up working for food, secrets, favors, or other things of value rather than hard cash. If you take on one of these jobs, try to eke 500 nuyen worth of value for a straightforward job, 1,000 or more as complications mount.

Item retrieval: This is a lot like the above task, though generally without the complication of the item in question wandering around on its own. Though sometimes other people take the thing you're looking for. Anyway, whether it's a device prototype, a special sword, a child's toy, a really good bottle of scotch, or anything else, people have a way of coming up with an item they really need to get them through the trials of the blackout. As with missing persons, a simple retrieval should bring in 500 nuyen, a little more complexity bumps that to 1,000, and if you need to get by serious security, make sure you charge at least 5,000.

- ▶ What I like the most about these jobs is that there doesn't seem to be any interference from security forces. No sirens in the distance. No high-threat-response teams. No looking over your shoulder for trailing police drones. It's good clean work, as far as I'm concerned.
- ▶ Clockwork
- ▶ With those last two, it can depend on who or what you're retrieving.
- ▶ BlueShoes
- ▶ I shall not hold back against anyone I encounter undertaking such contracts. I would never work with a person who would do such a thing, either. You had best hope you don't take any that cross my path, murderer.
- ▶ August
- ▶ There are more runners on my side of the aisle than yours.
- ▶ Clockwork
- ▶ I shall be on the lookout for opportunities to cull some of you, then.
- ▶ August
- ▶ So to get more on topic, I'm going to share what happened when I ran into a pack of ghouls during the blackout! Bear with me, this is heartwarming. I was skulking along the sidewalk when I came 'round the corner and right into a group of seven of them. They'd been skulking along the same wall coming the other way, and we'd all been real quiet. I thought I was about to be ghouled, seeing how my shotgun didn't work at all. But they just froze, too. They looked at me, I looked at them. I was about to run for my life when the one in front waved at me and said

“Hello.” We got to talking, and they turned out to be nice people. They were out watching for signs of trouble—they bad spirits that make the zombies and such—and running errands for some folk who needed help. I assume they were also cleaning up the corpses from the streets, because I noticed an absence of those in the vicinity, but I thought it unwise to bring that up in conversation. They were all wearing a purple sash or bandana. I asked what it meant, and they told me they were vegans. They said it wasn’t in a literal sense, but they use the term as a shorthand for ghouls who only eat food that wasn’t killed for the purpose of being food. I guess it’s a movement or something. Ghouls with a code of ethics about who they’ll eat or not. Any of you hear of that?

- > Ratchet
- > I have. There’s a ghoul in NOLA who helped out with feeding the local homeless. He said, “Don’t be afraid of me. I’m a vegan.” Now that I think of it, he was wearing a purple bandana. Everybody loved that guy. I think they called him Noodles, because he’d always pass out sealed ramen packets. I hope he’s doing well.
- > Matthias
- > I just got in a more detailed piece, from someone with some unfortunate experience with disasters. Hell of a thing to become an expert in. Anyway, here’s AJ to give you a deeper look at how this is affecting St. Louis.
- > Bull

STILL FRAMES IN THE ACTION

POSTED BY: AJ <UPLOADED 11-25-80/2323:23>

So you think you have drek luck, eh? How’s this catch ya? I took a little job a few years back. It wasn’t in my hometown, but it was a quick in and out, easy gig; the job went smooth. Luck went south because the job was in Boston, and I got stuck behind the lockdown. Move ahead to now—I’ve been clear of Boston about a year now. I’m doing my best to generate a new report on the blackout in St. Louis, much like I did for Boston, but at least I can get out of here if I want. I’ve just got too much gold in my heart to bail.

Yeah, I should’ve known better. I’d seen the news with the blackouts up the eastern seaboard, but A) that’s the other side of the UCAS, and B) I wasn’t even in the UCAS side of St. Louis, I was on the CAS side. Didn’t matter, I’m still stuck in the dark with several systems that won’t reboot, but I’m not giving up, as you can tell.

I’m not journaling my own explorations this time, but I’ll give you the geographical highlights of whatever the drek this is, along with dropping the forum chatter that I snagged from some of the pop-up boosters that hosted Matrix activity. I’ve

snagged briefs from a few other locals who I trust to offer some more in-depth insights, and I found a few random bits of stuff that I’ll slap on here just to make it easier for the Triumvirate. All in all, the situation in St. Louis means someone is up to something shady in the darkness, and while I don’t have all the pieces, I think I can speculate with some accuracy.

As for those boosters, folks leaped on the chance to blabber at each other again. To save bandwidth, the operators often ran everything as text only. It wasn’t the Matrix, really, but it was better than nothing, and when you were alone in the dark it was something to connect to.

So, in memory of my favorite reporter, here I go again.

VOICES IN THE DARKNESS

Here’s the data dump broken down by booster node, with titles I made up for them. I cleaned out bits here and there to save space and avoid the garbage, but it isn’t *all* gone. If the rantings seemed to hold some hint of interesting truth, I dropped it in near the end for the conspiracy nuts to sift through.

SHINING STAR?

- > Anyone know anything about that OmniStar office building over on Pine that was being renovated? Three of my crew headed there yesterday to check out a rumor about a well-stocked DocWagon food pantry. They didn’t come back, and I’m just curious if it was the site or something along the way that might be delaying them.
- > Philter
- > That’s in the heart of the dark zone. Not sure why anyone would head there for anything.
- > JamesGull
- > The flash trashed everything electronic, including door locks. Access to whatever you want, wherever you want, is just a crowbar away. Plenty of scavengers headed into the darkness.
- > NoFearoftheDark
- > If you’re talking about Serra Park, I’d keep your distance. You never know what D-Wag had stored in their labs that may be thawing and ready to unleash a plague on the city if someone opens the wrong thing.
- > SaintLouisSingle
- > If anyone goes, can you look for my wife? She hasn’t come home since the blackout, and she works on the eighteenth floor. Her name is Kayla West, and she’s short, with black hair, green eyes, and glasses. Not sure what good it will do anyone, but I’ve got a pair of thousand-nuyen certified sticks for definitive info on her. I just need to know.
- > WestJimWest



- › Everyone should stay away from that building. When the flash went off, the fire-protection system went haywire. I saw people slamming into the front doors of the lobby to try to get out. Passed it the next morning, and there were no bodies. Just blood spatters on the glass and smears on the marble floor.
- › TaretheScales
- › What are you talking about? I went there this morning for medical treatment. They had offline generators that didn't get zapped. They aren't at full power, but the office has plenty staff on site including DocWagon, Lone Star, and Manadyne. Protection, medicine, and arcane assistance all in one. Definitely not where this guy lost his crew.
- › DowntownBrown
- › And they're just helping people out of pure kindness? If my olfactory booster hadn't been fried by the flash, I'd be smelling bulldrek.
- › Archon
- › Actually, everything there is fine. They're helping because they're good people and want to help others. The generator power is reserved for the medical center on the tenth floor, so be careful and bring lights to get through the lower floors. Obviously the elevators don't work, so use the main stairwell. If you have injured with you, you can leave them on the ground floor, we've rigged a pulley system in the elevator shafts for emergencies.
- › Omni Operations
- › Good humans? "Ignore the nine floors of darkness, we promise we're up here." What is this drek?
- › Archon
- › Pretty much a standard in a lot of these disaster zones. I did relief efforts in Chicago and Boston. Both times we found populations had moved up at least four floors when possible. Even small structures with less than four floors never had residents on the first floor, and rarely the second. The move up gives a buffer zone to spot and handle trouble. Of course, this led to a large number of deaths during fires or structural failures.
- › EngineNineOnStandby
- › Whether you head there or not, the lower nine floors have a lot of salvageable material. Violence and death across the downtown caused by system failures left most of this region with salvageable goods. Heading into corp-controlled areas could be risky. Better to hit spots not under someone's watchful eye.
- › EasyPickings

MARKET MESSAGE

- › Help available at 800 Market Street. We have supplies and a safe space inside the dark zone. All are welcome! We can't check SINS right now, anyway!
- › Cooper
- › Oh, thank you! Do you have anyone who can or is willing to help us over?
- › EliseReynolds

- > I'm in, got a few spare Predators too for anyone who needs one and knows how to use it. I say the sooner, the better. My building is having issues with looters, and they're working their way up. I'm high enough that I probably have a day or two, but there are people under me I'd like to bring along, and they'll probably have issues before nightfall today. I can see the emitter truck, corner of 9th and Pine. Meet near there?
- > Courtside
- > I have four people here who are willing to go. The other dozen with us aren't sure about this. Anyone out there able to verify this is on the up and up?
- > DarkVision
- > Don't go there. They're ...
- > (Null ID—Transmitter signal damaged)
- > Sad to say, but Cahokia over in the barrens is doing better than we are. Probably because they're used to these conditions.
- > AngelaLofton
- > Stay away from Cahokia. Mana is spiking in the area, and spirits are saying the area is dangerous, even for them.
- > SpellcasterforHire
- > We lost a few blocks. When the water drops, if it drops, we'll see how folks fared. The river ended up moving a barge that had plugged a cracked embankment and protected it from complete failure. Minute it pulled it free, the flow quickly crumbled fifty meters of earthworks. The barge got dragged through, along with two tugs. Buildings near the break crumbled fast and slowed the flow, but the high river flooded.
- > LarryLongshoreman

PROPAGANDA

- > Citizens of St. Louis, don't fear. Every effort is being made to return power to affected areas. Your city stands by you. For the safety and welfare of everyone, the City of St. Louis, along with the support of the United Canadian and American States and Confederation of American States, has placed the affected region, along with an operations corridor of approximately one half-kilometer, under the conditions of martial law. Citizens within the affected region are asked to follow the curfew and stay within their domiciles from thirty minutes prior to sundown until thirty minutes after sunrise. This allows setup and breakdown of support facilities and allows violations to be handled during daylight.
 - Support stations will be available during the daylight hours to distribute supplies and handle medical care. Permanent stations are located at the edge of the affected zone, and mobile stations will operate across various sections of the affected area throughout the day.
 - Citizens are reminded that interference or disruption of any support station or enforcement personnel is a federal felony and punishable by immediate and extended incarceration. Criminal activity will be investigated by both local and federal authorities, with detainment maintained indefinitely. Judicial proceedings will not reconvene until after martial law has been lifted. Information pertaining to the source of the attack or criminal activity can be directed to the appropriate node on the peripheral Matrix hosts. Intentional false reporting is a federal offense under martial law. As efforts progress, updates will be provided when available.
- > CityofStLouis
- > Big hit there. If you're in the area and need help, drop a line. We have boats heading out each day, but it's slow because of treacherous waters and current.
- > MississippiQueen
- > The fallout could have been worse. I don't know if anyone else saw it, but those buildings didn't fall from the water. I saw a dragon in the water. It was dark and had a scar on its snout, and the head was bigger than a Citymaster. It swam through the raging water like it owned it and barreled through buildings like a bulldozer!
- > Meeper420
- > So a dragon bothered to help out. Not likely. Stop spreading lies and rumors on here. We have enough fear and worry about.
- > SysAdmin
- > I've studied dragons. Leviathans are of particular interest since they are so rare. The only great leviathan, known as the Sea Dragon, is captured in only a handful of reliable images on the Matrix. What's especially relevant is the scar and her size. No other leviathan comes close, and that scar isn't well-known. She got it a month ago after giving a hard lesson to Terasca in New Orleans when their altercation became a physical one. I'd lean toward believing him about those buildings and shift worry over to why she's here.
- > Dragonologist9653
- > What??? You're full of it.
- > SysAdmin

RIVER STATION SOUTH REPORTING

- > Hey! Glad to drop the first message. We're here in the glow of the ARCH and living better than expected. Several barges have been pulled clear from groundings.
- > RiverMudMatt
- > People! I'm looking for folks to doss with. My place got hit by gangers. I was gathering goodies at a Stuffer Shack, so I have supplies to share. Just need a roof over my head.
- > Soulfire
- > Dragonologist9653 stopped by and uploaded a pic. It's a stupid selfie, but the leviathans in the background are unmistakable. Could be faked, but *shrug*. Also, we'd like to note SysAdmin is not actually a system administrator—we just don't have good name-blocking protocols on here.
- > Admin
- > The river's seen a lot of traffic since they cleared a path. Barges of supplies are coming into the ARCHology, and a few are moored out together in the river, waiting to bring more in.
- > ARCHEologist

- > River Rats need help. They're getting the short end of the stick out there. They're a target for the patrols when doing anything except ferrying people to safer turf.
- > MudinmyVeins
- > It's not just the corps; the gangs have been pointed at them. Even though gangs in the blackout are partying and frying resources left and right, they're still stocked to the gills. Enough to trade with. Someone is backing them, and not for benevolent reasons.
- > NoRestfortheWicked
- > Today marks three weeks. Three goddamn weeks. We've had these boards for the bulk of that. Why can't the goddamn megacorps do better? The CAS still accepts the BRA, and last I checked, the dirt I live on is in the CAS! This is some petty, murderous bulldrek. People are still dropping daily from malnutrition, diseases, violence, and other causes! I'm a damn MCT citizen, and I can't even boost a regular Matrix from my own corp. Drop some satellites! Send in some sat trucks! I know they exist, because we dumped them in the desert to rot years ago! No reason they can't come off the scrap heap. We don't deserve this, we deserve better! When the power comes back and we get clear of this, I'm going find a way to make a difference.
- > MCTEngineerSamWatts
- > Funny you mention satellites and sat-trucks. I saw the latter get turned back near the martial border. I've also seen drones signal-blocking satellites, with either broad-spectrum jammers or laser reflectors for those making a direct laser link. Someone is trying to keep us isolated. Anyone able to take down a drone, bring it to me. I can check the circuitry and get owner data. Not a perfect data trail, but it can point us in the right direction.
- > ItsNotHacking

FOUND THIS ... JUST NEEDED TO POST IT

- > Yesterday, I was the pinnacle of the street, an apex predator. Today, I'm practically a cripple, barely able to dictate this into a junk 'link I found. Tomorrow is a question. Let's talk about yesterday first, and then I might get to my tomorrow story.
It started out like every other morning: I checked the news feeds for updates on the East Coast attacks and heard the same garbage. Terrorists with zero capability of orchestrating such a thing taking credit, corporate pundits claiming the UCAS just needs to throw support back into the BRA, government officials claiming everything was fine, support was on the way, aid was being dropped, and efforts were well underway to restore normality. The death toll scrolled across the bottom of my screen and made me laugh. They weren't counting the SINless, and the number was already outside my ability to fathom.
I chuckled to myself that the ghouls were going to have a field day. I know that's sick, but that's my kind of funny. The feeds led me to my messages, nothing exciting unless I needed a new sex pill or wanted to "connect" with some cheap skank. No new work options, so it was off to the gym to keep my muscles up to

par with my metal. I was back home and chilling, catching up on Chase: Errant Knight when everything went black.

Now, not just dark with emergency lighting, but black because I have—well, had—cybereyes. But the dark wasn't the worst. Right after the darkness came the pain. The pain in my head from the circuits in my eyes frying, pain in my shoulders from my arms going limp, and pain over my whole body as the booster nodes for my wired reflexes all popped and fizzled out in the same instant as the darkness.

I'm glad I was already lying down.

The pain didn't last long, so that was nice, but when it was gone, I was left with the nothing. I couldn't see, couldn't feel my arms, my legs barely worked with the fried wires. But I could hear. I heard crashes, screams, and the early explosions. While I lay there helpless, I heard gunfire erupting throughout the neighborhood. I used to live in a nice 'hood right in the heart of the city. But whatever happened ended that.

When I got over my initial shock, after less than an hour (which felt like an eternity), I stumbled through shoving furniture in front of my door and did my best to pull curtains closed with my feet and my teeth, all the while hearing everything going on outside. I couldn't see a thing, but what I heard made it easy to draw a mental picture.

That was my whole night, sitting in the darkness and imagining the world. I wanted to see, to do something. But all I could—can—do is lay here. I managed to find this 'link. Got the recorder on with voice commands, and now I hope it's recording and transcribing properly. If not, who cares, because we're going to talk about what tomorrow brings.

I'm opening the door and walking out. I'm letting the world out there take care of what I can't manage in here because nothing works and I have no hands to manipulate things. I may meet someone who can help. I may meet someone who takes me out. Point is, I'll leave this 'link here to broadcast. If it works out, I'll come back and get it someday. If it doesn't, thanks for reading and please find out what the frag happened and put a bullet in the brainpan of the fragger that started all this.

Signing off, Collin James Kershaw. C.J. on the streets.

> CJ

SCRUBBED (A.K.A. HAVE FUN PLANS!)

Here's a small collection of the scrubbed stuff. I don't know what in this is true, but if any of it is, we're in some deep drek. Figured it was better to leave some of this out here for curious folks to check out, rather than let it sit somewhere offline and eventually catch wind of a disaster foretold in this madness.

- > We are the rightful owners of this city and this land. We have stripped it of the spider's taint and now shall reclaim it as our own. Members of the ancient tribes, come together, rise up, and wipe the land-stealers from this, our sacred home. The Ancient Nations claim the power behind the blackout. Those in so-called

“St. Louis” should leave now before we are forced to unleash the spirits of the darkness to cleanse this place!

- > ChiefSahuatik
- > How wrong can someone be? Or how crazy? The portals under Gateway Park aren't spacetunnels or whatever; they're metaplanar gateways built by the Black Lodge, and they've been there for over a decade. They were one of the big reasons the ARCHology got built so fast and for so cheap, as they brought in materials from other metaplanes. There's plenty of extra stuff stored down there and in the big arch that didn't come through in the same form as they expected. Check out all the warded space in the ARCHology. It's easily beyond any other megacorp arcology for ward space, and Novatech is not a major magic player.
- > DefenderoftheLight
- > They did it. Even though we let them leave, they still came after us. We spend billions to find a cure for CFD, spend more to build them a ship, and the fragging Monads still retaliate! How could we have been so foolish? Why'd we believe them? What fools have they made of us?
- > CainJames
- > It's not retaliation, it's revitalization. The Monads who stayed back needed more numbers. The blackout cities are no different than Boston. They're infecting everyone they can and cleaning out every database of the cures! We need to stop them. Band together, brothers and sisters, for the war for our minds is upon us in the darkness. Spread the word! Spread our salvation!
- > SavetheMinds
- > I've long known this day would come. When they sent the devil dogs to silence me, I should have come forward, but I thought I was safe in my feigned death. I should have known Ellison would strike at me with his master plan. St. Louis is black, but when the lights come on it will be Black. The Black Lodge will control the city.
Crazy?! Black Lodge?! You don't know, because they're hidden and in control. They lead world leaders. They guide the megas without needing to be a face on the trid. They're everywhere. Why else was a city so firmly a part of the CAS hit, while all the other cities blacked out were in the UCAS? You're fools! They are taking over. They must be stopped. Come together as a force of light and white against the Black Lodge!
- > HumanitiesLastHope
- > I saw them creeping in the darkness. They're here. I thought I'd seen the last of them in Chicago, but the blackout has allowed them to scurry freely in the night. We will be taken again.
Damn Ares! Why did you strike so poorly in Detroit? We know it was the bugs! You struck the hive, but not all the hives, and you gave the others courage to strike. We will be overrun. We will be turned and used. We will never win now. Ares and their warmongering have started a war they could not win alone, and their ego was too great to ask for help from true powers in this

world. We can only hope MCT and Saeder-Krupp can save us. The bugs are coming! Trust no one!!!

- > CermakWorked
- > Freedom isn't free. We all know that. Those of us who understand those words know how this happened. They also know it means we just keep fighting because they're afraid! What do Philadelphia, Baltimore, Toronto, Bangor, Newark, Halifax, and Bismarck have in common? They're UCAS cities. What is St. Louis? Especially downtown, where they hit? CAS! Why did we get hit? Because while the UCAS was being beaten down by someone else (probably the Corpse Court for the BRA debacle), they decided to use the cover to hit us and slow the loss. We will be free. Be free of the UCAS! Be free of the CAS!
They tried this to stop us! But they don't know the mistake they've made. The lights protect the masses, not the resistance. We work from the shadows. We have long lived in the darkness. The power will return, and they will find a different St. Louis. A free St. Louis. An **independent St. Louis!**
- > MississippiFreedomFighter
- > Nooooo!!! The White Wyrms has done it. His mountain village wasn't enough, now he wants more. He wants from the mountains to the Mississippi. He is not alone. This tech stinks of the Wired Wyrms. He feigned distaste for St. Louis, but he protects that river-spanning abomination. The River Dragon will be our slavemaster, serving the dragon king. This isn't the end. The other dark cities will fall. They will rule this continent. We are but a foothold. They will take us, then seek revenge on Aztechnology for the murder of their kin. Boston broke for Eliohann. The UCAS will crumble for Dzitbalchen. We must rise up and fight now when we have a chance. They have taken our tech, our tool to destroy them, but what remains is enough. Raid the armories! Rob the airfields! Show the soldiers the truth. They cannot stand aside and protect the oppressive efforts of the dragons! They must fight at our side.
- > Archangel

LOOKING AROUND IN THE DARK

Let me avoid sucking up tons of bandwidth with this and get to the point of my efforts. The lowest rung here, and the first drekheads to jump at this fragged up situation, were the gangs.

The streets of St. Louis went wild in the early nights. As the core of the city blacked out, gangs from the East (a.k.a. the East St. Louis Barrrens), Castle Rock, and the Blight came pouring in like piranhas smelling blood. Maybe they were waiting and ready because of all the other cities that have been hit, or maybe they're just opportunistic and can mobilize quickly, but whatever the reason, the dark zone and the zap-zone (as I call it) were swarming with them throughout the night. As the morning came, some of them settled into new spots to rest, while others headed back to where they'd come from. All of them left death and destruction in their wake.

I'd love to say it was just the first night, but the gangs coming in became a nightly occurrence, with more and more of them settling into the dark zone. Very few settled into the zap-zone. The place felt like a void most of the time. Tech is a part of our lives we rarely notice, including the hum it creates that we just don't hear anymore, but as soon as that's gone—oh, you notice. It's eerie. The dark zone was bad, but it had a few generators here and there, or rebooted old tech that managed to not go dark, but nothing big could run for long. The zap-zone was devoid of anything. The saving grace of most folks there was the ARCHology and the fact that, after forty-eight hours of darkness, it somehow powered up again and stayed that way. The external lighting of that ever-glowing behemoth cast long shadows.

Back to the gangs. They came in, they looted, they killed, they wrought havoc by night. But the daytime sent them scurrying to their lairs. It gave locals time to recover, and in far more cases than I'd like to admit, retaliate. Several local groups started calling themselves Van Helsings, after the famous vampire hunter, because they'd go in and kill the gangers who dosed down in the dark zone in their sleep, like resting vampires. It wasn't always some close-up kill, either. There're plenty of burned-out husks of buildings (and blocks when things got out of hand) that are a result of efforts to burn them all in their sleep.

As you can expect, most gangs now post look-outs or hire guards (often runners) to protect their squats while they sleep. I took one of these jobs and then decided "never again" when I had to put a few rounds into a crowd of angry sheeple who wouldn't listen to reason. I shot to wound, not kill, but people who are that far gone don't care until someone is dead. Luckily it only took two very neat headshots and the rest realized this wasn't worth the risk. It isn't always like that, but I didn't want that again. The citizens have become as bad as the gangs; they just don't all wear the same colors. The dark zone was a free-for-all in those early days and has only settled into a more controlled free-for-all over time. It's still like the Wild West in there, or an all-hours urban brawl match.

Let's move up to the mob. A lot changed for them in that first night. The previous Don was in transit when the blackout fried his limo and sent it right off the Eads Bridge. The power struggle that set off still hasn't fully settled, but their efforts have flooded the shadows with business and nuyen. Some of the challengers think of it as a conquest, while others are taking the hearts-and-minds route and helping those in the blackout, and all are trying to expand their powerbases and businesses while there's no top capo to rein them in. Try to pay attention to who you're working for, if only to dump reports on the Matrix pop-ups so someone can get an idea of who's winning, because frag-all if I can tell.

With the Mafia headless, the Yakuza and Vory are protecting their assets from rabid capos while also pushing back because they know the capos can't ask each other for help at the moment. The Yakuza are actually doing less expansion and more outreach than one would expect, taking care of anyone whose ancestry fits their world view. Hooding Yaks seems like an odd concept, but it's a regular thing, even if it's just Yaks paying runners to do good when they don't have the manpower to stretch or don't want the exposure.

The Vory are pretty much the exact opposite. They're operating in hardcore mode and dumping massive numbers of bodies in the river (which is a problem, but one runners can't address by anything other than not using the river as a body dump like so many others are). They're locking up territory, especially after the dumb-hoop gangers come through and soften it and then get hardboiled by the Vory. Plenty of locales that once were Mafia or Yak territory are now controlled by the Vory. Most of them still don't have power, but booze and physical gambling are back to the norm inside the blackout, so the Vory are still bringing in cash even if the juice is not flowing.

The other syndicates are generally stagnant. They're focused on holding turf and fighting off random gangers and citizens' brigades that are real uppity and super bored, especially with the Van Helsings bolstering their attitude. Remember, though, that what I'm describing doesn't cover all parts of the sprawl. The syndicates don't control that much dirt, leaving plenty of places as silent hollows with regular folks trying to figure out how to survive or how to get out without running into roving trouble.

Let's talk government next. In the early days of the blackout, a lot of government officials residing outside the blackout zone tried to calm the people and tell them everything was going to be okay. They attempted to send in law enforcement and security to help those in the dark and zap-zones, but they only managed to get a lot of folks killed before they realized the magnitude of this disaster. They declared martial law on both sides, not just the UCAS zone (which was already in effect) and told people to stay out of the dark zone while sending in relief piecemeal via air because nothing ever made it far on the ground. Plenty of runners were tapped to recover devices, people, valuables, and the like, but amazingly none of that work involved helping any regular citizens.

Now, for the hinky stuff. First, I tracked plenty of government aircraft making stops at the ARCHology, which means they were connecting with the corps. Maybe it was about getting aid, or maybe they were stopping by to scream at them and blame them for letting this happen. But more than likely, they're working some other angle. Maybe it's long-term restructuring or increased freedom

and support, or ignoring the whole “UCAS tore up the BRA” for the UCAS side of town, but they flew right past the heart of blackness and landed on the gleaming corporate monolith scores of times in the first few weeks.

Second, I got plenty of word-of-mouth reports about runners outside of the dark zone taking protection gigs that involved St. Louis government officials and various political figures from both the UCAS and the CAS. Again, aid, support, anger venting ... there are all sorts of options for why, but word of mouth (the flow of which is sometimes abetted by alcohol) pointed to some kind of arrangement being made. Maybe they need permission for a wall around the dark zone or they’re petitioning a full move to the CAS in hopes of avoiding future issues related to the UCAS. Whatever the case may be, a lot of work revolves around something that doesn’t help those suffering in the city.

Which brings me to my own personal strange experience as point 2.5. I took a protection gig to pick up some cargo being smuggled into the city from the Blight and transport it via a fairly specific path to the drop-off down near Arnold. I had a little leeway to avoid trouble, but they had some very specific spots they wanted this cargo to pass through. Details were sketchy, but they offered an upfront payment of some seriously needed medical supplies and food, which was enough to get me to go in blind. I survived Boston, and the early days of this still haven’t been as horrifying as that pit. Anyway, it turned out that the pickup was a person. A person with whom I was awfully familiar, thanks to her campaign ads that were still all over Seattle and the fact that I’d seen her on the trids almost daily back in the home sprawl. I drove none other than Corinne Potter, governor of Seattle, all throughout the dark and zap-zone and then dumped her off in Arnold without her ever sharing a single word. No hello, no small talk, no questions about what was going on. I drove her, dropped her with the same t-bird smuggler on the other end, and then went about my day wondering what the frag the governor of Seattle was doing here. Best I could guess was she was getting a look at what might hit them next, since they were pretty much the last major UCAS sprawl, other than DeeCee and New York, that hadn’t been blanked.

Let’s talk of rumor and reason three. All sorts of crazy stories are told in the dark. You talk to enough people, and eventually they claim to have seen some wild thing themselves, or they directly know the person who saw it. Ask a few questions, get a few details, and you discover that everyone who tells the same tale has some vastly different details. That’s why I’m willing to mention this rumor. Stories have already been spread about a river leviathan. But when you keep seeing a series of rumors about that dragon posting up in a flooded

zone and holding meetings with city officials on an abandoned rooftop, you start to ask around, and you hear some awfully similar details. These stories are going to add up to something, so it’s best if we figure out what that is soon.

So, those are my points. The city is putting a lot of effort into conversations with the corps, two governments, a distant governor, and a dragon, all while their citizens suffer in a place without power, and the days and nights slowly get colder.

That’s enough conspiracy talk. Let’s focus on reality. For those who don’t know, the zap-zone, that space where everything got fried to the point of no repair, is located in the heart of downtown St. Louis. From the river (well, really Gateway Park) out to Grand, and I-55 up to Madison was hit with whatever device the terrorists used. About a two-kilometer-wide stretch. I had street sam and decker buddies who died instantly from their ’ware frying, and the hospitals down there quickly filled their morgues due to failed equipment, accidents, life support failures, and so on. The dark zone is bigger, about twenty kilometers across. From what I’ve heard, that might be the biggest radius of any afflicted city, but St. Louis was also one of the biggest sprawls hit. It’s about an even split of UCAS and CAS territory centered on the same point as the zap zone. It tagged most of Downtown, a chunk of Crestwood, Kirkwood, Mehlville, and Ferguson on the CAS side, as well as parts of Granite City, Belleville, and East St. Louis (though I doubt the barrens’ denizens even noticed) on the UCAS side. The only thing that recovered quickly was the ARCHology, which stands as a beacon of light, casting long shadows into the darkness every night over the river. The base parks on both sides are squatter-ridden, but the building itself lets no one in from the ground. All access comes from the air. Everything else in that radius got blacked out. Devices didn’t fully fry but anything that was on was corrupted to the point of uselessness. Things that were offline seemed to survive, but when they came back, there wasn’t enough bandwidth or infrastructure for a functional Matrix. It was just gone. Power junctions were bricked, and it doesn’t look like the power is coming on anytime soon. There’s a lot of stuff that’s going to need fixing before the lights come back on a large scale.

Small scale has been hard to maintain. Every time somewhere gets power, it draws trouble like a sprite to open data. Everyone comes to either rain on the parade, steal whatever’s providing the juice, or steal the territory and have the lights for themselves. Plenty of runners I know have settled into a decent living by siding with a “spark”—that’s what locals call these lit-up sites—and protecting it for food, shelter, booze, and boosted gear and goods that most of them are squirreling away for later, shipping out of the dark zone, or selling in the dark zone and putting the nuyen somewhere



safe while they don't have to use it for rent and electric bills.

Did I mention rent? This is one of the bright spots in the darkness—no one is collecting rent, because they can't. Some rule about providing a “livable” residence, which they can't, because they can't fix drek. I'm sure once all this passes, the courts are going to be filled with lawsuits (“Your honor, just because tenants cannot safely sleep in a unit does not, on its face, render it not livable”), but since most runners use a fake for their doss, it's just going to be a lot of burned SINS and/or landlords that know full well who they have living there and they never bother to sue. Instead, they'll use the streets to collect. That's all down the road, and honestly, I'm not sure how well this place will manage down the road. I don't think it's going to go the Chicago or Boston route, but regrowth is going to be tough.

That's enough from me. I may add a comment or two later in the posts, but this is plenty of explanation for what we're looking at right now. Let me turn over a couple of bits from some guys I found here and trust.

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

Name's James. Nope, not real, it's a street name, but I always thought names like Robin, Locksley,

Hood, Hooder, or White Knight were a bit on the nose. I do good work in the shadows. I rob from the rich and give to the poor, and those I work with and connect with do the same. Everyone in the community knows James. Maybe it's the silly street name, but I like to think that I do a vast amount of good. I, like AJ, have experienced being trapped in a bad situation, but mine was Chicago when it became Bug City, so I know something about this game.

Introduction over—let's talk about St. Louis after dark.

First thing we have to do is get communications up. Hard to get data moving around right now. Really does feel like Chicago, minus the fragging bugs. Worst part is—well, maybe not the *worst*—I think the people here are tougher to deal with. You can't band together against darkness like you can against something physical like the bug spirits. You can't fight the depression of Matrix withdrawal, the fear of living without social media or doing things without your virtual assistant. You can't punch loneliness and isolation, and you can't shoot the frustration you feel when you realize how ill-equipped you are to survive unassisted by tech. People here can't fragging make themselves food. Even things others would consider simple, like opening a can of creamed soy, is beyond the teach-

ings of someone who grew up with a Nature-Taste KitchenHelper™. I run with Stitch, a snake shaman, all the time because I need him to patch up people's hands after they try to open those cans the wrong way.

Digression: communications. First people I approached won't surprise anyone. I hit up every rigger and hacker I knew to help me solve the problem created by zero Matrix. Hopefully all of you appreciate the difficulty of that. I couldn't call and arrange a meet. I had to go places and look for them. AJ was very helpful talking to people and getting pointed in the right direction, as well as helping me out of scrapes when I got pointed the wrong way. It took days just to get a dozen chummers on the case. Picked up a few more over the first week, and we had our first "Connectivity Car" up and running just shy of a week in. It was pretty much ready by day four, but the gangs were too rampant and wild for us to risk all the work we'd done. With nothing to distract them but this project, the team was focused hardcore. The test run was a bit overwhelming, and we trimmed back the plan because voice and video took more bandwidth than we could handle. Ten "Text Trucks" rolled out across the dark zone by day ten (poetic, I know), with two more Connectivity Cars sent to the zap zone. The riggers had a field day kitting up those rigs like it was some barrens death race, but it was a good idea. Only one of the cars made it out. The other got a collection of messages transmitted back before it went offline. The last message was a text from the driver about getting swarmed by rats. That rig is still out there with a load of messages that didn't get out, but we haven't risked anyone in an effort to download it yet. Several TMs we know (more on their part later, it's great) think they were emergent critters and the Matrix signal was like a dinner bell to the starving masses.

We've had the trucks and cars running ever since, and AJ has us sending him the conversations. Most of it is just people reaching out in the darkness, and that's why we keep taking the risk to put them out there. The gangs hit them, the corps seem to be after us as well, and the syndicates are trying to take over but use it for their purposes. We've lost several, and quite a few other groups are suddenly popping up their own, often with nefarious purpose, but what else would you expect from metahumanity in a blacked-out sprawl?

It also seems like we're not the only ones with this approach—some unmarked vans have been seen drifting around the city, being suspiciously functional and all. A handful of technomancers, along with a few deckers who managed to get some functional gear, have reported a wireless signal from the vans. Who owns them, who drives them, and what they're up to is anyone's guess.

Now, let's talk about those technomancers and something I think only we've come up with. The

moment the Matrix went blank, the TMs in St. Louis started freaking. The sudden silence was like losing a major sense to them. Imagine going blind or deaf in an instant. Many made the panicked run for the rest of the city where the Matrix still hums. A few made it, but most didn't. The streets swallowed some, others ducked into the safety of a new crew, but most turned back. They saw the terrors in the streets, and while the "silence" was scary, death was scarier. In this exodus run, a few discovered something. In the emptiness and void of no Matrix, they could sense each other easily and talk across the void. The experience is strange—it's no longer a conversation in the construction of the Matrix, but a call across the blackness. More and more devices have come online, and they can sense and touch them, but it's not the massive clutter and vast variety of the Matrix with its billions of devices. This lack of clutter has given them a little more reach than they used to have, and most of them can reach out and talk directly to another technomancer about a half kilometer away. A group of them have gotten together and created the Network. They operate like a message service across the dark zone and the zap zone (still a stupid name, AJ, but I'll use it for consistency), often in a direct way with two people talking through the pair of technomancers. Initially, they joined forces with our little hooder network, but recently they've started transforming into a more universal communication system, as other groups have started offering larger paydays to send their messages. We still do a lot of protection gigs for them—they're big targets due to the amount of information they send and know—but their income makes it easier to distance themselves from our movement and contract other muscle.

Those are the highlights of our hooding crew. We do the normal runs for supplies and equipment to keep the people safe and fed, and we try our best to hinder the growing forces of metahuman darkness that succumb to their base desires in the darkness.

ARCH-NEMESIS

AJ thought it was important to talk about this, though what I have isn't going to fill much space once he deletes all the expletives. I'm Cajun Kate, a regular river runner and frequent "cargo redirection specialist." I live on the Mississippi and Missouri, and I spent many an hour staring at that monstrosity as it got built. I keep my sonar up and try to stay on top of all things ARCHology. Now, that's a bigger deal than before because of the fragging weirdness. I'm as out of the loop as anyone else who isn't allowed inside, but I've got connections, so let's talk corporate dreckheadedness.

If you ask anyone who's made it in blacked-out St. Louis this long and mention the ARCHology,

back up, because there's a chance they might hit you out of reflex. This has been the *most* talked about thing during the blackout. Why? Because it barely got blacked out. Somehow, despite being on the edge of the zap-zone and in the heart of the dark zone, the ARCHology has been shining most of the time. When the blackout rolled out from downtown, the ARCHology went down with everything else, but on night three it lit up like a birthday candle. I should know, I watched it all happen from on the water. I saw the flash, then Downtown go black, and then the blackness rolled out down the river. Because I was working, I was actually spared the worst of it as I sat in the darkness with all my tech shut down, but I watched plenty of boats and drones go dark, all while the ARCHology kept the lights on.

As one would expect, the light drew the desperate, but that's the extent of aid they got from that ghost-forsaken drekstain of a building. Light. They locked down their ground floor entrances and got all their supplies and visitors through the air once flights started heading in again. The air was empty for a short while after the lights went out, as no one wanted to risk losing their tech if whatever had hit them was still operating. The parks and parking lots on both sides of the river have become shantytowns full of tents, makeshift houses, and community fires in two-hundred-liter drums (when they aren't just burning a car). The masses are angry, but they aren't violent—most of the time—because they know full well if those inside want them gone, they have the capability to take them out.

Let's talk inside. First off, who's there? NeoNET collapsed. Ownership of the ARCHology went to Novatech before the CC shredded NeoNET's assets, but ownership of the structure was far more debt than a broken-off Novatech could really handle. Samantha Villiers sought a buyer in Ares and Spin Global, but Ares never bit, and Spin is looking at Monaco rather than the split city of St. Louis. Thus far, no one has come in with an offer to buy the place outright, so the ARCHology is officially Novatech property, with office space rented to several dozen corps, including Erika, Transys-Neuronet, and OmniStar, as well as the St. Louis government and the Corporate Court. There are plenty of political issues going on around the ownership, but that's got nothing to do with the blackout, other than the rumor that it wasn't hit because the owners made a deal with whoever did this. But since no one has a clue who really did it and every terrorist organization is claiming the attacks as their own, it's a moot point.

I will say the efforts to try to fix things are spearheaded inside here, with government officials talking to the CC officials and the corps that are here. Problem is, no one knows what happened, so knowing how to fix it is tough.

They've sent out researchers. These guys get protection from runners and join that glorious category of deniable assets. Thing is, the researchers don't talk much about what they're looking for, and they usually hire the same runners for the same researcher. Meaning we in the shadows will need to communicate, and that's a hard sell.

They're a well-protected, active Matrix hub. This is huge. Hackers try to break in daily, but this rock stands unbroken (according to the hacker community). Technos dig it, just to have the feel of the Matrix nearby, but even they can't seem to scratch past the brutal defenses arrayed against them.

They're mostly empty. The capacity as compared to the actual number of inhabitants means it's mostly unused floor space. Between not being totally sold or leased and the number who just weren't in residence or at work at the time, the place would feel like a ghost town. That hasn't stopped several slick squatters from slipping inside, most thanks to yours truly, but it's a dangerous game to play. If you get caught inside, you can't just run out. No surprise that I slide them in through a water access.

This place is a pain to everyone outside and one of those corporate eyesores that just make everyone angry. It already made a mockery of the city's skyline and is just the start of more massive sky-rakers. Maybe that's why they blacked us out. To drop values so they can build new towers to their power.

Thanks for letting me rant, AJ. The next drink is on me!

- > No mention of the body tossed out a window of the place on night two?
- > Plan 9
- > Never saw it. Unsubstantiated rumor, as far as I can tell.
- > Cajun Kate
- > But I have pictures. Can't send them through the Matrix, though. I'll find some way to get you a look.
- > Plan 9

EXODUS TO NOWHERE

My grandfather used to talk about the old days. He had a nice house in a nice little neighborhood, with a big yard and nice neighbors. Then, VITAS and the first Crash came. Most people don't realize how bad it hit the U.S. Behind these events, the megacorps rose up, and much of the first world saw a massive urbanization shift. And it wasn't just the switch from rural to urban, but suburban to deep urban as arcologies and skyrise living got people close (but not too close) and out of suburbia. The suburbs turned into barrens.

But enough about history and the good old days. The point is, those suburbs are about to get

some new residents, as those affected by the blackout are moving out en masse.

Vast caravans of people are leaving the affected regions of the cities to squat and reside in some of the abandoned neighborhoods left behind. It's not isolated to a single sprawl, either. The idea is universal. All the blackout cities are seeing average folk, not just barrens rats and gutter trash, moving out to the empty suburban neighborhoods. The groups are usually on foot, but a few have gotten creative, stringing lines of dead cars together like a train and pulling them all together. Cops have had a hard time dealing, and most let them just roll on.

It's a dangerous effort, and I tried to warn them, but desperate people rarely listen. Maybe a plea here will save a few, but there are plenty of runners who do anything for money. Point is, the corps that hold deeds on the property they're squatting in aren't going to be nice. If it's a mega, which most of them are as they absorbed banks and employee property over the years, the dirt is extraterritorial. As such, deaths on it can be investigated or ignored as their security forces see fit, and the property can be protected the same way. With no one technically living there, they'll be free with the wetwork and frequently skimping on the investigations.

Hopefully more runners work to help these troubled folks than to harm or hinder them. Fingers crossed.

SMUGGLERS FOR THE WIN

I dig hooders and white knight runners. They're definitely some of my favorites. Better than runners with a golden heart are riggers—in particular smugglers—with the same gilded pumper. The run from the West Coast was already hot, especially with the smuggling action in Denver, but the ramp up in riggers making what they call the Blackout Blitz is unheard of. I'm guessing several cities are short on skilled riggers right now, because so many are making cash and connections getting supplies to Bismarck, Lexington, and St. Louis. The East Coast isn't getting the same support from the West Coast, but there are plenty of riggers running the eastern seaboard up from CAS and Carib League spots.

These runs are bringing food, water, medicine, and, most valuable of all, drugs into the regions to help the people survive and cope with the darkness. I'm not a huge fan of the last, but it also keeps a lot of people who shouldn't be on the street off it as well as calming down and defocusing the gangers.

Runners have gotten security gigs, and plenty of blackout victims with nuyen to spare are paying good money to take up the space on those rigged rides after they dump cargo. Some rig jockeys won't take those jobs, but plenty of them do. The ones who refuse usually fill up with a few critical patients from local docs to move out of the black-

out or over to another city altogether. If you can get a ride or a job helping these crews, you may get a lift out of hell for yourself.

NEW YORK HITS

The news mentioned Newark, and I've been wondering why the focus went there when I lost contact with chummers in Newark, Brooklyn, Queens, Jersey City, and the Bronx. Even Manhattan took a hit (I'll bitch about that later), and it's getting coverage like only Newark went dark. Sure, Newark got the fireworks with the big flash in the sky, but areas all over New York and New Jersey went dark. It wasn't as clean as some other places and that might be a clue, but right now I don't care about clues—I care about truth and letting the people know what's going on.

And what's going on is bulldrek!

I live in Perth Amboy—well, technically I doss in a houseboat on Raritan Bay. So ka, it's a refit barge, but it means I'm outside any of the East Coast blackouts. Thing is, I have hundreds of friends across this sprawl (I need more in Manhattan, but I don't have that kind of corp clearance), and minutes after the blackout I was all over the Matrix checking in. The black zones were weird. Strange to have voids that big. The grids were still there, but they were patchy before they flaked out completely. I made touches, found some friends safe, but had nothing on most of them. Well, except for my handful of Manhattan friends.

The grid across Manhattan had issues for all of about two seconds. Corps in the rotten apple had things back up in a jiffy, almost like they had backups ready to roll. Sure, I sound like a conspiracy nut, but here go the details, without cute anecdotes.

Newark was reported hit just like Baltimore and Philly. The flash popped over Jersey, but blackouts hit several New York boroughs as well. In every other city, the flash and the blackouts had a link of some kind. Here, Newark got the flash and a blackout alongside several over separate regions that saw no flash but still blacked out.

Nowhere besides Manhattan has regained power. Nowhere else. But somehow this corp-controlled glitz-dump got juice back.

It was easy to find plenty of other circumstantial stuff and rumors, but can we have any doubt when a corp-controlled stronghold somehow comes on in under a day while other places are going on weeks of blackness?

Well, I didn't. So I dug.

I know when this hits the streets and shadows, I'm a marked man, but I'm willing to offer what I have because this has gone too far.

Serve the corps. Doable as long as we have entertainment and life.

Barely subsist on what we make. Okay, as long as the entertainment is good, some recreational

goods are available, and we have our lives.

Ignore the heavy boot of oppression and instead see it as a safe and secure hand protecting us from the darkness always trying to destroy us. Sure, as long as those drugs are good, we have the illusion of freedom, and we're alive.

Black out city after city, murdering thousands with each act, in some charade intended to badger the UCAS back under your BRA boot, and in the process kill us by the thousands and take our lives.

Well, you see, with that, there is a problem. We take the oppression as long as we live, but kill us, take our lives, and we do not sit so idly by.

Get the datafile I'm attaching and this message to Old Crow. He has the connections. Let him spread the word and rile the masses. They were willing to sacrifice us in this. They were willing to sacrifice us in Chicago. They were willing to sacrifice us in the AMC. They were willing to sacrifice us in Boston. They have been willing to sacrifice us too often. We can't accept this any longer.

- > Time to add a little more to this file. With a little bit of time, people are trying to look into the why and the who of what happened, instead of being consumed by the what. There may not be a lot of answers ahead, but it will help us ask the right questions, which is important.
- > Bull

DEFENDE NOS IN PROELIO

BY FREYA

POSTED BY: LYRAN

◀UPLOADED 12-04-80/14:15:22▶

- > This was originally posted on ShadowSEA's fancy-pants private data haven for all things magical, the Emerald Palace. Someone on the inside forwarded me a file dump, and when I saw Freya's name, I figured I'd cross-post it here. You know things are getting bad when someone with an ego like hers is asking for help.
- > Lyran

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil ...

You've all heard about the blackouts by now. You've heard the conspiracy theories about who's behind it. Most people blame the corps—the “evil” corps, as though amoral corporate greed were any match for the real evils lurking in these blackouts. Blood mages, toxic shamans, shadow spirits, shedim ... the list goes on, and their numbers are growing by the night. There are a few of us out here, an informal network of magicians and adepts calling

ourselves the Archangels, protecting people against the wickedness and snares of these blackouts. We can't be everywhere at once, though, and things are getting worse by the day.

This document lists of some of the most dangerous threats the Archangels have discovered but don't have the manpower to deal with ourselves, along with general information for those who would join the cause. This isn't all of them, not by far—it would take an elven lifetime to list all of the magical threats the blackouts have to offer. The targets here are the ones that are too big for the Archangels to handle alone but small enough that competent runners could get the job done.

One little note regarding payment before we get started. I know a fair number of you reading this don't, in fact, believe in altruism. If you fall into that category, don't fret: The Draco Foundation still offers bounties for live captures of blood and toxic magicians, and the rest of the targets included in this file are dangerous enough that other people will pay to have them dealt with. When I have info on those contracts, including their likely KWE rating, I'll post it.

- > What the frag is a “KWE rating”?
- > Nanabozho
- > The Kano-White Eagle Scale of Metaphysical Force. It started off as shorthand for researchers that wanted to describe the power level of astrally active beings and objects, and eventually made its way into the shadows as a convenient scale of reference. Any time you hear someone talking about “Force something,” they're using the KWE Scale.
- > Trismegistus
- > So, more overly-rigid hermetic bulldrek. Got it.
- > Nanabozho

Be careful when dealing with the Draco Foundation and their “we only pay bounties to people with SINS” policy. It's possible to find “bounty brokers” who'll arrange a deal, but you usually give up fifteen percent of the bounty as a transaction fee—and getting a hold of one during the blackouts is probably a job in itself, not to mention hanging on to your bounty long enough to meet them.

All right, enough housekeeping. Let's get on with the hit list.

MAJOR THREATS SHADOW SPIRITS

You couldn't ask for a situation more tailor-made for shadow spirits than these blackouts: millions of terrified, despairing, angry people packed into small places. To shadow spirits, that miasma of metahuman emotion is an all-you-can-

eat buffet. Imagine how much energy a nightmare can drain from a group of people who jump at every unfamiliar noise after dark, or how a shade might gorge itself on those who have given up hope that the blackouts will ever end. Wraiths cackle with glee as desperate people fight and even kill each other over a scrap of food, a mouthful of water, or a spot in an alley just wide enough to shield them from winter winds. Succubi gladly drain anyone who wants to be distracted from the misery with mindless lust, while muses make a feast out of creative-minded people who use their talents to inspire others. The longer these blackouts go on, the more numerous and powerful the shadow spirits will get, until the UCAS' major cities are as infested by them as Bogotá was during the Az-Am War.

BAD VIBES

The most common, and potentially most dangerous (or at least irritating), foe for the Awakened in the blackout zones is background count. Distilled metahuman misery started leaking into astral space since a few days after the power went out, and it's been making our lives difficult ever since. Foci shut off and can't be reactivated, quickened spells fizzle, spirits balk at being dragged through the metaphysical muck ... I've even seen adepts have their abilities dampened so much that their Talent becomes a burden instead of a boon.

If you're planning to visit the blackout zone, come prepared. Upgrade your foci so they can withstand the astral interference. Try to limit how often you use spirits, and bring plenty of reagents to use in atonement rituals, especially if you want them untainted. If you have the opportunity to learn cleansing metamagic and the rituals that come with it, or the adept metamagic that lets you ignore some of those side effects, do so. If you meet a magician who knows cleansing, find a way to be their new best friend until they agree to teach you, or at least let you hang out in the areas they've purified.

- ▶ Unless the magician you run into is Freya and you can't stand self-centered elven princesses, in which case dealing with background count might be the preferred option.
- ▶ Martinet

Speaking of which, for those of you who remember the wraiths called Maelstrom and Oblivion, I have bad news: they have a northerly cousin. When the UCAS government started deploying troops to keep the peace, it brought up a lot of bad memories in Philadelphia—particularly North Philadelphia, with its history of police brutality and racially and meta-racially motivated violence. Tensions skyrocketed, and fights started breaking out as the stress of the blackouts grated on everyone's nerves. During one particularly large brawl, the soldiers tried to crack down on the people involved to keep the inci-

dent from becoming a full-scale riot. It went about as well as you'd expect, but something was different: Instead of agitated crowds clashing with police trying to restore order, the brawlers threw themselves at the soldiers with bloodlust in their eyes.

The soldiers started shooting after several of their number fell under the assault, and over a hundred citizens of North Philadelphia died before the slaughter ended. Afterward, people claimed to have seen a black-cloaked figure on the edge of the crowd, delighting in the carnage. A local Awakened Baptist minister investigated and found that the culprit was a powerful wraith he tentatively named Strife. I don't know what happened after that, just that the clashes between the local citizens and the soldiers haven't stopped.

- ▶ Reverend Leon tried to banish that wraith two or three different times. The last time he tried, the wraith took over one of reverend's escorts who then shot Reverend Leon in the back. There're a couple other mages around, but we aren't powerful enough to take on a spirit like that without help.
- ▶ Lincoln Lion

BOUNTY: STRIFE

Type: Wraith

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 13

Active Bounties: UCAS (210,000€, payable when spirit is destroyed in its home metaplane)

Description: Strife, like all wraiths, appears as a black-cloaked humanoid figure with glowing red eyes.

Last Known Location: Philadelphia, PA, UCAS

- ▶ Wait, how are you supposed to prove you destroyed a spirit?
- ▶ Bits

Besides their direct influence, shadow spirits are masters of manipulating others via spirit pacts. Mistress Mystique is the madam at a low-rent brothel and BDSM club in Halifax. She started off as a joygirl and made a name for herself by being an outstanding earner, amazing both the madam and the other employees with her earning power—every single one of Mystique's customers had the sex drive of a rabbit on novacoke, and they were happy to pay for every lewd act they could manage before they collapsed from exhaustion.

What Mistress Mystique's colleagues didn't know—what Mystique herself didn't know, at first—was that she's an adept. Mystique only discovered her talent when she was approached by a mysterious woman who offered her more. Naturally, the "mysterious woman" was a succubus named Luxuria, and the "more" came in the form of a spirit pact that let Mystique use her new patron's

mind-altering powers to send her customers into a frenzied lust. The symbiotic relationship continued for years: Mystique pocketed huge amounts of cash from her customers, and in return, Luxuria grew powerful from the life energy it drained.

Then the blackouts started, and customers stopped coming to the brothel—but Luxuria still wanted the life energies it drained from Mystique’s lovers, and Mystique still wanted the power the spirit gave her. Now, the duo lure innocent bystanders in with promises of shelter from the blackouts, then take what they want by force.

- ▶ My team and I took a run at Mystique and Luxuria not long after the blackouts started. Mystique isn’t that powerful an adept, but the Talent she has is enough to deal with your average person on the street. I also got the feeling that Mystique is a reluctant participant, not a willing one. Give her an alternative, and she might be willing to turn on the spirit.
- ▶ Brimstone
- ▶ Or she might be a master manipulator backed up by a spirit who gets what it wants by telling people what they want to hear. Just saying.
- ▶ Rune

BOUNTY: MYSTIQUE AND LUXURIA

Type: Adept (Mystique), Succubus (Luxuria)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 4 (Mystique), 11 (Luxuria)

Active Bounties (Mystique): None

Active Bounties (Luxuria): UCAS (210,000€, payable when spirit is destroyed in its home metaplane)

Description: Mystique is an attractive white elf, though the perpetual youth of her metatype has been tarnished by years or decades of hard living. Her clothing tends to show off her body to help lure her prey. Luxuria’s spirit powers allow it to appear in whatever form its victim will find most attractive.

Last Known Location: Halifax, NS, UCAS

SHEDIM

Obviously, metahuman-made disasters like these blackouts are going to result in a lot of people dying—or as shedim would call it, “growth in the housing market.” The Watergate Rift might be closed, but there’s no shortage of shedim hanging around DeeCee, especially if one JackPoint download I’ve read about master shedim experimenting with new rituals is true. What I can say for sure is that an entire shedim horde seems to be spreading up the East Coast from the DeeCee/Baltimore area,

coordinated until recently by one Evan Corcoran, a bank CEO and close confidante of Colloton’s Director of Magical Security Policy (which would explain why he was never caught).

Corcoran’s now dead—well, more dead—but some of his lieutenants are still at large, including former Fredericton Mayor Cole Bright, who was outed as a shedim and jailed back in 2074. Apparently, Bright got tired of waiting for the city cops to decide what to do with him and broke out of prison. He’s been seen in DeeCee a few times in the years since, most notably last July, when he and Corcoran were spotted at a popular DeeCee restaurant.

- ▶ Bright’s legacy lives on (pun intended) in Fredericton. A group there is suing the city for banning Bright from running for re-election, on the grounds that they’re discriminating against him for being a stupid evil zombie.
- ▶ Pest
- ▶ I’ve been in and out of Saint John a few times, and the shedim are definitely more organized there than in other cities around here. I bet Bright pitched up there when the blackouts started.
- ▶ Wolastoq

BOUNTY: COLE BRIGHT

Type: Shedim (Master)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 12

Active Bounties: UCAS (165,000€, payable upon proof of disruption)

Description: Bright’s true appearance is that of an animated corpse, but he normally uses spells to conceal himself as a late-middle-aged human man and masks his aura to appear mundane. The most visible signs of his true nature are the chill in the air around him and the way plants and small animals die in his continued presence.

Last Confirmed Location: Fredericton, NB, UCAS (possibly located in Saint John, NB, UCAS)

Walton’s story, on the other hand, is more tragic. Some of you reading this probably know her as Misthios—yes, the street samurai who used to work out of Baltimore. The way the locals tell it, Misthios got geeked when she and her team tried to take Evan Corcoran out a couple years ago. Corcoran hung on to her body to use as a vessel, and when a master shedim took it over, it started using Misthios’ real name as an alias. If you go up against her, you’d best hope she doesn’t decide to carry on the tradition.

BOUNTY: MARJORIE WALTON

Type: Shedim (Master)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 14

Active Bounties: UCAS (255,000¥, payable upon proof of disruption)

Appearance: Walton appears as the early-middle-aged female troll her host was in life. Like Bright, she normally uses spells to conceal herself (though her body is better-preserved than Bright's is) and masks her aura to appear mundane. She also exhibits the same chilling, life-sapping aura as Bright does.

Last Known Location: Washington, FDC, UCAS

TOXIC MAGIC

Everyone knows that toxic magicians and spirits love to hang around wholesome places like chemical spills and nuclear-waste-disposal sites, but these blackouts have resulted in a couple of lesser-known opportunities for toxic magic to fester. The first one, besides being metaphysically corrupt, is just plain gross. Widespread power outages cause a lot of problems, but one that people don't think about too often is that no power over a prolonged period causes plumbing problems. Shitty jokes about "shitty jokes" aside, I'm sure you can all see where I'm going with that.

- › Eww.
- › Viking Cowgirl

I know this sounds like something you'd find on a particularly juvenile comedy show, but the "metahuman waste" variety of toxic magician has already found some purchase. There's a Lenape street shaman running around Newark who used to be a member of Warpath, a Native American group bent on kicking non-natives out of North America by force. When the blackouts lasted long enough that the sewage plants stopped working and started overflowing, the added stress on the environment made him snap and turn toxic. He abandoned his old totem to follow Pollution and started calling himself T. Crapper. He now runs around wreaking destruction on anyone who isn't Native American, preferably by exposing them to raw sewage (including Pollutant spells and toxic spirits) to destroy them and their homes the way their ancestors did to his.

The other variety of toxic magic I've seen in these blackouts is more subtle, and less nauseating, but no less dangerous—because why would it be? This other variety focuses on the corruption of metahumanity itself, rather than the environment in which we live. Back in Seattle, I had the displeasure of fighting a group of toxic magicians called the Temple of the Nine Gates, who turned out to

BOUNTY: T. CRAPPER

Type: Toxic Magician

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 10

Active Bounties: DIMR (75,000¥, payable upon capture)

Description: Crapper is a middle-aged Native American dwarf male.

Last Known Location: Newark, UCAS

be Elder God cultists in the guise of an extremely warped vision of Gnosticism. Imagine my surprise and annoyance when I found out that another Nine-Gater group had taken up residence in Manhattan on some kind of twisted crusade against the megacorps. They're led by a priestess calling herself Aletheia, and their hobbies include making Faustian pacts with evil deities and trying to convince mundanes that it's possible to Awaken by committing enough blood sacrifices. Who knows, maybe Dunkie's House of Shady Deals will give whoever gets her a two-for-one deal, since she's both a blood mage *and* a toxic.

BOUNTY: ALETHEIA

Type: Toxic Magician (Elder God cultist)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 9

Active Bounties: DIMR (30,000¥, payable upon capture)

Description: Aletheia is an elven female of Middle Eastern descent. She typically dresses in priestly looking white robes.

Last Known Location: Manhattan, NY, UCAS

LESS-MAJOR-BUT-STILL-BAD THREATS

BLOOD MAGIC

Don't get me wrong: I still have a special disdain for those who practice blood magic, including thinking they'll ultimately destroy the world. The reason I call it a "less major" threat is because most of the blood magic I've seen used since the blackouts started is at least partly benevolent. One stranded Aztechnology wage mage I met opened a vein to empower a warming spell and keep a group of people from freezing to death, and he was teaching a younger, newly Awakened street magician to do the same thing. I worry that they'll be less

likely to restrain themselves to willing donors as time goes on (or that they'll need so much power that they have to choose between using more willing donors or fewer unwilling ones), but for now, we've got bigger problems to deal with.

Li Wei is a former Ares Firewatch sec-mage, one of the few who didn't get turned into an insect spirit host. Apparently, he was part of some super-secret Ares initiative to fight the bugs using blood magic (because that's *never* caused problems), because I ran into him briefly in Detroit when he was part of Anne Ravenheart's merry band of reprobates. Li and the Firewatch troops he worked with had a better-than-average success rate against the bugs, but they took a lot of casualties, and a few of us wondered whether it was the bugs killing them or Li going Blue Falcon on his teammates to power his magic. Whatever the case, it looks like Li got himself neck-deep in blood magic addiction before the Detroit op ended. He fled when the Ares MPs tried to take him in and later popped up in various places around Toronto.

- ▶ Several of my fellow Khalsa have run into Li since I first arrived in Toronto. For some reason, he likes to attack the gurdwaras we protect. I don't know whether it's because he sees us as a convenient supply of victims, or if he thinks we're all bug spirit fronts, or if he just doesn't like guys with beards and turbans.
- ▶ Sikh Burn

BOUNTY: LI WEI

Type: Talismonger

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): Unknown

Active Bounties: Atlantean Foundation (75,000€, payable upon capture)

Description: Li appears as an elderly Chinese man. His left eye has been replaced with a faceted emerald.

Last Known Location: Greater Toronto, ON, UCAS

THE INFECTED

Obligatory disclaimer: Not all Infected are evil. Many of them, possibly even most of them, aren't. Yes, they eat people, drink our blood, drain our souls, whatever. If you think it's unnerving for *you*, ask a bovine shifter how they feel around meat-eating metahumans sometime, and remember that they don't have the advantage of numbers.

Okay, disclaimer (and vegetarian elfy-rant) over. The fact is, some Infected actually *are* horrifying monsters, whether because they're intelligent hunters who are more capable of attacking us than we are of defending ourselves,

or through sheer bestial ferocity. The worst of these are probably the **wendigo**, which is what you get when you infect an ork with Strain I HMHVV. They're cannibals who create cannibal cults with mind-bending powers similar to the ones used by spirits of metahumanity, and every single one of them is a toxic spellcaster, a magician, or a mystic adept. Talia Poroshenko is one example. She's reported to have showed up in Rhode Island after the blackouts started. As food supplies got scarce, she had no trouble recruiting people into her cult. According to the data the Archangels dug up, she's displayed both spellcasting and adept powers, in addition to her Infected abilities and the power she gets from her brainwashed minions. Honestly, it might be easiest to just drop a MOAB on the place and collect her ashes afterward.

BOUNTY: TALIA POROSHENKO

Type: Wendigo (Toxic Mystic Adept)

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 12

Active Bounties: DIMR (165,000€, payable upon capture), UCAS (87,500€, payable upon proof of death)

Description: In her natural form, Poroshenko appears as a taller-than-average, well-muscled ork female covered in white fur, with elongated nails and tusks. She frequently uses magic to change her appearance, most often into that of a strikingly attractive ork.

Last Known Location: Providence, RI, UCAS

INSECT SPIRITS

You know, after Detroit, I'd really hoped that the bugs were all dead. I mean, I never actually *believed* they were, but a girl can dream, right? But no, they're still out there, trying to assimilate all of metahumanity into their gestalt consciousness like they did in the days of the Universal Brotherhood. Worse yet, they seem to have accelerated their efforts to turn magicians to the insect spirit tradition. When I was in Detroit helping Bravo Company/61st IR assist Ares with their bug problem, we ran into an insect shaman who used to be a shadowrunner who'd gotten booted out of his hive because the queen saw him as a threat and took it personally enough that he decided to sell them out.

When they brought me in to help interrogate him, the self-righteous prick started lecturing me about how helping Ares destroy poor, defenseless bug spirits that were victims of cruel experiments proved that everything I'd written for JackPoint's hooding download was a crock of shit. It's the only time I've ever seen McCord leave the room so he wouldn't burst out laughing.

- ▶ Yep, that happened just as Highness stated. And at the time, it was as funny as it sounded. But I later learned that life has an odd way of showing you the truth.
- ▶ Rifleman

A couple months later, I'm taking a well-earned vacation when the blackouts hit and Dragonslayer informs me I'll be going east. A few chummers and I form this impromptu network of Awakened and start discussing bounty targets. One of them mentions an insect shaman who escaped from Detroit—and wouldn't you know it, it's the same one who lectured me about my hypocritical attacks on (most) bug spirits. KE is willing to pay anyone who brings him in (although I have no idea how to do that now that they've left the UCAS), and I'll personally throw in a bonus if you beat the little shit senseless before you hand him over.

Well, there you have it: the Archangels' Greatest Hits. Don't think for a second these are the only problems that need fixing, though—they're just

BOUNTY: QUEENSGUARD

Type: Insect Shaman

Estimated Power Level (KWE Scale): 8

Active Bounties: Knight Errant (15,000€, payable upon capture), Freya (10,000€, payable upon proof of beating the little shit senseless, redeemable up to three times)

Description: Queensguard is a human male in his late twenties or early thirties.

Last Known Location: Detroit, MI, UCAS

the ones we could fit into this document with the shitty Matrix access we have. Hell, several more have probably popped up since I started this file. And it's only going to get worse as the blackouts continue. The Archangels will hold the line as long as we can, but if any of us are going to survive this, we'll need all the help we can get.



LIGHTS OUT

BY CLIFTON LAMBERT

“Oof! Gentle, sweets! I’m a little tender there!”

Alan pulled back from embracing MB and looked him over, forehead wrinkled with concern.

“Ah, I’m so sorry! Are you okay? You don’t look hurt? Did you get shot? I swear, if that reckless fragger got you shot again ...”

MB held up his palms and hid his reaction to the pain as best he could. He considered playing it off as just a bruise, but Alan would be getting a good look at it soon.

“No, no. Nothing like that. Well, I did get shot, but it wasn’t really anybody’s fault. Just a security guard with a strong work ethic.” He chuckled, hoping to lighten the tension. Alan never responded well when he came home from a shadowrun with bullet wounds.

“It was just a pistol. Oracle took care of most of it with his magic.”

“You didn’t ...”

“Huh? No, of course not. Just doing his job the best he knows how. I’m a bit impressed he had the nerve to draw on me.” MB wasn’t joking about that. He wasn’t just an ork; he was a big ork, with big ork muscles. He was also an adept, so he was even scarier than he looked. Most people wouldn’t want to draw his attention by annoying him with a gunshot wound.

MB sloughed out of his armor jacket and hung it next to Alan’s coat, moving carefully. He stripped off his shirt and lifted the corner of the bandage on the left side of his chest, showing Alan a puckered scar surrounded by nasty-looking bruises.

“Got me good. Fragger penetrated my armor. By tomorrow it will be just another pretty scar to impress my boyfriend.” He flexed his arms in a pose that framed the new injury for Alan’s benefit.

“Real sexy,” Alan said flatly. “I’m glad you’re home safe. Any complications or ...”

“Casualties? Nope. Except for this little love tap, it went pretty smooth. I like this team. It feels like we’ve got it sorted out, you know? Professional and drek. I’d have nicer things to say, but I don’t want to jinx anything.”

“Even Jazzercise?”

“Give her a break. Everyone starts out green. She learned her lesson.”

“Yeah, well, that doesn’t mean that I’m going to let it go. She ‘learned her lesson’ by getting you shot. A lot.”

“I’m in no mood to argue. I also want to forget about people shooting me for a bit. You hungry?”

MB opened the refrigerator in their spacious kitchen and began tossing peppers, mushrooms, onions and a few loose veggies onto a cutting board. The kitchen took up nearly a third of their downtown St. Louis apartment. It was part of what made the place so expensive, and it was MB’s favorite feature. He’d never be able to rent here under his fake SIN, but Alan was



a genuine SINner with a regular, legal job. He was one of the assistant chefs at Basil Green's, which was conveniently on the same block as their home. MB knew his ID would hold up as long as he didn't draw too much attention—not an easy task for an ork adept who gets shot at for a living. He found that baking cookies was a very good way to make the neighbors less likely to call the police on him for being a scary-looking ork. Alan belatedly answered MB's question by taking the wok down from its peg on the wall. He set it on the stove and began to rinse the rice.

"I recorded tonight's match. I haven't watched it yet. Mind if I turn it on?"

MB waved with enthusiasm toward the kitchen's trid set, a very large knife in one hand and its sharpener in the other. Alan spoke, and the urban brawl match came on.

The two finished preparing dinner, working smoothly together and sneaking kisses as they watched the match unfold.

Cheering erupted on the trid speakers. Alan and MB turned toward it to see what had happened, and the world changed in a moment.

A blinding flash erased every shadow for an instant and washed all color to a uniform white. It lasted less than a second, but both Alan and MB would recall the sight with clarity for the rest of their lives. Then all was dark. And silent. All of the sounds they never noticed they heard for most of their lives had stopped. Neither of them had heard such quiet before. As MB's vision

slowly returned to him, he first thought there was something wrong with his eyes. The city had gone dark.

MB halted and gestured for Alan to hunch down and be still just as they approached the parking garage's exit. The small-unit-tactics training MB had worked into their *Portal Wars* gameplay was not something either of them had wanted to use in reality. MB was back in his combat gear, with his armor jacket and custom ballistic mask on. He was armed with an astounding array of throwing knives and ninja stars and carried a crossbow. They'd found that most of MB's weapons were just as dead as their microwave, and Alan was carrying the only functional firearm between them: a century-old break-open double-barreled shotgun. The most advanced technology in that thing was the trigger system, and it was completely mechanical. They only had a dozen fat, round buckshot shells for it, and the plan was to not have to use it at all. Alan wasn't conditioned for this like MB, and he had little chance of defending himself without a significant technological advantage.

After waiting to make sure there weren't going to be any more blasts and waiting for the ringing in their ears to quit, MB had taken less than a minute to gear up while Alan stood there in shock. Looking out across the city showed that the darkness was all around them, continuing for kilometers. The distant glow showed signs of civilization far from the city, but the only lights to

be seen in St. Louis came from the flames of crashed aircraft and the occasional burning building. They had carefully made their way down the stairwell, Alan holding a candle that gave MB's orkish eyes enough light to see clearly. The silence was broken by sporadic frantic or tragic sounds, moans and screams without clear sources. They had arrived at the parking garage without incident and were nearly out of the building. The sounds of many rushing feet outside had stopped MB in his tracks. They crouched in the shadows and waited to see who would pass by.

"Look! It's still lit! I told you it would stay lit!" came the voice that preceded the crowd of people that began to pass by. There were dozens of them moving at a jog or faster.

"Come on!" the optimistic woman cajoled the other two people flagging behind her. "We can make it! We'll be safe there! The lights are still on!" And on they went. After the last of the stragglers had passed by, MB slipped outside, keeping close to the shadows. He signaled for Alan to follow, and then they both saw it: the St. Louis ARCHology standing brightly with full power in the distance. It was the only part of the city that seemed unaffected by whatever had happened.

"Are we going to go there, too?" Alan asked as softly as he could. He had to tap MB on the shoulder and repeat himself, but MB just shook his head.

"That's a bad idea. First, if whoever did this wants to be thorough, that is going to be a prime target. Second, it's a megacorp arcology. There's just no way I see them helping the people who come knocking on their doors. Too dangerous either way."

"So what do we d—AAAGH!" Alan exclaimed as a ghostly translucent image of a man suddenly appeared in front of them both. MB chuckled.

"It's okay, Alan. This is Oracle. Hello, Oracle, good to see you alive and well."

The apparition appeared as a middle-aged human wearing a robe covered in intricate symbols. The third eye on his forehead seemed alive, but also looked like a tattoo.

"You as well," Oracle said, speaking as clearly as if he had been standing there in the flesh. He turned to Alan. "It's good to meet you, Alan. I've heard so little about you."

"How wonderful to know. Pleased to meet you as well. Thank you for keeping my stupid man alive. I know he must not seem worth the effort, but I do prefer it when he comes home with his bullet wounds already mended."

MB broke in. "We were just deciding where to go next. Looks like the whole city is dark except for the ARCHology. Near as I can tell, all the electronic stuff is completely dead. Even most of my guns."

Oracle nodded. "I have made contact with Flatz but have not been able to locate Jazzercise. She is not in or near her home as far as I can tell. I have a spirit searching for her now. My current plan is to unite us and make our way to the cabin." MB nodded. The "cabin" was a well-stocked safehouse a few kilometers outside the city. The entire team had set aside funds from each shadowrun to create an insurance policy for when a run went bad. This wasn't its intended purpose, but if they could reach it, they should be able to determine what had happened and what to do next from a safe location well stocked with food, ammunition, and

hopefully some functional spare gear. "Flatz lives near my home and believes that he can get Norma running. He's already there working on it now. I have one spirit watching over him, one searching for Jazzercise, two protecting my library, and one with me. Unless you have another pressing engagement, I propose to cover you from astral space while you make your way to my home."

"We should swing by Jazzercise's place in case your spirit finds her on the way," suggested MB.

Oracle shook his head. "Either my spirit will find her and guide her to us, or she is beyond our aid. This is no time for unnecessary risks."

"Jazzercise is one of us. She's worth the risk. We take the extra time to do what we can. If she's gone off or hidden on her own, great. If she needs our help, we'll be there."

Alan opened his mouth but said nothing, then closed it and sighed heavily. He nodded as well.

"Very well. I will cease manifesting now, but I will be near. Please try not to startle when I appear, as I will likely be doing so to warn you of danger." Alan nodded, but Oracle's ghostly form had already vanished.

Instincts kicked in. Go that way. Stay close behind. Stay low. Keep to the shadows.

MB communicated all of this with two quick gestures. They set out, winding through the wrecked vehicles in the streets, trying to stay in cover.

It took them over an hour to travel the two and a half kilometers to Jazzercise's home, which would have been a ten-minute drive in normal traffic, but MB moved carefully. Everywhere they passed was touched by the blackout: every building and vehicle was dark. Vehicle wrecks were everywhere, as every one of them underway when the flash hit had become suddenly uncontrollable. Neither of them had seen so many dead bodies before. Alan's instincts told him to find help and approach people to learn what they knew about what had happened, but MB insisted they avoid contact with everyone they might encounter. He broke his own rule more times than Alan had bothered to count to help someone who was stuck in their car or pinned amongst the wreckage. Each time he seemed sheepish, as if Alan would call him out for hypocrisy, but he only smiled back with pride. MB always took care of people. He cared about them.

Oracle clearly felt differently, manifesting to admonish MB for taking risks, wasting time, and ruining his spirits' concealment power—which he claimed would cost him some important but nebulous resource to reinstate. It was because of their argument they did not spot the approaching ghouls.

There were at least twenty of them, dressed in worn but sturdy clothing. Several were pulling a wagon made from the bed of a pickup truck, and it was piled high with corpses. Two of them came from behind the wagon and tossed a body on the pile, and everyone noticed each other at once.

Alan let out a scream and raised the shotgun. He had just enough restraint to remember not to fire the weapon with MB too close to the where the cone would spray, and so he hesitated until he would get a clear shot. Oracle whipped around, and MB brought his crossbow up as he stepped between the ghouls and Alan.

MB gestured behind his back:
Wait. I'll duck right, then you shoot.
On three ...
One, two, ...

"Whoa, hey, relax! It's okay," came a shockingly normal voice from the ghoul in front. He was wearing a motorcycle helmet and slowly set down a duffle bag. He sounded genuinely nervous. "We're vegans."

"I don't even want to know what that means," responded MB in a voice that Alan did not recognize. It seemed threatening and cold. "but we're going that way, and you'd better not try to take a bite, or the only thing you'll be eating is this crossbow bolt."

"Why would I eat you? Do you think we're short on food?" The incredulous ghoul gestured back toward the wagon. "I told you, we're vegans. We don't kill people for food. We're out here cleaning up and offering assistance. We've got bandages, medicine, alcohol for cleaning wounds, bottled water ... you seem like you're doing okay, but do you need anything?"

"Helping yourselves to the buffet is more what it seems to me," Oracle spoke, disdain clear in his voice, "but we care nothing for your meals provided you do not attempt to make my allies one of the courses."

Another ghoul stepped up and shook her fist at them. "Frag off, asshole. Somebody's got to clean up, or else there will be diseases. You don't need rotting corpses in the streets, and we don't want to see food go to waste. We understand more than you how costly it is."

The first ghoul waved his arms slowly down as if the gesture would calm everyone present. "Everyone relax. We're careful to identify who we can. We know some of these people, and we return who we can to their families. There will be plenty to eat, no matter how many we turn over. Please. You are welcome to some supplies if you need them, but do not harm us."

There was a long, silent pause.

Alan finally said "Um, we're looking for someone. She lives near here."

"Human woman, lots of cyber. Goes by the name Jazzercise. Uh-oh—what?"

At the mention of Jazzercise's name, the ghouls shifted their stance, looking at each other with what could only be taken as knowing glances.

"Oh, don't tell me she's in that cart!" MB bellowed, pointing at the impromptu corpsewagon.

The ghoul shook his head and pointed back the way they had came. "I knew her. Nice lady. She brought us food sometimes. Go back to the next block. Head right but then turn left into the alley. Look up." He paused, maybe searching for words. "I'm sorry for your loss."

And the conversation abruptly ended as MB and Alan hurried to find their friend, hoping that the ghouls had been mistaken.

They hadn't been. After passing more dead and dark buildings to follow the ghoul's directions, they found her.

Alan noticed her first. He pointed up at the fire escape above and then turned to vomit on the near alley wall.

MB looked up slowly, not wanting to see what Alan had. Knowing there was no escaping it. He looked slowly up the dirty alley wall that was chipped with damage from age and stray bullets. His eyes slowly traced the lines of the decrepit rusted fire escape as it hung askew from the building. It seemed likely to fall at any moment but had probably been that way for years. With growing dread and the taste of bitter acid on the back of his tongue, MB finally saw her at the top of the fire escape. He let out a sudden sob and sprung into motion, jumping up to kick off of the alley wall and climbing the fire escape, moving fast through its dangerous sway. Oracle appeared in the air next to him, keeping pace smoothly in his ghostlike manifestation. His third eye tattoo wrinkled in concern, but his other expressions seemed cold and detached.

"Please come down from there, MB. There is nothing you can do for her. Her aura is gone."

MB didn't slow his precarious ascent as he suddenly roared, "Get out of my way!"

Oracle stopped in mid-air and MB continued up. The magician mumbled something that sounded like, "But I'm not in your way," and then called out, "Be careful! Wait! I can spare a service to have a spirit help you."

"Just have it make sure this whole thing doesn't fall off when I'm up here," MB's voice cracked and trailed off as he reached the top.

There, tangled within the busted frame of the top section of the fire escape, was Jazzercise. The rusted metal bars were mostly pushed in, but some had snapped in places and impaled her. She might have survived whatever put her there, but one of the bars had gone in through her mouth and its jagged point protruded from the back of her head, trailing gore and cybernetic components. Her arms and legs were twisted at odd positions, and MB noticed that her cyberlegs seemed to be locked in a jumping pose. He realized what must have happened as Oracle spoke softly nearby.

"She was always so good at moving about the city. I almost never had a use for my levitation spell after she got those jacks installed in her artificial legs." He pointed to the edge of the building on the opposite side of the alley. "She must have started jumping, but then it happened. Her arms and legs stopped mid-jump. I'm so sorry. I already miss her." Then he vanished.

It took nearly thirty minutes to carefully extract Jazzercise from the fire escape. MB made little noise, but his face was soaked with tears.

The reverent silence was broken by the sound of a vehicle engine. It sounded rough and raw and made a noise much like a gunshot after the old pickup truck rounded the bend.

"That her?" hollered Flatz from the driver's seat. He shook his head and said, "Fragging shame. Load her in the back and hop in. I saw some ghouls back a ways, and I don't want them hitching a ride."



UCRASH

///REQUESTING ACCESS:
SECURE NODE 78-22-54/4(D)
'WAR ROOM'/U-CRASH///
««USER NAME/PASSWORD ACCEPTED/
ACCESS GRANTED»»
///DATE/TIME: 11-09-80/1138:34 ZULU///

- › The predators sense weakness. The vultures are closing in. Pick whatever imagery you want, but the UCAS is clearly under attack, and they're losing. We'll use this section to share updates about the developing situation, then try to put all the pieces together once this looks like it's going to settle somewhere.
- › Bull

SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN DEECEE

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR
'UPLOADED 11-20-80/0651:13'

With everything that's been going on since the blackouts started, I haven't been able to sit down

and write a coherent summary of how events are unfolding—and even if I had, things are moving so fast that I'm sure something would've changed before I was finished. Instead, I'm going to post a collection of feeds from around the UCAS, with updates as things progress. I obviously haven't had—and won't have—time to investigate it all myself, so take these postings with the appropriate amount of salt.

PRESIDENT DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY, SEEKS ELECTION DELAY

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO, NEWSNET

UPLOADED BY KAY ST. IRREGULAR
'UPLOADED 11-01-80/1200:13'

WASHINGTON, FDC—In an effort to respond to the blackouts covering the East Coast of the UCAS, President Colloton declared a state of national emergency during a press conference in the Oval Office today.

“I hereby invoke a state of national emergency

in those areas affected by the widespread blackouts and order the deployment of the UCAS armed forces to assist local authorities with enforcing the laws of this nation and restoring public order in those affected areas,” President Colloton said. “This afternoon, I will formally request that Congress introduce legislation that would allow us to delay the 2080 elections until thirty days from the end of the blackouts, in order to ensure that citizens in those cities can exercise their right to vote.”

<1.3 Mp deleted by admin>

- > You know what that means for us, folks: the longer the elections get put off, the more work for us.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Here's a weird one for you, chummers. This message from "Corinna" was waiting for me when I logged in today. I'll let you read it for yourself before I say anything.
- > Earther

NEW MESSAGE: NOVEMBER 8, 2080

From: Corinna
To: Earther
Subject: Employment Opportunities

Dear Earther,
 You should have gotten some data on me from Skeever, but this will make the introduction official. My name is Corinna. I'm a fixer in DeeCee, and I'm looking for capable teams of operatives to carry out high-risk extractions on a short timetable. I'm reaching out to you in the hopes that the hard work you've done promoting the Frozen Shadows VPN has put you in contact with operatives capable of carrying out these missions. The extraction targets are politicians from multiple cities currently subject to blackout. I've attached a full list to this message [link]. The employer can arrange passage through UCAS government checkpoints if identity information is provided in advance. Pay will be commensurate with experience. If you know of any teams who would be willing to undertake these jobs, please have them contact me at the listed commcode. LTG# NA/UCAS/FDC 312 (99-3872-4455)
 Best regards,
 Corinna

- > Yeah, "weird" is one way to put it. Who the hell's Corinna? Is she cute?
- > Tiger58
- > If you're into famous elves. She's one of a network of fixers biosculpted to look like Nadja Daviar, with all the connections—and baggage—you'd expect from the name.
- > Tribal, DCS
- > Anyone else looked at that list? Senators and members of the House who didn't show up for the emergency session of

Congress ... the names ring a bell, but I can't quite put my finger on how they're connected.

- > Mission Control
- > They're all Colloton supporters. They're also only about a third of the total number of missing congresspeople. Looks like someone's trying to skew a vote.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Hey chummers, just picked this up from the folks at the BaijiLocal data haven. Any of you merc types who haven't already heard, sounds like you might have some work coming!
- > Earther

ARMY MOVING EAST?: BAIJILocal

b/BaijiLocal · Posted by u/Keewatin **SuperMod 100** 3 days ago

ARMY MOVING EAST?

Just went out for a smoke and saw a train going past with a bunch of fraggin' artillery guns on it! What's going on? Anyone out east that isn't blacked out who can fill us in?

14 Comments Give Award Share Save Hide Report

PrincessPat 14 points · 3 days ago
 nothing from my contacts in the army.
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

CaptainCanuck 3 points · 3 days ago
u/PrincessPat Your contacts are just following opsec. I know for a fact that something big is going down.
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

LeafsFan26907 -2 points · 2 days ago
u/CaptainCanuck u got any proof? no ofc not, you never do, cuz ur full of drek
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

CaptainCanuck 1 point · 2 days ago
u/LeafsFan26907 That's literally the point of opsec, fragface.
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

RRW 11 points · 2 days ago
 Sorry, been off the grid for a few days. Smuggler chummer from Portage said he overheard some of the railway guys talking about a bunch of trains being loaded with equipment from the army base at Shilo. Apparently, it was all going to Sudbury. No idea why, though.

Mukwa 8 points · 2 days ago
 People around here are getting nervous ever since Quebec started beating their chests about l'annexion.
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

MikeFromKenora 5 points · 2 days ago
/u/Mukwa you mean "people" as in S-K? can't let the Frenchies take over their precious smelter.
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

Mukwa 2 points · 1 day ago
/u/MikeFromKenora Not all French-Canadian people are from Quebec. But yes, S-K might worry about that.
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

RRW 1 point · 1 day ago
Why would our military protect S-K, though?
 Reply Give Award Share Report Save

view more comments>>>

LeafsFan26907 -7 points · 2 days ago
 u/RRW sure, friend of a friend of a friend said blah blah blah, prove it or gtfo

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

Crotias High Prince 12 points · 2 days ago
 u/LeafsFan26907 You've been warned multiple times already. Keep it civil, or your next ban is permanent.

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

MikeFromKenora 1 point · 2 days ago
 u/LeafsFan26907 This from a guy who cheers for a team that can't even beat the Flames?

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

RRW 1 point · 1 day ago
 Why would our military protect S-K, though?

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

LeafsFan26907 -1 point · 1 day ago
 u/Crotias y arent u banning this fgr for not being "civil" o wait because mods r full of drek to isnt that right hypocrotias

Reply Give Award Share Report Save

- > Picked up another file from a contact in Montreal named Gringoire. As far as I can tell, it's from a briefing between Québécois military officers. Looks like their "security assistance" isn't going well.
- > 00

TRANSCRIPT: 11-18-2080

[Officer 1] We expected the blackouts to disrupt the UCAS' chain of command, but they're responding much more effectively than we anticipated. The First Battalion was ambushed at Saint-Louis-du-Ha! Ha! and forced to retreat before they could reach Edmundston.

[Officer 2] Esti de câlce de tabarnak! What about the rest of the theater?

[Officer 1] We've sighted hostile infantry conducting reconnaissance near Campbellton and Dalhousie, but they have yet to mount an attack.

[Officer 2] They're not supposed to be able to mount an attack. The UCAS forces posted at Gagetown were part of the corps that disappeared in August, so who the fuck is responding?

[Officer 3] At the moment, the most likely scenario is that the UCAS deployed special forces or hired mercenaries who are able to work with local populations. Communications intercepts show higher-than-normal local message traffic, but the messages we've captured so far seemed innocuous, and manual translation is taking time.

[Officer 1] Manual translation? Why not just use a linguasoft?

[Officer 3] They're in Chiac.

[Officer 2] Then send astral and drone reconnaissance to Shediac and keep them there until they find something. Withdraw the First Battalion to Rivière-du-Loup and reinforce them with the Mont-Royals, reroute the Voltigeurs to Campbellton, and send the Third Battalion southwest through Saint-Quentin to capture Edmundston from the south. Dismissed.

- > Sounds like a meeting of the regimental staff. Officer 1 is probably their ops officer, Officer 2 is the colonel, and Officer 3 is intel. Also, couldn't we have marked it with the intel guy being Officer 2 and the ops guy being Officer 3?
- > The Canuck
- > The more important question is, is there really a town called "Saint-Louis-du-Ha! Ha!", and is it as funny as the name implies?
- > Kiddle
- > Yes.
- > Glass Cannon
- > Just saw this on the local news. Seems like Quebec's not having much luck anywhere.
- > Earther

BREAKING NEWS: QUÉBEC INVADES THE UCAS

BY VIJAY CHAKRABARTI, KSAF

POSTED BY OPERATOR BASTARD

◀POSTED: 11-14-80/1830:01▶

THE PENTAGON—The Department of Defense reports that units from Republic of Québec's armed forces have crossed the UCAS-Québec border and occupied territory in New Brunswick and Ontario, including the city of Ottawa, the capital of the Canadian region before the creation of the UCAS. DoD spokespersons refused to comment further, however, citing operational security concerns.

A statement released by Québec's Minister of International Relations, Philippe Petitpas, claimed that Québec military's actions were "security assistance." "Given the current humanitarian crisis in the United Canadian and American States, the Government of Québec has grave concerns about the welfare of the Francophone minority in New Brunswick and Ontario, which have historically faced discrimination due to linguistic differences," Petitpas said.* "Since communication is difficult at the best moments during a crisis, [Québec President Jean-Louis Frenette Jr.] has ordered *Forces armées Québécoises* (FAQ) personnel to both offer humanitarian aid to Francophone citizens of the UCAS, and to protect them in the event of inter-communal violence."

* *Note: Quotations are translated from the original.*

- > Guess we know what the ruckus on Baiji was about now.
- > Mission Control
- > Wait, how was the army moving before Quebec actually attacked?
- > Tribal, DCS



UCAS FORCES REPEL QUÉBÉCOIS ATTACK

BY SOPHIE GAGNON, KSAF

POSTED BY EARTHER ◀11-18-80/1910:02▶

SUDBURY, ON—The UCAS Army successfully held off an attack launched by Quebec’s armed forces earlier today. The 1st and 3rd Companies of the 613th Infantry Regiment (the “Royal Canadians”), based at Petawawa Garrison, arrived in Sudbury early this morning. The 613th immediately set about reinforcing defensive positions along the Wahnapeitei River, in some cases finishing building the fortifications mere minutes before an aerial bombardment by Québécois military drones began.

“We’re here to protect UCAS citizens from outside threats,” said Lieutenant Juliette Shearer, public affairs officer for the Royal Canadians. “Calling it a ‘humanitarian effort’ doesn’t change the fact that armed foreign soldiers are on UCAS soil, and it’s our job to push them out. All in all, today’s engagement was a win for us. If the FAQ tries to attack again, we’ll be ready for them.”

Local residents, however, aren’t so sure about the army’s priorities. “An awful lot of those troops got sent up to the smelter, the one Saeder-Krupp

owns,” one Sudbury-area resident said, asking not to be named. “Seems a little weird that they’re going to so much trouble to protect the corps instead of the people.”

Another Sudbury resident, also asking not to be named, had a more positive view of the situation. “That smelter’s brought in a lot of jobs since Saeder-Krupp opened up shop here. I know people are pissed about Ares saying they’re leaving the UCAS, but honestly, I think that’s all just a media stunt. Hell, a lot of the steel we smelt here used to go to the GM factories in Detroit and Oshawa, and we’re still putting out as much of it as we did before. Someone’s gotta be buying it, right?”

When asked about the link between the 613th’s deployment and Saeder-Krupp’s assets in Sudbury, Lieutenant Shearer declined to answer, saying only that she couldn’t comment on “DoD policy decisions or specific operational matters” in a public setting.

- ▶ Okay, so, for the third time: Why would the UCAS protect S-K?
- ▶ RRW
- ▶ Maybe legal reasons? Cops in the AMC have jurisdiction in local megacorp facilities, although that just means they have to bribe us to make us go away instead of waving the law in our faces. It

also means they can try to sue the government for damages in the case of something like, say, the army failing to protect them during an enemy invasion.

- > Bearly Professional
- > That's probably what they'd say in public. I'd bet my beard there's more to it, though. They probably got their hooks into someone in DeeCee—more so than usual, I mean.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Oh sure, give the army all the credit when they didn't do half the work.
- > Kane
- > I heard there was a coalition of merc units harassing the Quebec forces from the time they crossed into UCAS territory.
- > Picador
- > "Coalition of merc units"? Hell, they had damn near a full squadron of t-birds waiting in Thunder Bay before the Frenchies even crossed the border. Never seen so many smugglers all doing the same thing at once. I also happen to know they had offshore fire support. Hope they weren't planning to use that highway again anytime soon.
- > Kane
- > You're doing work for hire now, Kane?
- > Rigger X
- > Naw, that was just a coincidence, believe it or not. Kat was in the market for something shiny, so we went up to Hudson Bay to check out a story about someone shipping diamonds out of some new Arctic Ocean seaport in Churchill. Then the boys at the Krime plant in Winnipeg heard we were in the area and invited us to test some missile they designed for the Krime Wing, so we took a trip down to Thunder Bay and had a few beers with the pilots there before we hit the munitions range. Guess we weren't as quiet as I thought, because when we got back, I had a message from some tight-ass suit who said he was with S-K Prime, asking if I'd lob a couple of cruise missiles at some tank column. Y'all know I hate lookin' like I'm on someone else's leash, but it ain't every day I get to shoot ordnance like that and have someone else pay for it. Had so much fun I almost forgot to pick up the diamonds before we left.
- > Kane
- > I ... don't know what I was expecting, but that wasn't it.
- > Hard Exit
- > I call bullshit. Nobody with ears would ever think a Krime product was "quiet." Even Kane.
- > Clockwork

OTTAWA LIBERATED FROM QUÉBÉCOIS OCCUPATION

BY SOPHIE GAGNON, KSAF

POSTED BY: OPERATOR BASTARD ·11-22-80/1304:12·

OTTAWA, ON—Residents of the Ottawa region celebrated today when news spread that the last Québécois military forces had been pushed out of the city. A spokesperson for the Ontario National Guard confirmed that UCAS units had forced the FAQ to retreat across the Ottawa River, removing the Québécois military's last major foothold in UCAS territory.

While units from the Ontario National Guard played a major role in evicting the Québécois military from Ottawa, several UCAS personnel I spoke with on condition of anonymity admitted that they had received outside help. "We were too scattered to offer any resistance for the first few days of the attack," one officer told me. "The day after the FAQ invaded, this group of British guys showed up. None of them would say who they worked for or how they got here, just that someone had retained their services to help defend Ottawa. Those guys were total pros—they ran guerrilla ops against the FAQ until our forces were able to engage directly."

Predictably, the Ontario National Guard's public affairs officer neither confirmed nor denied the reports of outside assistance. "We aren't aware of any formal arrangements made by the Department of Defense to employ private security contractors to assist the ONG," said Lieutenant Aaron Drummond. "But it's entirely possible that private citizens with military backgrounds participated in the liberation effort on an ad hoc basis. If so, they deserve the same praise as the servicemembers they fought alongside, and we hope they come forward so we can recognize them properly."

- > Three different theaters, three times where mercenary units were in exactly the right place at exactly the right time to stop what were supposed to be surprise attacks in their tracks—and one of them was orchestrated by Saeder-Krupp Prime, or at least someone willing to claim they worked for Saeder-Krupp Prime.
- > Fianchetto
- > It's a safe bet that it actually was S-K behind this. Some old Argus contacts let slip that the force that ambushed the FAQ at Saint-Louis-du-Ha! Ha! (bloody hell, I can't take that name seriously) was the 22nd Spartan Legion. That lot is too distinctive to be misidentified—unless there's another power-armored merc unit that enjoys getting into fistfights with main battle tanks, which I suppose isn't impossible—and at this point too loyal to Lofwyr to work for anyone else.
- > Thorn

- ▶ The 22nd isn't necessarily loyal to Lowfyr; they simply like that he keeps giving them battles to fight, with new tech to test out. Problem is that because of their modus operandi, they don't do well in anything other than all-out warfare. The 22nd has several official complaints in their IMA jackets, a few just a razor's-edge shy of actual war crimes.
- ▶ Rifleman

COLLTON AGREES TO ARMISTICE WITH QUÉBEC

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO, NEWSNET

POSTED BY: ROCKY SMOKE '11-25-80/1715.45'

WASHINGTON, FDC — White House Press Secretary Christopher Davila confirmed today that President Colloton has agreed to an armistice with the Republic of Québec, ending the hostilities between the two countries. "President Colloton is relieved to be able to put this conflict behind us, and hopes that the UCAS and Québec will enjoy a more constructive relationship in the future," Davila said. The armistice follows a joint offensive by the UCAS Marines and UCAS Navy that severely damaged the main operating bases of Québec's military, the *Forces armées Québécoises* (FAQ). President Colloton and Québec President Frenette are expected to meet within the next few days to sign the armistice agreement and formally conclude hostilities.

- ▶ Heads up, gang. We're in the crosshairs this time. This one just broke.
- ▶ 00

BREAKING NEWS: NAN FORCES ATTACK FIVE UCAS STATES

BY VIJAY CHAKRABARTI, KSAF

POSTED BY: DOUBLE-DOUBLE '12-10-80/1405.10'

THE PENTAGON — The Department of Defense reports that military units from the Native American Nations have launched several surprise attacks along the western border of the UCAS, less than three weeks after the cessation of hostilities between the UCAS and the Republic of Québec. Early reports claim that troops from the Sioux Defense Force crossed the border into Missouri, Nebraska, and North Dakota, capturing Bismarck and advancing to within ten kilometers of Kansas City, Omaha, and Fargo. Simultaneously, Algonkian Armed Forces moved south and east across Saskatchewan and Manitoba, taking control of each of those states except for a ten-kilometer radius around Winnipeg. At least one other member of the NAN is openly supporting the conflict; representatives from the Salish-Shidhe Council issued a statement saying that

any attempt to move the UCAS military's Joint Task Force Seattle through Salish-Shidhe territory would be treated as an act of war and responded to as such.

- ▶ Geez, another war?
- ▶ Beer Run
- ▶ The rest of the admins and I are in the process of backing everything up in case the Algonkians get any closer. Consider this your warning that we might go read-only or offline on short notice.
- ▶ Rocky Smoke

INDEPENDENT REPORTERS ACCUSE SENATOR KITTERING OF COLLUSION WITH ARES

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO, NEWSNET

POSTED BY: ROCKY SMOKE '12-14-80/0900.02'

WASHINGTON, FDC — Senator Lance Kittering (R-MI), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, is on the defensive after two prominent investigative journalists publicly released evidence that the senator brokered a deal between Ares Macrotechnology and a senior Michigan National Guard officer. Charlie Stone-Bear and Roberto Madeira, best known for their work exposing Humanis front organizations on behalf of Mothers of Metahumans, released a recording of the senator meeting with Brigadier General Benjamin Jackson, Adjutant General of the Michigan National Guard, which controls the bulk of the UCAS military units stationed in the Detroit area. In it, Kittering is clearly heard promising to arrange a position for General Jackson as a "senior strategic consultant" with Ares Arms upon Jackson's retirement in exchange for ensuring that the Michigan National Guard units were moved outside a certain distance from Detroit. The full recording is available here: [\[link\]](#)

Senator Kittering vehemently denies the accusations. "These allegations are completely false," he said, when interviewed at his office on Capitol Hill earlier today. "That recording is a fabrication. Sure, I had dinner with Ben—pardon me, General Jackson—that night, but we never discussed anything to do with work. He's a family friend. It's not illegal for friends to go out for dinner together. What you should be asking is why this story only came out after I spoke out against President Colloton withdrawing the UCAS from the Business Recognition Accords."

A spokesperson for the Department of Justice said that the FBI was in contact with Stone-Bear and Madeira, and would verify the authenticity of the recording before deciding whether to open an investigation.



- > As much as I hate to defend a corp shill like Kittering, he might be telling the truth. Stone-Bear and Madeira hire from the shadows pretty regularly, and I know for a fact that they aren't picky about whether their "evidence" is real, as long as it's convincing.
- > 00

BREAKING: SIOUX ADVANCE HALTED BY UCAS MILITARY

BY VIJAY CHAKRABARTI, KSAF

POSTED BY OPERATOR BASTARD
<12-16-80/1130.03>

THE PENTAGON — Just days after the Sioux Defense Force crossed the border into the UCAS, the Department of Defense reports that the Sioux military units have halted their advance. Early this morning, F-38 Woodstock fighters and MQ-40 Unicorn UAVs launched from Whiteman Air Force Base struck several military installations inside the Sioux Nation. Immediately after the attacks, President Colloton issued a statement saying that the air strikes would continue unless the Sioux military units ceased their "aggressive actions" and retreated. However, while the strikes caused the Sioux to halt their advance, so far they've shown no signs of returning to their home territory.

- > I know the Sioux love their chest-beating, but if I were them, I'd be real careful about pushing their luck right now. Those Unicorn drones are capable of carrying nukes, and air strikes just proved that the Sioux aren't guaranteed to be able to stop them.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Can I just say that how impressed I am that the UCASAF launched their strikes against the NAN from Whiteman Air Force Base? It's like they were trying to be as offensive as possible!
- > Beer Run

SEN. KITTINGER FOUND DEAD AFTER FBI OPENS INVESTIGATION

BY TODD BAILEY, NEWSNET

POSTED BY KAY ST. IRREGULAR <12-19-80/0715.00>

LANSING, MI — Senator Lance Kittering (R-MI) was found dead in his home early this morning, after DocWagon responded to an emergency signal from the senator's biomonitor. The Ingham County medical examiner's office issued a preliminary finding that Kittering died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Knight Errant investigators claim to have found a message Kittering recorded imme-

diately before his death in which the late senator confessed to accepting bribes from Ares Macro-technology to ensure that UCAS military personnel didn't become involved in the megacorporation's military operations against insect spirits in Detroit.

Shortly after the late senator's death was announced, a spokesperson for the Department of Justice confirmed that the FBI would be closing its investigation, as it was "obviously pointless" to continue.

- > That was fast.
- > Operator Bastard
- > Are we sure this was actually a suicide, or could it be a hit made to look like a suicide?
- > Thompson Girl
- > I'd have to get a look at the official reports, forensic reports, and the VR scene-reconstruction before I gave an opinion. But even then, it could be either. There are professionals out there who specialize in making things look exactly like they aren't.
- > Det. Gumshoe
- > Or as the classic saying goes: Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.
- > Stone

FBI BREAKS 'RADICAL TERRORIST RING' IN OTTAWA

BY CRAIG HARKLEROAD, KSAF

POSTED BY: SUNSHINE <12-20-80/2010:20>

OTTAWA — The UCAS FBI announced the arrest of ten individuals who, according to their report, were part of a "terrorist ring intent on undermining social structures."

The ten individuals are all UCAS natives, none of whom have any criminal record beyond assorted misdemeanors such as traffic violations. The FBI says they were arrested in a confrontation that resulted in minor injuries to both agents and suspects, none of whom required hospitalization.

"This cell was intent on striking at the foundations of society and the structures that make civilization possible," said Regional Director Vanessa Beech. She declined to say if they were involved in any recent attacks, including the blackouts that have plagued many UCAS cities.

Beech also did not say if the suspects had connections to any nation or established organization, but sources speaking on deep background said the cell was part of a radical anarchist network bent on destroying civilization so a better version could be constructed.

- > The arrests, at least, are something that actually happened. The FBI made a lot of noise stomping through the streets to round

these ten people up, and they left a smoldering brownstone when they were done. They've been tight-lipped about the evidence that led them to these arrests.

- > Det. Gumshoe

U.N. MOBILIZES RELIEF FORCE, SAYS 'IT WILL TAKE TIME' FOR UCAS TO RECEIVE AID

BY JONAS SCHMIDT, DEMEKO

POSTED BY: KAY ST. IRREGULAR <12-21-80/2315:01>

GENEVA — The United Nations has announced the creation of the U.N. Mission in the United Canadian and American States (UNMIUCAS), following a request for humanitarian aid from UCAS President Angela Colloton. "It is the responsibility of the United Nations to provide aid to countries in need in the event of disaster situations," a U.N. spokesperson said. "Per U.N. Security Council Resolution 3574, the United Nations has begun assembling a humanitarian relief force for deployment to the United Canadian and American States. However, as with any large-scale operation, it will take time before the aid effort is fully underway."

The announcement was publicly welcomed by political figures in the UCAS, including representatives of President Colloton, but staffers within the Colloton Administration have privately expressed frustration with the situation. One anonymous source questioned why the aid effort would "take time" when quick-reaction forces are typically able to provide emergency aid within days of a disaster. The source suggested that the U.N. was bowing to pressure from the Corporate Court to delay the aid effort until the UCAS agreed to re-adopt the Business Recognition Accords. U.N. sources replied by pointing to the difficulty of coordination and communication in cities without electronics or Matrix capabilities.

- > Right now, there is a ton of news about this whole situation to follow. Every reporter out there is trying to find the next big story, in a situation where a new big story emerges multiple times a day. The journalistic fervor is unequalled in my lifetime.
- > Sunshine
- > Also means we need to be extra vigilant. So far most of these stories have been easy to verify, but make no mistake, there is information warfare going on here. We're not getting the full story.
- > Snopes
- > Like we ever do?
- > Fianchetto
- > Russia was slow-walking this but seems to have gotten some concessions to finally let it through. They're slow-walking the aid

still, however. That means that the Vory are willing to allow it but want their cut.

> Red Anya

KENTUCKY STATE GOVERNMENT SECEDES FROM UCAS, JOINS CAS

BY RUTH LITTLE, KSAF <12-21-80/1200:00>

LEXINGTON, KY — <0.8 Mp deleted>

- > What happened to the rest of the story?
- > Tiger58
- > Still getting details, but the general gossip is that after Lexington got hit, the governor was shaking. Several groups claimed responsibility and a few "Do X or Louisville's next!" messages (even letters. Letters!) got to the governor's mansion, but none of it was seen as valid. Having that hanging over your head has to be nerve-racking, and when the bulk of Ares assets were in-state, someone had a chat with the governor to the effect of "We can't work in the UCAS, but we can protect the CAS. If you switch sides, well ..." Cut to a week later, and Kentucky goes CAS.
- > Plan 9
- > Kentucky's always had a culture more similar to the CAS than the UCAS. Fear could be what nudged them across the line, but what does Ares get from this?
- > Snopes
- > Fort Campbell's been a sore point with Tennessee ever since it stayed in the hands of the UCAS military. With the CAS on both sides, it'll have to go, but no one wants the CAS to get a massive military base. But wouldn't that make for a nice HQ for Ares' assorted military assets?
- > Plan 9
- > Colloton might sell the base to them rather than let the CAS have it, but she'll bleed them dry in the process. I don't know how good it'll be for the bottom line. Then again, the base has been a bigger boom for smugglers than the military for decades.
- > 2XL
- > Smuggling? Through an Army base? I know there are laws about that, but isn't there some code of honor that prevents soldiers from doing that kind of thing?
- > Riot
- > Oh, my sweet child. You've never met a supply sergeant, have you?
- > Butch
- > So the Sioux border situation is still evolving. Remember where I talked about Ares pulling out, leaving the UCAS military in a bind? It took six days after the border break-in before UCAS

got planes in the air and rockets on the ground. Tanks were idle without fuel, troopers grumbled as they were stuck with rations instead of fresh food, information was limited due to having to rely on scouts and short-range drones instead of eyes in the sky ... it's like fighting in the fraggin' 20th century or something. In these conditions, the Sioux have the advantage. They aren't afraid to use it.

- > Stone
- > Interestingly, they also held back on most of their magic. There're a few spirits about, largely to disrupt aircraft or to conceal footsloggers, but you aren't seeing combat shamans on the front line, and you certainly aren't seeing the Ghost Dance in action. Anyone know what's going on there?
- > Hard Exit
- > When the man of the house lies down for a nap, you don't allow the children to scurry about making noise.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > While I'm not certain about that (and "man of the house," really? I thought you were more aware than that!), it does help things stay conventional. If they're not using "magical nukes," then the UCAS isn't using real ones. Yet. (Please stay that way!)
- > Pistons
- > With the eyes on high closed, the UCAS military has also been using several magical techniques that they've been working on for decades in case of another fight against the Native American Nations. I don't think they did very well at first, but it sounds like they're making progress. The shamans have more knowledge and more power, but the UCAS has more people—which, you would think, would also mean more magicians. Attrition is in their favor. Maybe.
- > Butch
- > I can confirm that. The first four days, the UCAS spirits weren't doing very well. Day five, they started rolling out elementals, both the classics and a few of those new urban ones. The former were an even match, but the latter seemed to have left the Native spirits befuddled.
- > Glasswalker
- > Hey, just a quick question, but did anyone else notice that the NAN troopers were A) mostly ork and B) super young? I mean, I know soldiers tend to be young, but this seemed like it was beyond the norm.
- > /dev/grrl
- > I'm not sure if they're younger than average, but I can talk about the ork part. They make up just under half of all NAN forces (and roughly a third of the UCAS military), but that's not surprising: They're strong and tough, and orks often find themselves stuck in dead-end jobs for virtually no pay. The military's a good way out of poverty, where you can get decent money and an education that you normally might not have had. Right, Butch?
- > Sounder

- > I hate that you're calling me out on this one, but yeah, it's how I got out of the barrens in the first place, and where I got my medical training. Without the UCAS military, I'd have either been dead by twenty or tossed in prison. Hell of a thing, trading your life for the chance at a better future.
- > Butch
- > Who the frag attacks North Dakota in the middle of winter?!
- > Slamm-O!
- > It's hard to get solid information at times, but the NAN media's been talking about an individual named Captain Brian Red Cloud fairly often. He's the lead for the attack on Bismarck, which went stunningly well. They then had running battles with UCAS forces for five solid days, always a step ahead of the defenders. The Great State of Texas has been all-ears on the fight, and there's been talk of assembling some mercenary forces to roll up and chip in—unofficially, of course, since the CAS has stayed neutral. They don't trust either the PCC or Aztlan to not try something should official forces start rolling out, and quite frankly, I don't blame them.
- > Hard Exit
- > Red Cloud? Well there's a name with history.
- > Icarus

THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE: JTFS ALLOWED TO LEAVE SEATTLE

BY DOROTHY MAYNARD, CHEROKEE PHOENIX

POSTED BY: SEATACSWEEETIE <12-26-80/0344.14>

SEATTLE — The Salish-Shidhe Council has announced that they will no longer hold the movement of Joint Task Force Seattle as an act of war, as long as agreed-upon pathways out of SS territory are followed. This involves the majority of the UCAS military taking air transport first to Denver, then to Dallas, before flying up to Chicago, while the remainder will be escorted out of Seattle by the Makah navy, ending the UCAS naval presence on the West Coast entirely.

Salish spokesman Marie Corn-in-Morning-Sun stated, "It was a decision not made lightly but ultimately it was one of mercy. Christmas is a holiday of high import to the UCAS, and the soldiers were desperate to get word of their families in this time of great turmoil. The agreement to allow them to leave includes a promise that they will not take up arms against our Sioux family, and we hope that the UCAS can be trusted to uphold their treaties in a way that their ancestor, the United States, did not. With the failure of the Third Treaty of Denver, there is currently no agreement between our nations for peace. Perhaps this gesture will open eyes and lead to a new beginning of these negotiations when the new year comes. We will be here, in Seattle, preparing for peace but ready for anything."

<file paused by admin>

- > See? Told you Santa was real.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Sure, Fred, it's a gift, but for who? The JTFS was the threat that kept the Salish from looming too large over Seattle. Without them here, where does that leave us? The Metroplex Guard sure can't hold off the Salish, and if the Sioux decided to help? Well ...
- > Bull
- > It's going to kill my business, I'll tell you that. Army boys are always looking to spend some money.
- > SeaTacSweetie
- > I worry for my people in this. Even Damian Knight broke his word to us in time, and in him I saw a soul I could trust. More the fool I.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > You say that, but the initial invasion was started by the Sioux under the laughable claim of "humanitarian aid" for Bismarck. More like a land grab when they saw the UCAS was weak. I figure that they'll round up the white people and march them out come spring. I should be happy they won't do it in the dead of winter, but I'm still bitter today.
- > Hard Exit
- > Man, Yesica, you've just not been the same since the Rio Gambit. We should hang out, have some beers, chill out for a while. I'll bring Riot along, let her see what a couple of old warbirds can get up to.
- > Butch
- > I might just take you up on that.
- > Hard Exit

SEATTLE DECLARES INDEPENDENCE FROM UCAS

BY JOE MARTIN, NEWSNET <12-28-80/1934.11>

SEATTLE — Seattle Governor Corinne Potter, backed by Seattle's Council of Mayors, declared Seattle to be a "free city, independent of any governments besides its own."

The move comes during a tumultuous period for the UCAS, with Ares leaving a ravaged Detroit for a new headquarters in Atlanta and extended blackouts hitting several major cities.

"It's a simple calculation," Governor Potter said in a question-and-answer session following her announcement. "What are we getting for being part of the UCAS? We're all aware of the revenue we generate for the nation. Are we getting protection in return? A strong standing in the world? Today, the answer is no."

The revenue from Seattle will only be part of the loss the UCAS suffers with this move. The prestige and Pacific trade access are also significant. UCAS officials are scrambling to build a response and see if they can win Seattle back, but Governor Potter says there is no point.

“We are not taking this action lightly or half-heartedly. We are not just dipping our toes into the water of independence. We are diving in.”

- > Okay, well, uh. Seattle's gone solo? Uh. Well, I can see why the governor let the Task Force out now. Wow.
- > Slamm-0!
- > Just beginning to process this. The ramifications will be unending.
- > Bull

ST. LOUIS DECLARES INDEPENDENCE FROM UCAS

BY OMAR GUTIERREZ <01-02-81/1645:15>

ST. LOUIS — <0.7 Mp deleted>

- > Ghost, at this rate there won't be a UCAS left ...
- > Kiddle

COLLTON SIGNS BILL TO RE-AFFIRM BRA

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO,
NEWSNET <01-25-81/1200:56>

WASHINGTON, FDC — In a stunning blow to her administration, President Colloton signed a bill today that represents the UCAS' re-affirmation of the Business Recognition Accords. The move comes after repeated calls to request Corporate Court and U.N. assistance in dealing with the crisis caused by the blackouts covering the northeastern part of the country. President Colloton initially stated that she would veto any attempt by Congress to reverse the October decision to rescind the BRA, but the worsening humanitarian situation and increasing public pressure seem to have made her original position untenable.

“As president, it's my duty to choose the course of action that's best for the nation,” Colloton said, after signing the re-affirmation bill. “I withdrew the UCAS from the Business Recognition Accords because I believed that it was the correct course of action. However, the dire circumstances now being endured by UCAS citizens are a much greater concern, and the United Nations is the only body capable of providing humanitarian assistance on the required scale.”

Colloton refuted a theory that blamed the blackouts on the Corporate Court to punish the UCAS for canceling the Business Recognition Accords, saying “We're still gathering evidence, but we all know what the terrorist group Winternight accomplished with the Second Matrix Crash. We are working on a theory that this is an effort that dwarfs that one.”

Colloton's announcement met with equal measures of praise and criticism. “I won't lie, I'm disappointed,” said Defense Secretary Ronald Despain, Republican presidential candidate. “I've always stood shoulder-to-shoulder with President Colloton when it comes to holding the megacorporations accountable for their actions. I understand why she signed that bill, and I absolutely support doing everything we can to help UCAS citizens who are in dire straits because of these blackouts, but I wish we could've done it without handing victory to the Corporate Court.”

“I'm glad President Colloton has finally decided to accept the reality of the situation and swallow her pride for the sake of our nation,” said Senator Branigan Dane, Democratic presidential candidate. “As you all know, I've said from the beginning that the president should've accepted support from the United Nations as soon as it was offered. I'm glad she eventually made the right decision, but she put a lot of people through unnecessary suffering by making them wait.”

According to insiders, the re-affirmation bill not only restores all of the previous provisions of the BRA, but adds several new conditions that give Corporate Court-rated megacorporations even more leeway to operate in the UCAS without government interference. NewsNet will report further as more details become available.

- > Looks like Colloton finally cracked. Shame to see her go out this way.
- > Earther
- > Good thing she's not running for re-election. No voter likes to feel like the president thinks they don't matter, even when they actually don't.
- > Operator Bastard

LIVE: VICE PRESIDENT MARTIN SPEAKS OUT FOR CANADIAN AUTONOMY

REPORTING BY SOPHIE GAGNON,
KSAF <01-27-81/2002:47>

[Scene: Steps of the former Canadian Parliament Hall in Ottawa, Ontario. Damage inflicted during the Québécois invasion is visible on the walls behind an event platform. A human woman stands on the platform, with her image projected

on a large ARO above. A sizable crowd of people has gathered to watch the speech, despite temperatures well below freezing.]

[Reporter] We're live at Parliament Hill in Ottawa, where Vice President Michaela Martin is speaking at an event sponsored by the Canadian Heritage Foundation and Museum. Let's hear what she has to say.

[Camera cuts to VP Martin.] Most of you know that I was the governor of Ontario during and after the Crash. At the time, Ontario had the strongest economy of any state in the UCAS. Now, it's about to become one of the weakest. It's all well and good for President Colloton and the candidates from each party to say they're getting tough on megacorporate accountability, but suing Ares isn't going to bring back the jobs we lost when they left for Atlanta.

That isn't the only way that DeeCee has left Canadians behind. Everyone's heard by now that the NAN has invaded the UCAS. Military personnel from Petawawa have been sent to the front lines, and we hope and pray that they all return home safely—but where were they a month ago, when Quebecois soldiers did this? [Martin points to the damaged Parliament building.] Why was the UCAS 613th Infantry Regiment, the Royal Canadians, guarding a Saeder-Krupp smelter in Sudbury while Ottawa had to rely on mercenaries to defend itself?

I might be UCAS Vice President, but I've always been a proud Canadian. My connection with all of you, and our success in Ontario in the wake of the Crash, were why President Colloton chose me as her running mate. The past few weeks have clearly shown that DeeCee isn't committed to doing what's best for Canadians, and it's about time we had leaders who were—even if that means choosing them ourselves. Thank you.

<Ad break>

- > I told you so!
- > Rocky Smoke
- > Ghost, Martin's speaking openly against her own president now? You know things are getting bad in DeeCee when even Colloton's own administration is publicly breaking ranks.
- > Pistons
- > Martin's probably just playing to her corporate masters. She's well-known among "anonymous sources" for being even more of a megacorp shill than most politicians, and it's no secret that she's bitter about losing the presidential primary to Roland Despain. I wouldn't be surprised if Ares or another one of the Big Ten is using her to put pressure on Colloton.
- > Sunshine

FEBRUARY AND BEYOND

CORPORATE COURT AID ARRIVES IN BALTIMORE

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO,
NEWSNET <O2-O2-81/O815.O1>

For the first time in months, a light is shining in the darkness on the UCAS' eastern seaboard. While the relief process was already underway, the pace of aid flowing to stricken cities has increased in the days since President Colloton signed the bill that would renew the Business Recognition Accords. Representatives from the United Nations Mission in the UCAS (UNMIUCAS) are confident that power can be restored quickly, though they were reluctant to give NewsNet a specific time-frame or comment on what may have caused the blackouts in the first place.

Even as the humanitarian crisis in the UCAS begins to wind down, the political crisis in Washington is moving full speed ahead. The "thirty days after the blackouts end" election date that Congress and President Colloton set in November means that candidates will have a few short weeks before early voting begins. Election rhetoric is riding high, and most of it concerns how each candidate would've handled the blackout crisis differently than the current president.

"All of them are walking a tightrope," said Lyle Whitman, NewsNet political analyst. "Nobody wants a president that they think would sell the UCAS out, but Colloton has taken a lot of heat for bringing us back into the BRA after coming out so strong against the corps. After that, none of the candidates want to be associated too closely with her." Democratic candidate Senator Branigan Dane is narrowly leading the field, according to NewsNet's latest polls.

- > This is complete **bulldrek!** Various rigger and smuggler groups have been trying to get supplies into the UCAS almost since the first blackouts happened! But we kept getting attacked at every turn by everyone from mercs to runners to other smugglers! I've personally lost two t-birds and almost a dozen associates.
- > Osprey
- > Maybe you shouldn't be such a bleeding heart, or try something a bit more in your league.
- > Razorback
- > Oh, you just wait, soon as I get my MiG back up and running ...
- > Osprey
- > Take it elsewhere. First and only warning.
- > Glitch

- > For those curious, the people are desperate for help. Help gets shipped in. Assorted people are paid off to get those supplies—mercs are paid to protect them, corps are paid to ship them, organized crime gets a cut, and what's left gets distributed by cronies. When a shipment that's going through Yak territory gets grabbed by the Mafia, they both hurt their enemies and help their own people, and vice-versa. This is why deliveries get hit despite being protected by crime family X or Y. The little guy gets left out but, well, nuyen talks.
- > 2XL
- > There comes a time when profit should get tossed in favor of basic decency.
- > Chainmaker
- > Yeah, that's in chapter seventeen of my new fantasy novel. In the real world, those with the money make the rules. That's how it's always been and how it'll always be.
- > OrkCEO

POWER RESTORED IN PHILADELPHIA

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO,
NEWSNET <O3-20-81/O835:19>

PHILADELPHIA, PA — Philadelphia, the last of the remaining blacked-out cities, finally had power restored today. It's been nearly two months since other cities had their lights turned back on, and the country has received significant aid from the United Nations Mission in the UCAS. As in other blackout zones, the damage in the "City of Brotherly Love" is catastrophic, once again likely to total in the billions of nuyen. <0.9Mp deleted by admin>

- > The important part of this story is that now that the power's back on, so is the election—it's set for April 21, the first working day after the thirty-day time period.
- > 00
- > Knight Errant was able to get the Zero closed up and running again after two weeks of hard fighting. A few thousand people died (mostly Zeroes from inside the Zone if you trust the official number) in the combat, then it was handed off to Lone Star when the bugout order came down from on high. Bishop was **not** happy about leaving the city. He had a press conference, talked about how he's subject to orders from above and how it went against everything he believed and how he planned on fighting to come back as soon as possible. The man got rave reviews, and Philly's the one city that still looks to Ares as a future-savior, not a scapegoat. If he doesn't get fired for insubordination, he's got a bright future.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > All well and good, but who's going to get the city repaired?
- > /dev/grll

DESPAIN ELECTED PRESIDENT

BY SUZANNE MONTENEGRO, NEWSNET

WASHINGTON, FDC—The results are in, and former Secretary of Defense Ronald Despain has made history by being the first ork to be elected President of the United Canadian and American States. Exit polls reveal that President-Elect Despain's metatype and appeal to metahuman voters was a key factor in his narrow victory over Democratic candidate Branigan Dane. <2.5 Mp deleted by admin>

- > So what's all this mean, Kay?
- > Pistons
- > How the hell should I know? Ask someone who can actually see the future.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > It means the whole Underground's going to be a giant party for the next week. Anyone who isn't an ork or troll might want to steer clear until it dies down.
- > Bull
- > Yeah. A few of us were actually impressed that Despain used "orks and trolls know how to build something from nothing" to pitch himself as the best person to rebuild the country after the blackouts. Most of us are waiting for the other shoe to drop, though.
- > Butch

BIG CHANGES

POSTED BY: BULL

Drek, man, where do I even start? How about with the end? The UCAS is in deep drek. She's taken hit after hit since the turn of the century, but this last rash of chaos may be her death blow. She's not gone the way of the Roman Empire yet, but she is certainly in the Romulus Augustus phase. Chicago is long gone. New York belongs to the megacorps. Boston is more recently removed, though looks to be limping back. Detroit is a mess. Then you have Philadelphia, Halifax, Bangor, Bismarck, Lexington (hell, the entire state of Kentucky), North Missouri, the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas, along with the trouble up north, and one simple conclusion is clear: She's falling apart.

I'd love to cover all of it, but I'm going to focus on her biggest recent losses: Seattle and St. Louis. One, close to my heart; the other, a major move in the world of some of my trusted colleagues.

SEATTLE

The loss of Seattle is a tremendous blow for the UCAS. It's not a headshot for the quick kill, it's more

a severing of the femoral with possible bleeding out to follow. While St. Louis has been seriously talking and stalking closer to going independent, Seattle's "Free City" movement never had a real foothold or big following. Then again, neither did the move for the Seattle Underground for a long time, until all of the sudden it did. The point is, we are now living in Seattle, a free city and independent metroplex. The independent status was declared by Seattle on December 28, 2080, at 1659, then accepted and ratified by the Corporate Court and United Nations only a minute later. There was plenty of action bringing us to that point.

Let's talk about Seattle since Halloween 2080, after Philadelphia and Baltimore went dark. As one might expect, the city had reactions across the spectrum. A few people and groups wanted to send aid, but most didn't care. They weren't affected, therefore it was just another pair of cities in chaos in the UCAS. They were far more interested in dealing with the internal issues that had been caused by nullifying the BRA. A small but vocal minority had started the independence discussion already and used these events as a talking point for their cause. Though they didn't blame the corps, they definitely wove a tale about the lack of corp support leading to system failures and their inability to operate effectively without the benefits of extraterritoriality.

The delay of the federal elections wasn't a surprise, but it clipped the political argument going on about re-signing the BRA. The shadows had been hot already, but the minute the announcement hit the Matrix, it went apedrek! Due to the massive amount of extraterritorial property in the metroplex, Governor Potter did a quick backroom deal to maintain a certain level of status quo. While Seattle, as UCAS territory, didn't honor the accords officially, they had spent the previous three weeks living under an informal truce while the shadows used the very uncomfortable situation to best advantage. Seattle is a hub for every one of the Big Ten, and dozens of AAs keep major offices and North American HQs in the city. The fact that the UCAS feds were pissed because Ares turned their back on them was petty bulldrek. Seattle had plenty of other corps to worry about. The hardest part was the fact that Knight Errant fully held to the UCAS ruling out of spite and marched their hoops all over the property of the other big boys under a collection of false pretenses. I'm sure that didn't play well up on Z-O at the time, but now it doesn't matter. We'll talk more about that shortly.

As the lights went out up the Eastern seaboard, Seattle slowly grew more and more worried that they would be next. Knight Errant had a week from hell as not just the shadows went wild, but also the slums. Barrens rats in droves used the fear and muddled rules as a chance to raise hell. It ac-

tually kept the fear localized for a week—and then the blackouts shifted west.

It was the following week, when St. Louis, Bismarck, and Lexington went black along with Knight Errant bailing on their contracts, that Seattle truly started the sprint on the road to independence. Fear of being next gripped the city, and while Governor Potter talked about UCAS support on the trids and the propaganda from Dee-Cee flowed, behind closed doors deals were in the works. That meant shadow work galore, so Seattle was once again a hub and hotbed for runners from all over to come and rake in the dough. We just didn't have the local numbers to support the biz, especially with how brutal the corps were about defending property. They started disappearing runners because of the lack of the BRA. It wasn't always a dirtnap either. Several provided an involuntary relocation to get people out of Seattle and onto extraterritorial property, where they were offered life and a little corporate debt to pay off.

I'm digressing! The shadows heated up during early November and early December. While the corps were conniving and tough, the cops were in disarray, as Lone Star took back over. Somewhere, I'm sure someone is covering how Ares is planning to survive all the KE contracts they lost from pulling out their guys, but it isn't me. Luckily for Lone Star, under a decade out of the top spot is not that long. They transferred Seattle veterans back in, recruited newbies, and transferred what they needed. They're still working out a few kinks—one being that Seattle signed the BRA, and alongside independence, that means Ares/KE property was extraterritorial. That made it hard for the Star to just move in, but shadow moves and corporate shenanigans will grease those wheels to get things set.

Great ghost, I can't hold a topic. Maybe I just don't want to talk about the next part. I learned long ago the old street adage, "Never deal with a dragon," and Seattle did. Let me just roll off history and touch on why this happened.

Here's to hoping I can focus!

THE WHYS: FOUR BIG REASONS

1. Frag the UCAS!
2. Corporate Court support!
3. A dragon made me do it.
4. Neighborly friendship.

Let's cover these motivations for independence a little deeper. First up: *Frag the UCAS!* There is no other city in all of the UCAS that was as deeply affected by the cancellation of the BRA as was Seattle. Seattle is a megacorporate metroplex with a full retinue of megacorporations existing and battling in our backyard. When the UCAS rescinded the BRA, they clearly didn't think how it would affect their crown jewel.

- ▶ It's more that they overplayed their hand. They thought that doing business in Seattle would be so lucrative that the corps would make sacrifices to keep the money flowing. They thought they could exercise some muscle, but they forgot how much stronger the corps are than them.
- ▶ Cosmo

The move left Seattle, a place surrounded by foreign powers and reliant on its relationships with the megacorps, stranded and alone. The UCAS' tough talk did nothing for Seattle but get them buried in bad news.

Seattle took the envoys and support the UCAS offered and did their best to keep Fort Lewis and the JTF from doing something stupid, but when the JTF started poking around at the Salish defense grid, it was obvious they were playing for the UCAS and forgetting about all the other powers with an interest in the city. Sure, the initial forays had stray missiles hitting Redmond and Puyallup, but who cares, that's just the barrens. Those hits got played across every megacorporate media outlet in the 'plex, and while it was an obvious ploy to rile the citizens of Seattle, it worked. It showed the disregard the UCAS had for Seattle and demonstrated that they were willing to risk war and an extended siege just to get a small band like JTF Seattle back to the homeland to protect those cities.

The people were led cleanly down the path of independence by painting all of this as a lack of care by the faraway UCAS government. Sure, runners probably staged the footage. I would bet the forays were handled by shadow ops, not black ops. But in the end, it all came down to the same thing.

Frag the UCAS for leaving the Emerald City to become the Crimson Crater in their war with the corps.

Second factor, trailing close on the first, was the efforts of the Corporate Court to make Seattle feel like independence was the only way to go. Relief efforts, blackout prep and prevention, and support for their policing shift, not to mention the handshake backroom deals, put the city of Seattle neatly into the back pocket of the Corporate Court. Ares even offered an apology for the contract violation through the CC and made a tentative deal to compensate the sovereign state of Seattle for losses caused by their need to break their policing contract.

With the Big Ten and the Corporate Court offering plenty of incentives, including breaks on municipal service contracts until the end of the century, Seattle can have an economic boost over the next two decades and use the additional funds to build up elements they didn't have as a metroplex, like converting the Metroplex Guard to a formalized military, while contracting military assets from various sources until they have their own force properly trained and outfitted. The members of the CC, along with AAs like Maersk, OmniStar,

Gaeatronics, and Erika, are all on board with making Seattle a success now that it has cut the cord.

It's lucky that Seattle is not a shadowrunner, or they'd be doomed. On December 21, Governor Potter took a ride on a UCAS aircraft carrier out into the Sound. The event was covered by the media, and everyone was abuzz as to the purpose of the trip, since the reason for the press presence wasn't announced with the invite.

Cameras started rolling at 1600. With a beautiful sunset as a backdrop, a stunning azure-skinned woman rose from the Sound atop a pillar of water and stepped onto the deck of the carrier. Her beauty was immediately apparent, but as she stood across from Governor Potter, her true size also became evident. This woman was easily three meters tall as she towered over the governor. Her dress of blue scales, with scintillating opalescence in the setting sun, made her appear inhuman—which, as we came to find out, was only fitting.

Most have seen it already, the footage went viral, but for anyone who hasn't or wants a transcript, I'll link up what they said. Normally politicians are boring and long-winded, but the Sea Dragon made sure everything got right to the point.

Governor Potter (P): Welcome, Queen Mother of the Seas. Seattle welcomes you and is honored by your presence and invitation.

The Sea Dragon (S): Governor Potter, I do not need flowery praise. I come with an offer and care for little more than an answer. I am not a land wyrm seeking subjects. Your city faces the failure of your patron nation. I would offer you my support and matronage if you choose to sever your ties. Regardless of your decision, I seek to purchase properties within your domain. Your assistant should be getting the list as we speak. Here is the payment.

(P): We will have to review the properties, but I'm sure that is sufficient payment. Excuse me—Captain Stacey, are we stable with that ... new payload?

Captain (C): I'm not happy my flight deck is blocked by ... several tons of gold, but it's nowhere near enough to compromise her seaworthiness.

(S): Gold has a set value on your markets. If this is too great a volume, I can offer it in precious stones as well.

(P): No need. The payment will be held while we assess the viability of those properties for sale. When complete, the difference will be returned in whatever ...

(S): No need to return it. The property should be no issue, and if a few are not acceptable, the additional value can be considered my first investment in your independent city-state.

(P): We've made no formal declar—

(S): That is all I needed. Thank you for your time.

The Sea Dragon dove from the deck and took her true form as she hit the water, rocking the aircraft carrier with her wake. Over the next week, several property sales were begun and post-dated as December 29, moving along after the city's Independence Day. Alongside the sale, Governor Potter quietly accepted the "matronage" of the Sea Dragon for the nation. She has an appointment on the Founder's Council, which also includes appointees from each of the Big Ten, OmniStar, Maersk, Tír Tairngire, California Free State, and the Salish-Shidhe Council. All of these parties have heavily supported the city's step away from the UCAS and into independence.

Governor Potter very quickly sought to calm relations between Seattle and the Salish-Shidhe after the latter demanded Joint Task Force Seattle stay put or risk a declaration of war. Her diplomacy wasn't entirely a gentle hand, and it also wasn't the first diplomatic entreaty she extended. As the SSC made their threats, Potter reached out to other neighbors, in particular Tír Tairngire and the California Free State. Neither were willing to go to war for the UCAS, but for a free Seattle, they were far more supportive of convincing the SSC and the rest of the NAN to reconsider war as an option. When Potter came to the SSC, she came with two main tactics.

First, she entertained conversations about a few backroom deals, floating the idea of independence and seeing what reaction and support she might be able to get out of her neighbors. When the Sea Dragon rolled in with her own support offer, Potter had an unorthodox coalition, but one that was powerful enough to worry the SSC, especially since they had quite a few military elements cross-training at that point. Most were surreptitiously aiding the Sioux forces that had already invaded the UCAS to kick all this off. Once they had a quiet deal, Potter came out publicly talking tough against the Salish. All of it was a ploy to get the support of JTF Seattle and the UCAS military forces stationed in the metroplex.

Backroom conversations with military leaders started shortly after she came out talking tough, and she quickly gauged who would be willing to commit treason and join Seattle in separating from the UCAS. The numbers were far larger than she expected, with only the highest-level officers of the JTF still blindly loyal to Colloton and the UCAS. It helped that Colloton's name wasn't on the ballot for the vote that got indefinitely postponed. Colloton wasn't going to be sitting in the Oval Office anymore, and none of the other candidates seemed military minded, while Potter had just quietly brokered a war coalition between several nations while standing up to a longtime ally/frenemy in the form of the SSC.

In a single very hectic week, Governor Potter gathered together all but one of the pieces she needed to make her declaration of independence.

She still didn't have the people. She handled that in much the same way the United States had once skipped out on Britain—that is, by using legislators. She called together all of the members of the city's political systems and used the argument that if the citizens had voted these individuals in, they represented the populace. It wasn't as clean a vote as the Second Continental, but it was affirmed by ninety-two percent of those gathered, representing eighty-five percent of the registered population. Most of the opposition came from several Redmond and Puyallup representatives who knew where any fighting might occur and who would truly benefit from this move.

It was enough support that Governor Potter drafted the declaration, garnered signatures from all the district mayors (except Redmond), spread the plan quietly to all the key players, and took the shot at the UCAS all between the afternoon of December 27 and early evening of the 28th.

The rest is history.

- ▶ Treason's a big word. The common soldier wasn't big on fighting since they'd be on the front lines, but the officers who gave them orders were loyal. That's why she had to let them out with the SSC's blessing. It would have been great to get all those soldiers defending Seattle instead of going home, but it just wasn't happening.
- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ I hear that some of the soldiers went AWOL and stayed in Seattle to start a new life in the shadows.
- ▶ Red Anya
- ▶ I hear that a few dozen spec ops and officers went AWOL to stay behind and stage guerilla fighting, hoping to draw the natives into a war where the Metroplex would have to call the UCAS back to save them.
- ▶ Plan 9
- ▶ Seattle was the last port on the Pacific for the UCAS; I don't expect them to forget this loss easily, if at all.
- ▶ SeaTac Sweetie

ST. LOUIS

I know, I know. The good part of St. Louis was in the CAS anyway, but that's ignoring Granite City, Edwardsville, and Alton, along with the huge fact that the UCAS just lost another major shipping port. East St. Louis is a pit, but the UCAS half of St. Louis was more than that. Now, before we get into what this will mean, let's talk about how and why it happened, starting with the forces that played a part to make St. Louis feel like they could do better as a nation than as a city.

DEALS WITH A RIVER MONSTER

Usually I save the thing I'm least comfortable talking about for last, but I think if I start typing all the rest of this information, I might just leave this part out. Which I shouldn't, because even if it's just a rumor, the possibility that a dragon is backing this free city is good for everyone to know. If you're living a dangerous life as part of a dragon's fiefdom, you should be informed of that possibility.

The Sea Dragon found her way to St. Louis shortly after the blackout. She lent aid with issues on the river and then held a quiet and very private meeting with the city council on a rooftop surrounded by river flooding. The site was certainly a message from the Sea Dragon about the potential of the muddy Mississippi to retake a city unable to use modern technology to protect itself, but the support offer was delivered not in the form of some kind of river reformation, but instead in a simple land transaction and investment in the city (sound familiar?). While the deal wasn't struck and finalized immediately, since St. Louis had not publicly declared their independence, the payment was left. Following the pattern she set with her contribution to Seattle, the Sea Dragon made her payment in gold bars stamped with the letters "CSA," as in the Confederate States of America from the Civil War days. I didn't see it myself, but rumors abound among runners who claim to have cashed in by skimming a little from the top of this supposedly massive stash that the Sea Dragon left inside the building beneath where the meeting took place. If the payment method wasn't insane enough, rumors say it's stored inside a Civil War-era submarine of French design that must have been arranging some form of deal when it sank.

- ▶ Those runners have some valuable souvenirs of the Civil War, because no fence in town is touching those bricks with a three-meter pole.
- ▶ St. Louis Blues

The problem with the Sea Dragon's support, and my information, is that neither I nor anyone I've spoken to have any idea why she's interested in a free St. Louis. She must have a reason to drop that kind of cash on the city and buy up so much property. She's not a megacorp, so there is no extraterritoriality, leaving all this property out of corporate control. That could be one reason she's doing what she's doing, but it still doesn't get to her larger purpose.

DEALING WITH THE CAS

With the acceptance of Kentucky's secession and annexation, along with calls for Canadian freedom in the north and the Sioux coming in from the west to "lend aid," several other UCAS states

started thinking about secession. Most didn't have popular support for the move, as they have a lot of resources coming from the north, and they're not eager to sever those ties.

Behind closed doors, several deals were made on the backs of shadowrunners and government operatives and inked in their blood. The CAS worked out deals with St. Louis, the Sioux Nation, and even Aztlan. The talks with that last entity focused on assuring their southern neighbor that they had no plans to expand in their direction, and they also wanted to make sure the Azzies didn't see this as a chance to push north. Aztlan being Aztlan, they mustered some troops and performed a few "training exercises" to stress out the CAS, but I know for a fact the CAS arranged for several runner teams to be in the area and wreak havoc should the Azzies make a truly aggressive move. Not all of those runs went off smoothly, but those that did kept the Azzies focused elsewhere.

The St. Louis deal obviously allowed the city to gain independence and claim a solid chunk of the CAS. In exchange, the CAS kept a piece of real estate in the sprawl as their "government enclave." On paper, it's intended to allow a healthy trade relationship, but it's nowhere near the river. Not that they need access to the river in St. Louis, since all of the Mississippi south of St. Louis is still theirs, but the move puts them a bit west of the Mississippi and south of the Missouri, with no direct access to either within St. Louis. The CAS will use the enclave as a staging area for property and personnel being transitioned out of the city, but some goods will likely be stored here permanently. Enterprising runners might keep an eye on the place to identify people and material passing through, and tag anything you might want to grab later as it moves.

The Sioux deal was more complex and involved speculation on the success of the Sioux in keeping their hold on territory they claimed during their "aid advance." The Sioux had not made an intentional advance through Kansas, focusing more north in order to stay closer to potential aid from the AMC and avoid risking issues with the CAS. They may not have been willing to risk the CAS not supporting their efforts or, worse, informing the UCAS of the pending invasion. After the fact, with Wichita just tossing up their hands despite the fact that they had not been blacked out, the Sioux took the opportunity and moved into Kansas with some initial contact with the CAS and the beginnings of an offer to give the state over to them if the UCAS didn't win a political battle for its return. The point is somewhat moot now, as Kansas joined Kentucky in secession.

The third secession domino fell with the reunification of Missouri, but that deal hinged on a free St. Louis, increasing the value of the rest of Missouri's river property, including a likely shift of political value up to Alexandria or Hannibal to the



north or Cape Girardeau to the south. The Omaha region, which suddenly became a border town near three nations, is going to see some political and social changes in the near future, pushing a heavy amount of shadow work that way as well.

Thanks to deals and efforts between St. Louis, the Sioux Nation, and the CAS, the CAS was willing to cede the city in order to gain Missouri and Kansas. All this horse-trading and deal-making is leading to interesting times ahead.

THE CORPS AND THEIR BLOODY ARCH-OLGY

Let's talk about the biggest reason St. Louis stepped up from a political border-town to a national entity of its own: the megacorps.

A "free" St. Louis is not some political giant that can stand on its own. It will survive based on the support of the megas that battle for contracts within the city, and runners will survive based on the massive influx of nuyen from all the corporate backstabbing that had already kicked off. Not every mega has the same level of interest, but a few are making serious investments in St. Louis' success.

Aztechnology has been using the Blight as a research area for a decade already, and now that St. Louis is independent of their rival CAS, they are putting money and support into the city as a means of increased access. During the city's negotiations, Aztechnology and the city government made several large land deals for property in the Blight and along the river. Attached peripherally to those arrangements were food-supply deals to regulate prices for food products coming from Aztechnology and their subsidiaries to locations with government contracts, along with limiting any price gouging that could occur with the city's isolation and limited resources. Since no one wants to starve shortly after declaring independence, this was a major deal for St. Louis to take, and Aztechnology made out like bandits.

Spin Global was nearly set for a deal to take over the ARCHology when the Corporate Court came in to claim some space and ease the financial burden on Novatech, the official owners. Their efforts in looking at the massive structure as an HQ made them a prime candidate to contact for support while exploring the idea of independence. While they don't own the whole structure, they have a regional office in the ARCHology and have invested heavily in the region as a safe foothold in North America. The independence of St. Louis helps them stay clear of other national politics, leaving them able to focus on megacorporate politics as they weave their way through the tangled web of playing in the Big Ten and having a seat on the Corporate Court.

Mitsuhamama took the top spot in the megacorporate ranks through mergers and acquisitions,

gaining a foothold in markets all over the globe. St. Louis held its share of those new assets, and when an opportunity arose to create an independent city they could control, they were glad to toss in their backing in exchange for a whole series of government contracts and property deals. They aren't fighting their way up, but instead defending the high castle they sit on. It's a different corp war in the shadows for MCT, but their dominance in this city will be challenged nonetheless.

Horizon has long been the little fish in the big pond, but they've put themselves at the forefront of the free-city movement as the PR firm for the new nation state. Connections to the break-off of Seattle are rumored to have come with Horizon's help.

- ▶ Let's not forget Seattle Governor Potter's Horizon connections. Their fingerprints are all over the place here.
- ▶ Kay St. Irregular

Those who have looked too long at the position of Horizon within the Big Ten and focused on their ranking based on gross value fail to realize that Horizon doesn't hang out on the Corporate Court because they have money (there are plenty of other AAs that exceed the valuation of Horizon); they're up there because they know full well what to do with their charisma and influence over the masses. Minds are an asset no one can properly value, and Horizon has unimaginable wealth in that department—wealth they plan to spend in the independent St. Louis.

Evo has been all over St. Louis since the city became a focal point for changelings with aquatic features. As one of the biggest investors in the East St. Louis barrens (where a large colony of changelings live and work around their facility just north of the Cahokia region), Evo has been pushing the free city movement from behind the scenes from its earliest days. Rumors abound that Evo will be using this new free city as a place to display and release some of the futuretech they've been developing in their Azanian research facilities. For the offer of advancing St. Louis into the new century even as the '80s get under way, Evo supposedly garnered special consideration for safety issues and public release information from the free city. We can expect jobs galore, both stealing Evo tech and covering up Evo problems, but this work will come at the expense of trying to operate in a city transitioning into the future faster than the rest of the world.

Novatech bought in big, taking their HQ from Boston and tossing it into St. Louis. As the local remnant of NeoNET (RIP), they followed their fallen parent's final wishes of settling in the Gateway City. Heavily invested in the region, they have been proponents of a free St. Louis



since the rumblings first began. From research facilities across the region to production plants littering Granite City, Novatech has a lot of sway for an AA. As one of only three AAs with offices in the ARCHology, they hang out close enough to the big boys to rumble a bit as they rebuild. Don't be surprised if their efforts here start making headway toward rejoining the Big Ten, especially with how pleased the Corporate Court is with them for their dealings with the ARCHology.

Maersk is another AA with offices in the massive arch over the river, though theirs are on the lower levels, closer to the water they desire to control. As St. Louis looked for support for their independence, only a few of the AAs were willing to step up out of fear of reprisal from members of the Big Ten. Maersk had no such fear. They're still looking for a path to the big table, and making bold moves seems to be their modus operandi these days. They gained large shipping contracts from the free city while also getting their fingers into the city's info brokerage and financial sectors through key subsidiaries.

OmniStar, the newest AA conglomerate, stood with both Seattle and St. Louis, garnering much the same deal they gained on the West Coast. By offering megacorporate support, they solidified policing and medical services contracts within the city that extend to the end of the century. While twenty years seems an eternity to the average citizen (well, if they aren't an elf or a dwarf), for a developing nation it's merely infancy. The choice to sign the contracts for such a long time is also a message from St. Louis that they will be around in twenty years to renegotiate. As part of the deal, OmniStar got an office/station inside the ARCHology. It's mostly for PR, but at least a handful of HTR teams launch from that office each week, probably just to remind people that they're there.

The question of what's motivating independence is on everyone's lips, and the answer varies depending on who's giving it. Those raised in the corps see this as a move to build closer ties to the corps, almost making the country a subsidiary of the other corps, or maybe a corporate partner. National (or former national) citizens see freedom as either an escape from paying for the failures of their former nation or as a terrible mistake that will lead them to ruin. Runners don't care, except now they have a few extra borders to cross, new levels of bureaucracy to bribe and contend with, and some new lucrative opportunities, so it sort of balances out.

The real motivations for independence are all of these, with people in power trying to manipulate other powers as much as possible to get some degree of stability, safety, and of course wealth for themselves.

WHAT NOW?

Both the UCAS and CAS still have territory within the new borders of the Free City of St. Louis. It isn't exactly prime property, but it's also better than just chunks of the Blight. The UCAS is still on the Illinois side of the river, though they didn't give them any riverfront property, while the CAS got a chunk that includes their small government arcology. They tried to get a piece of downtown, but the new government wasn't having any of that.

The UCAS is already constructing a new government complex and getting help from Illinois and MCT on the construction project. Workers and equipment have been pulled down from their efforts in Chicago, partially for ease but mostly to make a giant show of a convoy of MCT construction rigs and equipment trucks rolling south on I-55. They even made a big deal of getting Lone Star escorts at the new border to "expedite" the border crossing and bring them right to the new UCAS lands. It was a spiteful show, but it was better than just rolling in and pretending they weren't an independent city.

The CAS just moved important government employees and equipment over to their arcology. The parking garage now looks a bit like a junkyard maze. The place is a big target for theft, but trying to get anything out or find anything in there is a serious challenge. They don't have a ton of other security, because they know anyone getting in and out has to run through a group of overstuffed chokepoints.

- > What in the fragging frag is the Sea Dragon up to with supporting two independent free cities here? Especially two that happen to flank Denver, home of Ghostwalker? Are we being set up for another dragon war?
- > Stone
- > Anyone know why Potter, Seattle's Governor and now executive leader, would be creeping around and pushing St. Louis independence?
- > Sounder
- > A diversion that's closer to home than her seceding city. It also could have to do with it being part of her past. She has youth ties to the city.
- > St. Louis Blues
- > Still doesn't answer why. Especially the "youth ties," because we all know her life is a Horizon fabrication. If ties to St. Louis have suddenly arisen, there's a reason.
- > Glitch
- > Maybe Seattle is planning term limits and she's setting up for round two. Leave one successful free city to go work in another one.
- > Plan 10

A LOOK BACK EAST

To quote Senator Thomas, “Everything that can go wrong is going wrong.” That’s the tale of the UCAS not just out west and down south, but also up north and even back east. The east is not as chaotic as the rest, but it took the biggest blackout hits, and the only thing that seems to be holding it together is whatever pressure and dirt DeeCee had on the states, which they’re now burning like currency during runaway inflation.

The East Coast was the start of the United States and the heart of the UCAS, and it will likely be the home of the death-throes of an “American” nation during its collapse.

Even though the cities are returning to the light at a slow pace, the debt the UCAS is incurring with the corps is beyond repayment, and no one in the world wants to help them out. Cities are rationing not only food and water but electrical and Matrix services in an effort to cut costs. Corps are raking in the dough with UCASian subscribers to their grids, but those UCASians are buying on credit, and that debt is just adding to the crippling of the UCAS.

If a UCAS citizen has a choice of paying their taxes to a nation that has been cutting back more and more services or keeping their Matrix subscriptions up so they can escape reality and commute to work, we all know who they’ll pay. The threat of the taxman just isn’t backed by much now.

Hell, even their own congressional representatives know what’s coming. There have been several over the past six months who took their own lives. Sure, some of them had connections to Ares, meaning the departure of that cash cow, with loads of incriminating evidence on them, could easily be blamed for their decision, but some weren’t from anywhere that had been affected by blackouts, secession, or invasion.

- ▶ Suicides? I’d pay good money for leads on any of those tragic losses that were influenced by the shadows. I don’t want to know who, just an anonymous tip so I know who to look into closer and see what they were hiding. This is not an era of “respect for the dead,” but rather an era of “point the camera that way” so others can get clear before they take the same path. Or get forced down it.
- ▶ Sunshine

Looks like the UCAS lost about a quarter of its land to this debacle, and greater losses may be on the horizon. Kentucky left, as did North Missouri, and Kansas, then Nebraska and the Dakotas went home to the NAN thanks to Sioux assistance. The Illinois side of St. Louis is gone along with Seattle, and Detroit might as well be a foreign nation with its problems. Up north, none of the Canadian land departed yet, but all of it is eyeing new homes with old friends, either nearby or across the pond. Some

of those potential partners may not be close and may not be much more stable than the UCAS, but at least they are not actively shrinking.

All of this leads me to my larger point: What is DeeCee saying about all of this?

The answer is the same as the name of our newest Corporate Court member: Spin, spin, spin. Any media outlet tossing UCAS-government-approved messages out to their own people is playing up every angle and, more often than not, lying through their teeth. The problem is, the UCAS has a lot of non-UCAS citizens. And those megacorp citizens aren’t limited to UCAS news, and they still talk to UCAS citizens. The divide between the two is growing, especially with the heavy dose of anti-Big-Ten propaganda that’s coming from the White House. It’s subtle, but it’s enough to sow the seeds of divide and fuel bar fights and coffee-shop debates.

Along with divisiveness, the UCAS PR machine is looking for pity from everyone. It would work if they weren’t the UCAS and hadn’t been seen as a global superpower for so long. Even among nations, they’re still high up there—at least they were until someone blacked out half their population and their biggest corp backer bailed on them. The loss of NYC, Chicago, and Boston over the years didn’t really help either. But they never played the weak and pitiful card before, instead falsely bolstering their citizenry with blind patriotism. They can’t really believe this will work, but that doesn’t change the angle that plenty of news outlets bringing “reports” from DeeCee are pitching.

Speaking of false patriotism, we also have DeeCee riling up their western states, including elements in what is now part of the Sioux Nation, about “taking back” what is theirs. It’s a fight they can’t really manage as a nation, but if they rouse enough rabble, and enough locals with guns start rolling out the militias and acting like guerrilla elements, they may have a chance down the road of taking back a beleaguered population. That’s if they are willing to turn those border states into warzones. One thing no American has had to live with in over two hundred years is the real threat of war on their own soil.

The hope is that any efforts to make the population seem unhappy will earn the UCAS real allies who will help them take back their land. DeeCee is claiming they already have allies, but none of that is being corroborated in nearby nations. Additionally, no aid seems to be coming their way from anywhere except the U.N., and that’s been sparse. In the world of reality, the UCAS is going to have to step down from “at war” status with the Sioux, because no one else really wants to help a nation that they know is just going to use that support to funnel money and supplies to the battlefield. This is true even though there are no currently active war zones, just a lot of talk and threats along the

disputed border. It's ugly for the people, but DeeCee doesn't seem to care.

Funny enough, across that same border and around the world, the Sioux Nation is looking like the honorable nation come to save their neighbor. While the East Coast managed to get power back, the Sioux, with the help of the PCC, just scrapped the junked tech and started over. They didn't get the news coverage of other cities coming back from the black, but they didn't care. Several hundred thousand citizens, who a few months earlier lived in fear of an NAN invasion, were standing up with their Native protectors. Now, all of this was just one giant Horizon PR spin show, but it's still better than the UCAS' repeated failures to show that they're surviving.

The last flailing effort at making their people think they aren't soon going to be changing some data in the Global SIN Registry is the DeeCee claim of support from several AAs, namely OmniStar, Novatech, and Maersk. No one else thinks any part of that trio is going to do a damn thing for the failing UCAS, but UCAS citizens are clutching at every straw of hope their government is tossing out.

We'll see when the elections get rescheduled what plays are being made by the candidates and then what the people of the UCAS are truly falling for. Every candidate or potential candidate is playing a different angle. The delay has opened the field back up, and if any of you remember the craziness of '57, well, we're about to repeat history, just like all the others who fail to learn from it.

About the only true and honest consolation the UCAS citizens can really enjoy in all this is the trouble Ares is having after abandoning them. DeeCee is claiming that Ares had lost all contracts with "loyal" corps in the UCAS, which includes Agripharma United, a rather large (and fake as frag) corporation that is nothing but a government subsidiary. It bought farms all over the Midwest and now uses the production of foodstuffs as a leverage tool. They had heavy contracts with Ares, and now they aren't delivering. Both food and biofuel are rumored to be in short supply for Ares citizens, especially those not directly linked to heavy profit divisions and subsidiaries. The UCAS may be in the weeds, but they can muster up enough strength to pull off a kick to someone's shins.

FORUM

- > All right, boys and girls, time to settle in and talk for a minute. The Blackouts. What were they? Who was behind them? What do we know and what are we speculating on? Plan 9, you have to wait for at least ten posts before tossing your hat in here. I want to see what the less-crazy ideas are first.
- > Glitch
- > Okay, we'll deal with the elephant in the room first. None of the attacks started until the BRA got nullified. They were spread out over a week then stopped. The Big Ten are obvious suspects but ... there are holes. They've never shown this kind of power before. Magically erasing entire military units and the towns they were sent to protect? Citywide anti-electronics attack that leaves no residue? There's also the fact that we only saw a week of attacks, but the BRA wasn't re-signed for months afterwards. Why not keep hammering away until the UCAS capitulated? It doesn't make sense.
- > Snopes
- > We also have several corps moving in for aid ... Ares in Philly, where the first attack was, for instance, S-K in the former Canada, Novatech (without Richard Villers) all across Mass., and more. Of course, there's also Ares and their complete betrayal by bailing out when things got hot. We should have learned from Chicago.
- > Sounder
- > Hey, what do you expect, Ares to lay down the lives of its people for the UCAS over protecting its own assets? You can't blame them for being all "Ares First" out there. They also did some good work in Lexington while on the way down to Atlanta, and you can't overlook that.
- > Stone
- > Look who's on the payroll. Taking over for Sticks, Stone?
- > Old Crow
- > Focus! So, we have the Big Ten as a possible suspect. Anyone else?
- > Glitch
- > The NAN in general. They were the ones poised to take advantage, they have the magical power, and their tech has become first-rate as well. They have motive, means, and opportunity. It'd take the Sioux, the Puebs, and maybe the Salish or Aztlan to all be on the same page, but combined, they could do it.
- > Hard Exit
- > I know you better than that. I further know that all of our nations are bound in the common defense. I cannot say that I know of any similar alliance for conquering, however. My talents have not been called upon in such a way.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > What about Yellowstone?
- > Lyran
- > How do you mean?
- > Hard Exit
- > Well, ever since Yellowstone got weird, you've had that gateway moving around, doing weird stuff, right? And it's tied in with the fae? So, what if this wasn't an attack, but the cloud hopping around, hitting cities? We know that it can gobble up people and

places and send them to the Court of Shadows, right? Tech isn't supposed to work right there, either, so maybe you have, like, fairy dust sprinkling down and wow that sounds stupid when I say it nevermind.

- > Lyran
- > Not the phrasing I'd have used, but a possibility. Stick it on the wall.
- > Frosty
- > We should also keep Winternight in the mix. This kind of apocalyptic weaponry is in their wheelhouse. I don't think that there's enough of them left to manage it, but you'd be surprised by what a dozen dedicated people can do when they don't expect to survive. I mean, Pax was in Boston not long ago ...
- > Winterhawk
- > It wasn't Pax.
- > Puck
- > I worry when you're so blunt.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Uhm, I hate to ask, Puck, but, well, you were teamed up with Harlequin a while back. Between the two of you ...
- > /dev/grrl
- > It wasn't Harlequin, and this wasn't me.
- > Puck
- > <sigh> Okay, fine. Planners, you're up.
- > Glitch
- > AIs.
- > Plan 9
- > Hey!
- > Plan 10
- > Hear me out! The Monads had this kind of tech potential, right? But they've mostly moved on. But while they were a cluster of AIs, they weren't all the AIs. In particular, there's one who's threatened metahumanity before and who's never shied away from disrupting the UCAS Air Force.
- > Plan 9
- > Sojourner.
- > Plan 10
- > Bingo.
- > Plan 9
- > Who?
- > Riot
- > The first of the modern AIs. She took over an Aztechnology satellite two decades ago, threatened to unleash bioweapons on

Aztlan from it until Pulsar went up there and talked her down. We talked about her in the 10 AIs download back before that one got scrambled. Speaking of which, Glitch, any progress?

- > Orbital Bandit
- > When FastJack was having his ... troubles ... he had some time to go in and scramble a bunch of files. Over the past few years, Fred, Pistons, and myself have managed to unscramble most of them, but a few are just tougher to crack than others, and that's one of them. He was FastJack, after all.
- > Glitch
- > Is. He is FastJack.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Ahem. Yes. Of course. Moving on ...
- > Glitch
- > Vampires!
- > Plan 10
- > Here we go.
- > Plan 9
- > Look, we've had this talk, but they haven't heard it. Do you mind? Okay, thank you. Ahem. So, we know that there are vampires in secret societies across the globe, and some are tied in with the Black Lodge. With that kind of money and power, they could have access to these Blackout Bombs, right? Or if it's magical, which we still don't know and which I just don't understand at all, then they'd have the knowledge for this kind of thing. Going to a world of darkness, where they can easily hunt metahumans who are blind and helpless without technology, sowing fear in the process, and to heap the blame on someone else ... it all fits. That's why it had to be done around Halloween. That's why there've been no incidents since. They got to practice the rituals, they got to see that they worked, and when the stars align again or whatever, boom, they can take down London or Prague or some other city closer to their base of operations and start to rule like they used to.
- > Plan 10
- > Really?
- > Hanibelle
- > You'd think they'd have mentioned that in the newsletter.
- > Red
- > Ha ha. Black Lodge jokes wee funnier when their body count was lower.
- > Plan 10
- > The Black Lodge is a possibility.
- > Frosty
- > I suppose I should also pin our old friends, the great dragons and the immortal elves?
- > Glitch

- > Right. Do you think if I had any sort of access to power of that level that I'd be hanging out here? No offense intended, of course.
- > Frosty
- > Well, the elves have whatever method they used to hijack satellites back when the Tír was first formed. Telestrian's been sitting on that knowledge for decades now and it's possible that this is related. They certainly have the magic, but what do they gain out of it?
- > Sunshine
- > They were part of the NAN when it formed. Maybe they're paying off old debts? Or maybe gaining new ones—help the Sioux out now, the Sioux help them take back Tir from the upstarts later. Or something like that.
- > 2XL
- > That's pretty thin but possible. We still don't know what kinds of resources the old Princes had tucked away beyond the borders of the Tír. It could all be an elaborate cover for one to reach some hidden cache in North Dakota. Unlikely, but...
- >> Frosty
- > Similarly ... <upload mussed hair> Dragons.
- > Slamm-O!
- > That never gets old.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Yeah, uh, could we not go there? It's not funny for some of us, okay?
- > Lyran
- > They're the free space in the center of every conspiracy, ever, and for good reason. The Sea Dragon certainly made gains from all of this.
- > Snopes
- > We can't rule any of these out yet, so you know what that means—talk to your contacts, dig through the trash, start sliding some nuyen around to people who might have better answers. If we can solve this before everyone else, we'll be in a strong position.
- > Glitch
- > For the record, if you do unlock this mystery, I'm prepared to be quite generous.
- > Icarus

TWILIGHT

President Angela Colloton wasn't used to losing. Once, she'd been the UCAS' beacon of hope. The light in the darkness. The stalwart protector. When Deus captured the SCIRE and ran bizarre and horrific experiments on UCAS citizens, General Colloton was their liberator. When the New

Revolution assassinated President Haeffner and tried to seize power in a military coup, General Colloton led loyal UCAS troops in defense of their nation. When the megacorps tried to crush the UCAS under their thumb, General Colloton resisted, shielding those under her charge from yet another malign outside influence. The people loved her for it, especially that last one; running against the corps was how she'd become President Colloton, back in 2068.

The corps were a tenacious foe, though—especially Ares. Colloton had never liked how Damien Knight's outfit had presented themselves as the “All-American megacorp,” only to sit on the sidelines while the UCAS struggled to rebuild itself after the Crash. She'd done her best to hold them to account for that in the years since. If Ares was going to make piles and piles of nuyen off UCAS citizens, they could damn well give something back, like Colloton and her fellow soldiers had done so many times.

Now it seemed like Ares was paying the price for their hubris. Colloton should've been happy with that—and at first, she was. When the reports of fighting in Detroit reached her daily intelligence briefing, the president had just smirked. *That's what you get for playing with fire, Damien*, she thought. That night, she'd told her husband that the only thing she regretted was that she hadn't taken Knight down a peg herself.

Then Ares found a way to stick the UCAS with the bill, and Colloton wasn't smirking anymore. Peacemaker was supposed to contain the fallout from whatever Ares was doing in Detroit, but it ended with tens of thousands of good UCAS soldiers missing and presumed dead. When Colloton chose to deploy her troops to protect the rest of the UCAS, the entitled cockroaches in Detroit accused her of “incompetence” and “abandoning” them, like she'd had some kind of obligation to protect them from themselves. Arthur Vogel had even threatened to move Ares' corporate headquarters to Atlanta, the same way Damien Knight had been doing for years—and told the employees Ares laid off that it was President Colloton's fault they were losing their jobs.

That had been the final straw for Colloton. She was tired of seeing Ares and the rest profit while the people of the UCAS paid the price. The people were tired of it, too, because even the corporate lobbyists and their sycophantic allies in Dee-Cee—good riddance, Kittering—couldn't prevent Congress from punishing Ares. Colloton had been proud to sign that bill, maybe more proud than she'd been in any other moment in her career. She'd finally put a stop to the corps' predations and made sure the people of the UCAS got their due, looking out for her nation like any good president would. Even the Corporate Court, in a rare moment of humility, had held their tongues; they

must have known they couldn't afford another story about how megacorporate meddling destroyed a UCAS city, not with NeoNET's downfall barely a year past. Colloton had won, and it would make for one hell of a capstone in her legacy as president. Maybe it would even give Despain enough of a boost in the polls to turn a slight lead into an insurmountable one.

Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

"Madame President?" It was Beatrice Chavez, Colloton's chief of staff—one of the few people in Washington who was still loyal to her, it seemed. Chavez's voice snapped the President out of her reverie, bringing her back to the Oval Office, surrounded by reporters sent to capture the signing ceremony. One of the photographers even had a flash-bulb attachment on one of his camera drones, a modern version of the ones they'd used on handheld cameras hundred years ago, even though technology had long since eliminated the need for such things. Ironically, the device itself seemed to prove that very point: the flashes were erratic, better suited to invoking the sentiment of ages past than producing anything new.

The sight of that malfunctioning relic hit President Colloton like a sniper's bullet. She could see herself in it—an artifact from a previous age, trying desperately to hold on to the credibility of the past in a world that had moved beyond it. The beacon of hope was being smothered. The light in the darkness was flickering out. The stalwart protector couldn't save the people of the UCAS from the damage inflicted by her own hubris.

The bill on Colloton's desk would undo all of the measures she'd taken to put Ares in their place. To the former general, it was an instrument of surrender in a war that, mere months earlier, she thought she'd won. Hell, Colloton hadn't even won the actual wars the UCAS had endured since then—a sorry state of affairs for a president who had earned her reputation in the military. General Colloton would've defended the UCAS' borders against any foe. General Colloton would have protected the people in Detroit from Ares like she'd protected Seattle from Renraku's runaway creation. General Colloton would have restored order in the UCAS' blacked-out cities the way she had in DeeCee after the Crash. General Colloton would've forced the corps to stop running roughshod over the people of the UCAS.

President Colloton hadn't done any of those things. President Colloton had overseen the single largest loss of life ever inflicted on the UCAS military. President Colloton had been as powerless as anyone else to stop the mysterious blackouts that had fallen over the nation's major cities. President Colloton had allowed two different hostile armies to set foot on UCAS soil practically unanswered while she scrambled to restore some semblance of order, to reassure people that everything would be fine because she was still the leader they needed her to be.

She wasn't, though, and even her inner circle was using it against her. Her own vice president was agitating for large chunks of the country to declare their independence. Her Secretary of Defense and nominal successor had condemned her willingness to sign this bill as pandering to the corps before it had even reached her desk. In her heart, Colloton knew Despain was right. She wanted to throw the leather folder and its real-paper contents across the room and storm out, but the cold, hard truth was that the people of the UCAS were suffering, and the only way she could help them was by swallowing her pride and accepting the Corporate Court's aid. It was the same decision General Colloton had made decades ago, knowing that some of her troops would die when she sent them into the SCIRE—except that this time, the sacrifice was hers.

The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. General Colloton's own words echoed in her ears as, for the first time in her life, she offered her surrender.







DETROIT NOW

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- › Over the past several months, we've witnessed world-altering events explode in our collective faces. There was no way to know Detroit would domino into events that engulfed the entire UCAS. And who knows where the aftershocks will go from here? As one thing led to another, I thought it was never going to end. I don't think it has, but things appear to have settled somewhat—at least enough to where we can take a look back and maybe start the process of recovery. By admin consensus, the War Room has been officially closed; the files are now “read only” and archived. That means we're getting back to a more traditional format. And I thought it fitting that we start this off by going back to Detroit. Although I don't think we can call it that for much longer. To give us the basic rundown, we've got

one Johnny Redline, rigger extraordinaire and Detroit native, who's been in the thick of things from day one. Word of warning, though—I've heard that Johnny is a wee bit salty of late with a massive chip on his shoulder.

- › Bull

BLOODY, BUT NOT BROKEN

POSTED BY: JOHNNY REDLINE

‹UPLOADED 02-11-81/1515:16›

First of all, forget everything you knew about Detroit because that city doesn't exist anymore. And this may sound a little neo-A-ish, but at this moment, I have zero frags to give and I'm gonna give my two 'yen. Plus interest.

Detroit has been a corporate pawn going all the way back to its founding. Decisions made by people far removed from the common citizenry have

brought the city to ruin and visited suffering time and time again. Why? Because they thought they were better than everyone else. We didn't matter; we're simply parts of the machine.

Don't believe me, take a look around sometime, see what the out-of-check ego of one fragging man with unchecked power accomplished. Word of advice: If you come here, don't mention Damien Knight in public if you want your keep your teeth in your skull.

Over the past six months plus, we were pawns, our homes a battleground on which nightmares were unleashed for no damn reason. We spilled our blood fighting back (and winning, frag you very much) against the unleashed terrors, but we were still abandoned. And not just once, but *twice*.

Frag Ares, and frag the UCAS.

But that's okay. What we have here qualifies as "unintended consequences." Despite the destruction, we've gotten a taste of real freedom. We don't want pity, we don't want handouts, and we sure as fuck don't want to be "rescued." We've been through the crucible, and now we're going to put our nuyen where our mouth is.

So if you have to, you can still call the city Detroit. But those of us who live here and run here are going to call her by her new true name. This is no longer a city of corporate control; it's something still taking shape.

Welcome, chummers, to **Motor City!**

DETROIT MOTOR CITY: VITAL STATISTICS

Okay, let's get some of the basic boilerplate stuff out of the way before we start diving into the good stuff. Keep in mind that this is older data. The income and SINless figures are going to be the most wrong, since that first one plummeted and that second one went up once Ares took off.

GETTING AROUND

Once a major hub of the automotive industry, Detroit currently boasts an expansive highway system that has been constantly upgraded and modernized over the past several decades. Major highways include: I-75, I-94, I-96, I-275, and I-696. Supplementing the highways is a complex street system; highways and roads all feature GridGuide. Additionally, Ares created an equally expansive public transportation system for the wageslaves who can't afford a vehicle. Long story short, there's street/vehicle access to roughly ninety percent of the sprawl.

- ▶ After the fighting, most of the old highways managed to survive. Inner-city street quality depends on which part of the city you're in. In outlying areas near the No-Go Zones, your mileage may

MOTOR CITY: FACTS AT A GLANCE

POPULATION (METRO AREA): 5,546,100*

Human: 65%
Elf: 12%
Ork: 10%
Dwarf: 6%
Troll: 4%
Other: Variable

Per Capita Income: 7,000 nuyen
Population Below Poverty Level: 20%
Estimated SINless: 15%

EDUCATION:

Less Than Twelve Years: 5%
High School Equivalency: 46%
College Degrees: 35%
Advanced Degrees: 13%
Literacy: 90%

LOCAL GRID (ARES/UCAS): MOTOWN DATA STREAM

Contracted by the UCAS to fulfill all matrix needs in the metro Detroit area, the Motown Data Stream grid is completely serviced and maintained by Ares Macrotechnology. Access icons include: a knight in full plate, a classic Model-T car, or the Ares Macrotechnology corporate logo depending on level of subscription/access. Matrix iconography is a real-time recreation of Downtown Detroit.

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Law Enforcement: Knight Errant Security (primary), Hard Corps Security (secondary)
Fire/Rescue/Medical: Ares Service Industries (Fire/Rescue), Doc Wagon (medical)
Public Works/Environmental Services: Ares Service Industries

* Note: Pre-Battle of Detroit numbers/figures. Current data sets are unavailable.

vary (pun intended). Anything near Downtown and the Scar is dicey, to say the least. Make sure that you have some kind of off-road capabilities.

- ▶ Gunnery Sarge

Traveling by air is easy, with two major airports servicing the Detroit metro sprawl.

The first is **Windsor International Airport**. Originally created when the United States and Canada were separate countries, Windsor is more modern and handles most of the regular and sub-orbital commuter traffic. Across the river, the old **Detroit Metro International Airport** is still in service, but over the past three decades it became known as mostly a corporate facility used by Ares

and by other members of the Corporate Court when needed.

- > This is odd, because during the battle, the ACMF took over Windsor International and made it their primary command-and-control facility. Detroit Metro, for all its corporate connections, was all but abandoned soon after the fighting began. Pity, they had some good cafés there.
- > Traveler Jones
- > Windsor was the ACMF backup—Detroit Metro was the primary. Someone on the bug side (likely Stevens) knew military tactics and did a pre-emptive strike against the ACMF CnC at Detroit Metro to cripple communications, especially close-air support. And it worked. That’s why we didn’t see any heavy airpower in play during Latvian Gambit’s opening salvos.
- > Rifleman
- > Currently, Detroit Metro is damaged but serviceable and has been taken over by the Garage and their chummers. So pay no attention to any explosions you hear out there, they’re just working on new stuff.
- > Shockwave

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 001 'THE GARAGE'

A coalition of riggers, techs, and gear-heads, the Garage traces its lineage back to an early twenty-first century chop shop near Flat Rock, Michigan. When they weren’t boosting cars, they were stripping them and using the parts on their racing machines in high-stakes street races. Known to use I-75 as their personal drag-strip and testing ground, the Garage kept pace with modern tech and fully embraced ASIST and rigger technologies.

Despite the Detroit Police and later Knight Errant’s best efforts to shut the Garage down permanently, the coalition has managed to stay one step ahead of the law and has diversified their portfolio. While they still engage in street racing, the Garage has gone into the smuggling trade. They’ve also become the place to go for custom vehicle mods in the Detroit Sprawl.

Just don’t ask where the parts came from.

WHAT ONCE WAS: OLD DETROIT SHADOWS

With some of the basic stuff done, it’s time for a history lesson. And trust me; this is data you need to know to understand Motor City.

The Detroit as we knew it came into being steadily over the past few decades but first started around 2016(ish) when former GMC big-wig Nicholas Aurelius formed Ares Industries after

the chaos of the Awakening. Using fresh capital obtained from purchasing former United States of America assets (including the old National Aeronautics and Space Administration, of all things) and securing new service contracts, Ares Industries planted their new corporate flag in Motown, making downtown Detroit its corporate HQ. At the time, Detroit was still reeling from the automotive industry decline of the late 1980s and was about two steps from becoming an urban wasteland.

As Ares Industries grew and became Ares Macrotechnology, Detroit kept pace. And as the years became decades, Ares bought up large swaths of real estate and began massive renovation and revitalization initiatives throughout the region, all with the blessing of the local and federal governments. The urban decay that once seemed like a cancer was being slowly rooted out by corporate chemotherapy, whether the city wanted it or not. By the mid-2070s, almost (key word there) all of Detroit had been completely transformed into what the Ares PR slags love to call a “prime example of corporate and civil cooperation.”

- > Or as the locals still like to say: “a bastion of corporate benevolence™.” *gagging noise*
- > Shockwave
- > The city looked pretty, but it wasn’t all cleaned up. A lot of the uglier elements simply went further out of sight and festered.
- > Electric Blue

Needless to say, this urban facelift had a profound impact on the local shadows. Desperate for his corporate HQ to be that shining beacon of corporate-ness to complement his “All-American” corp, new CEO Damien Knight (who ousted Aurelius back in ’33) let loose his pet security company Knight Errant on Detroit’s less-than-wholesome elements.

And I’m sure everyone reading this can guess how *that* turned out.

For years Ares and KE tried really, really hard with a lot of crackdowns, “example raids,” and anything that would grab positive headlines for them in the press. In the end, though, purging Detroit proved to be a fool’s errand. And despite the changes, most of those in Detroit still grew up with a varying combination of poverty, corruption, corporate intrusion, and people trying to tell us what’s best for us. Because of this, Detroit’s shadow-denzens tended to be a rather stubborn and somewhat defiant lot; a trend that continues today.

Ares realized they still needed the shadows to further their own agendas and have a convenient scapegoat or boogeyman they could point fingers at. Long story short, all Ares’ efforts really did was cause the shadows to become more adept at hiding our activities.

- ▶ Most Detroit runners also don't see shadowrunning as glamorous or trendy; it's a job, a means to an end. We prize our anonymity and work hard to keep it that way. If you're publicly known to be a runner, your rep in Detroit is likely already shot, and it's best to find another place to work.
- ▶ Gunnery Sarge

This did create a rather interesting dynamic within Detroit's shadows. Runners tended to (but didn't always) fall into two unofficial camps: those who were pro-Ares, and those who wanted to tell Ares where to shove it. There were those who straddled the fence, but that was difficult; eventually something happened that made you choose sides. And thus an odd sort of equilibrium was struck. The general consensus was that as long as business got done, everyone would walk away happy(ish).

- ▶ A lot of PR work was put into maintaining Ares' "All-American" branding, so one of the unwritten rules of the shadows is not to mess with this **too** much. If you did, you'd expect very nasty reprisals.
- ▶ Traveler Jones
- ▶ This also meant lot of transient runners would blow into town just to stir drek up and then breeze back out again, letting the locals deal with the fallout. We tend to not look kindly on those types when they come back.
- ▶ Shockwave
- ▶ It's also become a bit more complicated with the recent influx of new runners. By my reckoning, there are now almost as many out-of-towners as there are locals.
- ▶ Mr. Friday
- ▶ False flag jobs are a favorite for out-of-town runners and Johnsons. Sometimes they were meant to probe or screw with Ares, or to give KE an excuse for one of their crackdowns. It was also common for certain Johnsons to double-cross runners.
- ▶ Windy Storms

Runners knew that that if we didn't frag with Ares' beloved public image *too much*, we were mostly left alone. Clashes still happened when the shadows frequently came into the public view, especially after some drekheads made too much noise. Or someone in the corp wanted to raise their personal stock and used the shadows to make it happen. These situations inevitably arose but were dealt with.

In Detroit, you learned how to deal with it, find the balance that allowed you to operate without putting a bullseye on your back. If a runner didn't—our wouldn't—find and maintain that balance, they had very short careers. If Ares or KE didn't get you, the shadows here were quite adept at keeping our houses in order, if you get my meaning. This was how things rolled in Detroit. And it worked.

That was, until July 30, 2080, when all that changed, as a battle against one of the biggest insect spirit hives known to metahumanity began.

TURNING POINT: WAR IN THE STREETS

A good chunk of what I'm about to say has already been touched on, but I want to get my two 'yen in and present a POV from a runner born and raised on Detroit's streets.

For the first several weeks, the fighting in Motown was bloody and drawn-out because Ares stopped using the heavy artillery. This meant combat was up-close and personal with victory decided by who had fewer dead. But for every victory we earned, we lost one or two. Most days, best we could do was break even. We had to pick and choose our battles because we didn't have the manpower to spare; not that Ares was doing anything with their forces, even when they finally called in reinforcements.

And it wasn't just those fighting who were suffering.

I'll admit that I used to make fun of the wagslaves for being cogs in the corporate machine. But when things went sideways, more of them than I expected stepped up and did their part. Others found new and innovative ways to survive against the bugs and defended their own bits of turf with nothing more than innovation and guts.

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 002 'VERONICA GRIGGS'

A civil engineering student by night and soykaf barista by day, Veronica "Ronnie" Griggs doesn't look like a bug resistance leader. At 1.5 meters tall, Ronnie is a mousy looking waif of a human with old-style glasses because she is allergic to implants.

When the bug threat materialized, Ronnie was working at a Soybucks near Vendor's Row on 8-Mile and recognized that something was tunneling under her shop. She saved twenty people when the café's floor opened up. As the fighting continued, she and her group found an abandoned apartment building and took it over. Ever a tinkerer, Ronnie jury-rigged a seismometer to detect underground bug movement. Additionally, she had an inspired imagination when it came to jury-rigged defenses and traps.

Ronnie and her group, which grew to more than two hundred individuals, never had to abandon their apartment complex. Currently, she is still there offering shelter and aid to the displaced. A few gangs and criminal organizations have tried to get her to join or force her out. To date, all have failed.

- > The vast majority of Detroit's criminal organizations fell into this category, although they had more at their disposal than just "innovation and guts." Most of them stayed out of the main fighting but helped by keeping certain logistical pipelines open, organizing local neighborhood defenses, and providing intelligence on bug movements.
- > Mr. Friday

We helped civilians when we could, but Ravenheart kept us focused on bug elimination. Not everyone agreed with her, and the Irregulars had our fair share of malcontents and deserters. But we were still able to help a lot of people. We made friends, but also made enemies too. We just ... we couldn't save or help everyone, and when you see your loved one or best friend killed for no reason, you need something or someone to blame.

- > Sometimes, you have to make a call for the betterment of the mission or objective. Sometimes that call means that some have to be sacrificed now for victory later. It sucks, but it's the nature of warfare.
- > Colonel Cobra
- > I'm normally a long-range marksman, but I can handle an assault shotgun or SMG with the best of them when needed. I'm also damn skinny. So I often played tunnel rat whenever we found a new bug tunnel or nest. Last rat mission I went on, my partner, a Cajun dwarf named Chef, and I came across a nest of roaches in the middle of merging some new members, or whatever you call it. We ... we tried to get the still un-merged out and saved three—out of fifteen. I can still feel the slickness and smell bug guts on my skin. Chef also lost an arm. We were almost swarmed and ended up having to drop satchel charges down the tunnel. We vaporized a lot of bugs. But I still see the faces of those we couldn't save.
- > Bangswitch
- > Not to take away anything from anyone who was there, but I spent a lot of time watching from above, seeing a lot of similar scenes happen in real time, and not really being able to do a fragging thing about it. All I could do was keep the intel flowing. There's going to be a lot of drinking in my future to help me forget what I saw.
- > Orbital DK

About seven weeks in, things started to change. Even though I was technically the liaison between Ravenheart and the local shadows, I wasn't privy to every strategic decision, which was fine because I wanted to be out on the streets. And even though Ravenheart was driven to kill the bugs to the point of obsession, Ringmaster and Rifleman kept her grounded and on task.

After those seven weeks, two distinct things happened.

First, we went on the offensive. Up until then, we'd been reacting, chasing down bug leads and

then tried to kill them. Most of the time, we'd find nada and when we did it was a costly slugfest. But things got better and we got reliable intelligence on where exactly the bugs were; especially those fragging Alphas. And we made them pay. Oh, Ghost, did we make them pay, especially the bug shamans or maggot collaborators.

- > There's something that's been bothering me for a while now, but I wasn't sure how to approach it. So frag it, I'm just gonna come out and say it. I've been reviewing bits of battle footage and drone imagery. And I've seen teams that I'm 99.9 percent sure are Irregulars on patrol with or fighting alongside bug hybrids. To use mil-spec vernacular: Whiskey Tango Foxtrot?!
 - > Sam-R-Eye
 - > You sure they weren't like prisoners or something?
 - > Scattershot
 - > Prisoners don't take active roles in combat ops.
 - > Sam-R-Eye
 - > That's interesting. Any of the Irregulars here want to say something?
 - > Turbo Bunny
 - > Well?
 - > Turbo Bunny
 - > Because sometimes people won't let things go, I'll simply say that the good guys got one in the win column. This is one of those times we need to leave it at that.
 - > Rifleman
- Second was the increasing number of Ares troops that said to hell with their standing orders and worked with us rather than against us. Some outright defected and threw in fighting with us side by side, while others offered more covert support, such as leaked intelligence. From what I hear, most of that came about when General Ritter showed up at Platinum to meet with Ravenheart.
- > That personally cost Ritter. Even with Vogel taking over, Ritter was drummed out of the corporation and lost all of his benefits and pension.
 - > Mr. Bonds
 - > And I'd do it again, but this time sooner. Don't worry about me. I've dusted off some old contacts and found some new opportunities. See you around.
 - > Grey Ghost

Soon after that, Ravenheart put out a mandate for all Irregular and allied forces. Long story short, she decided those super-Alpha bugs needed to be dealt with. Over the next ten days, which unofficially became known as "Stomp Week" (hey, I

didn't come up with the name), we hunted those fraggers 24-7. Hunter Teams were organized and then given precise locations to Alpha lairs. After that, we didn't have to worry about any super-bugs—at least, not like before.

Of course, once the Alphas stopped being a threat, *that's* when Ares got off their collective hoops and did something. Unfortunately, the ACMF didn't learn a damn thing. Their actions kicked off the worst fighting up to that point, which ultimately culminated with the Battle at Ares Tower. And even though it was a victory, it was damn near Pyrrhic.

- ▶ I was there during Stomp Week and attached to a supplementary force working with one of the Sixty-First's Operational Detachments, OD: Blue to be exact. We were tasked with chasing down a particularly nasty and persistent pack of Alphas from just outside the Platinum Zone to the outskirts of Zone Three in Pontiac. Now, most of Blue's shooters had mil-spec armor with full face plates and the like, so no big deal there. But I do remember there being at least three individuals there who were definitely **not** mercs or even fighters. But they seemed to move oddly, and they were always with Blue's CO. And I'll be damned if they didn't seem to know right where the Alphas were; even prevented my group from being ambushed. Never got a good look at them because they kept their faces and the rest of their bodies covered. But frag me if we didn't rack up the kill count! And for only six casualties on our side.
- ▶ Brutus Ex-Mechnia

WHEN THE FIGHTING STOPPED

After the victory at Ares Tower and end of Operation: Latvian Gambit, it's easy to think that was the end of the story in Motor City. Not even close. Even now, we're still picking up the pieces and learning about new things that went down, what people went through during the Battle of Detroit as new data keeps coming in. And chances are there're things that we'll never know or learn about.

Putting aside the drek that went down in the rest of the UCAS and the blackouts, Motor City faced its own set of problems once the Battle of Detroit was over. These problems ended up being the catalyst for the change from Detroit to Motor City, so they're worth reviewing here.

STANDOFF AT ARES TOWER

The Battle at Ares Tower didn't end quite as smoothly as Deadline reported. After ... whatever went off in the sky, a lot of us were knocked on our collective hoops. And as both sides started to get their bearings back and standing, frigging Gen-

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 003 'LLOYD RITTER'

A former ACMF general, Ritter has had an illustrious twenty-year-plus career. Starting as an intelligence officer, Ritter first gained notoriety while on an undercover assignment in the shadowrunning community under the street name of Grey Ghost. After spending several years in the shadows, Ritter took a commission as an ACMF line officer, in charge of his own company and later battalion.

But the highlight of Ritter's career was when he took down the infamous General Saito in the 2060s. After that campaign, Ritter was assigned to ACMF HQ Planning and Operations division. Rumors indicate he was the primary architect of Latvian Gambit and was supposed to be the operation's CO. But something changed to both the plan and his position. When Latvian Gambit kicked off, Ritter had been relegated to the XO under General Danforth.

It's an open secret that Ritter was extremely critical of Danforth and the overall operation. Several times he clashed with Danforth over tactics and vague strategic goals. Eventually this all came to a head when Ritter personally relieved Danforth of command during the fighting at Ares Tower. While this action saved many lives, Ritter was forced to resign his commission.

Recently, Ritter has been seen in the shadows using his old street name, Grey Ghost. What Ritter has planned is unknown, although rumors suggest he's either working to create his own shadowrunner team or become a local fixer.

eral Danforth ordered his people to start shooting Irregulars, many of whom were still recovering from whatever hit us. I was one of those who got my bell rung, but I distinctly remember an Ares panzer pointing a rather large gun at my vehicle. Next thing I knew, those Irregulars who were on their feet were also pointing weapons at ACMF troops. But it wasn't until one of Ares' mercenary reinforcement units, the 77th Independent Rangers, turned *their* weapons on the ACMF that Danforth finally blinked, which ultimately saved everyone from a bloodbath for two reasons.

- ▶ While I'm glad things ultimately worked out, a small part of me still would have loved to have seen MET2000's panzers rip Ares a new one. Which, given the hardware they're currently fielding, I think they could have done easily. I may see about signing up for a tour or two.
- ▶ Brutus Ex-Mechnia
- ▶ And it looks like things worked out for Picador after all.
- ▶ Netcat
- ▶ Ghost, I can hear the smugness. But I'll bet there'll be hell to pay with the IMA. I'm sure there's some rule against pointing guns at your employers or disobeying orders.
- ▶ Clockwork

- > Not when said orders are unlawful **and** your employer violates contract terms by purposely ordering an attack on groups or individuals who are not posing an immediate/imminent threat, are not engaging in direct action/combat, or have effectively stood down from combat operations. At that point, our contract with Ares was immediately rendered null and void. And as a unit in good IMA standing, it was our legal duty to do all we could to prevent any “war crimes.”
- > Picador
- > You were waiting for just the right moment, weren't you?
- > Clockwork
- > I have **no idea** what you're talking about.
- > Picador

One, it allowed Arthur Vogel an opportunity to issue the stand-down order to all ACMF forces *before* the shooting started (again). But this still understandably caused a lot of initial confusion, complicated by the fact that we were all still pointing really big guns at each other and no one was sure if the order was legit or some kind of ploy. Because up until that order was issued, everyone thought that Vogel was still dead and that Damien Knight was still in charge. But his authentication codes were verified despite Danforth attempting to ignore the order. Thankfully, his officers, led by General Ritter, had enough of his drek and stood down. Last thing I saw of the man, Danforth was being drug into Ares Tower. No one has seen him since.

And two, it allowed us to focus on the new wave of bugs now coming our way. From there, we did what we should have been doing all along: worked together to geek bugs. And over the next few hours, that is exactly what we did with brutal efficiency, both in the vicinity of Ares Tower and later across the city. We didn't quite get all of the fraggers, but we got enough to declare victory and end the fighting.

After an insane three-day victory party, we got down to the business of picking up the pieces and taking stock of our situation. And that's when we found out how much our victory cost us.

- > Damn, I was out a lot longer than I thought. Missed a lot, too—should have caught that.
- > Deadline
- > Not your fault love, we all have our oops moments. But you more than made up for it at the party. *wink*
- > The Great and Powerful Ozzie
- > Wait, no data, no follow-up to whatever happened just before the end of the battle? What the frag? By all accounts a massive, magical event on par with Ghostwalker returning or Watergate occurs, and it's just glossed over like it was no big deal? Not

even a few words on what exactly happened or why? What kind of cover-up bulldrek is this?!?

- > Ecotope

MOTOR CITY TALES

POSTED BY: VALKRYE

Stitches was the ugliest fragger I ever saw. A bulky ork, he looked like somebody had peeled the skin off his bald head and sewed it back wrong. He admitted that replacing his face wasn't his best work. The explosion still had him rattled. I don't care what he looked like. He patched me up good after that wasp stabbed me.

Turns out, Stitches was an Army Captain on leave. He'd seen a lot of combat, and a lot of blood. A far cry from his West Point and University of Michigan days. It cost me two weeks of my life to heal. When Stitches wasn't stitching, he was kicking ass.

While I was recovering, a fight broke out in the clinic. A dwarf, a human, and an elf were trying to steal medical supplies. The elf pointed a gun at Stitches, who looked less than impressed. All them years in combat, I guess.

“The food and drugs,” the elf said.

Stitches merely shook his head and said, “Look, I can fix you guys right up. But you're not taking supplies from my patients.”

The trio looked all jacked up on cram. The elf telegraphed his move. Before he could shoot, Stitches skewered the guy with his spur. The gun clattered to the floor, and the fight went out of them. Took Stitches a few hours to patch him up.

I owe that man my life. He told me I owed him twenty thousand nuyen. Who said you can't put a price on life? I paid. I figured it was an investment

FALLEN KNIGHT(S)

When Arthur Vogel gave the stand-down order at Ares Tower, yeah, it was a shock. And to be honest, I think one of the reasons we all stood there looking down each other's gun barrels for as long as we did had frag-all to do with the tactical situation. We all wanted to know if it was true, and we also wanted to hear where Knight was. But as I said before, we all banded together and killed every bug within eye-sight and earshot. And just like that, the battle was over. There were still skirmishes both within the city and, from what I heard, without. Guess some of the buggy fraggers and their shamans made a break for it, only be hunted down several weeks later.

- > There are still multiple new open bounties for any bug spirits and/or shamans that may have made it out of Detroit once the fighting was over. Each offering a cool two million nuyen on any at-large insect shaman, plus the possibility for bonuses for bug spirits eliminated. And not being the Draco Foundation, most of these Johnsons aren't making collection a hassle.
- > Balladeer

- > One question I have is, what is happening around the world with regard to bug hives? I realize that HV-927 must have been a massive one. But there's no way this represents the end of the insect threat.
- > Redd Flagg
- > Two trains of thought. Ares' precursor to Latvian Gambit, Operation: Bottleneck, may have completely accomplished its objective and funneled all or the majority of bugs to Detroit for destruction (unlikely, I know, but stranger things have happened). Second, I'd bet that the bugs are going to lie low for quite a while. I can't put my foot on it, but I've been tracking a great number of these strays, and the fraggers are getting a lot smarter, adapting in ways we've never seen before. Still, your mileage and/or situation may vary on that. But various sources have told me that bug activity, even at known hot-spots around the world, has damn near evaporated. Permanent or not, who knows?
- > Moreau

So while we were busy cleaning up or partying until we got stupid (or both, but not in that order), elements of the UCAS military and various alphabet agencies *finally* decided to make an appearance in Motor City, which was extremely anticlimactic. The shadows pretty much melted back into the darker places and stayed there. Not out of any kind of fear—we were just too damn tired and exhausted for any more fraggery at that point. And to their credit, our UCAS “rescuers” didn’t act like idiots, so we had no reason to start anything. That, and they came with a drek-ton of needed supplies and helped maintain order.

- > UCAS must have really been desperate to send in the Navy, of all things. I'm sure they're good at their job, but sending sailors to an urban warzone?
- > Cool Hand Duke
- > Need to brush up on your military history, Duke. Seabee construction units are trained to build drek while literally getting shot at giving as good as they get. They're also some of the most stubborn frags out there. But what's interesting is that the 'bees sent in were scheduled for de-mobilization in less than a year. Guess they got a new lease on life.
- > Kane
- > Funny thing, too, was that Knight Errant also started doing regular patrols again like nothing happened, like it was just another fragging day. A lot of people around here will remember that.
- > Shockwave

And no sooner was limited Matrix access then restored that Vogel dropped those bombshells.

We knew Knight's death was doing to be major news, that there were going to be repercussions not just for Detroit but Ares as well, and maybe the

whole world. As much as we hate that man, we knew his passing was going to leave massive power vacuum. Don't even get me started on how fast the betting pools started up on how long Vogel was going to remain CEO, or who may replace him. There was even a frag-ton of speculation on how Knight died, as Vogel was less than forthright with those particular details. Not even a “died in the line of duty, defending against” or “blown to bits” kind of thing. Hell, we knew that anything Vogel or the Ares PR was going to put out was likely to be some kind of bulldrek to cover their backsides over what happened. But we wanted *something*.

- > We at least earned some kind of entertainment.
- > Shockwave
- > Despite repeated requests at clarification, Vogel and Ares PR reps still refuse to share any details regarding the circumstances of Knight's death, even any autopsy reports. Best we got are some images of a badly damaged corpse and assurances that all proper identification procedures have been maintained, thus confirming Knight's demise. Take that for what you will.
- > Sunshine
- > A memorial service was tentatively planned for October 20 to happen simultaneously in Detroit and Atlanta, but those plans have since been put on indefinite hold.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > All those combatants, and no one else saw what happened to Knight? Can no one else smell the cover up here?
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > Fog of war, son. Lots of stuff never gets seen when the fighting is all around.
- > Scattershot
- > Whatever.
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > Either way, that kind of drek happens all the time. And don't think you're always going to get all of the facts. It just doesn't happen. It's also part of the biz, so get used to it. But if you've got something to share with data to back it up, do it or shut up. I'm going to pre-empt any flame wars right now by saying that if you have only speculation, take it private or elsewhere; we're tired of cleaning up that kind of trash.
- > Glitch

So yeah, just like the rest of the world, all we know (or are at least presuming) is that Knight is dead, and good riddance! I personally hope he's roasting on some demon's pike in an underworld BBQ right now. But still, the usual rumors and stories are already flying fast about Knight, and why he did all this. Some have him as acting as some kind of noble sacrifice, others have him being out-

ed as some kind of super-mega-bug who was looking to invade the bug realm to take over.

But I've already given this topic more than it deserved. Feel free to talk amongst yourselves on that.

MOTOR CITY TALES

POSTED BY: D.D HAZARD

When the bugs took over Detroit, what a rush. I mean, think about it. A total loss of command and control. Johnny law in shambles. I could run around and do what I wanted, when I wanted.

My first order of business was to gather cash from my stash. Nothing better than a backpack full of credsticks. Then it was time to gather my chummers. This was going to be the best venture of all. As I waited on my chummers, I hid sneaky good and scoped the action. Fucking brilliant. Two termite spirits and five metahumans. I calculated the odds in my head and bet on the spirits. I giggled in delight as I won the bet with myself, and the metahumans were torn to shreds. Remember, the house always wins. I'm the house. I planned on making a fortune on this "tragedy."

Several hours later, me and five others were observing the melee from a warehouse roof. We had several bets going. First metahuman fatality. Who was wiped out first, the cops or the rabble. My money was on the cops. Which side would win. I had all the odds calculated.

As I quietly cheered on the bugs, a whirring noise caught my attention. A giant wasp was descending on us. I watched with extreme trepidation. I had a lot of money riding on who died first. Yes! I cheered. The wasp stabbed Tolson and dragged him into the air. I watched with glee as he wiggled and went still. I won that bet.

I won a lot of bets. Now I'm continuing my sport book as the city returns to normal. But oh, those were the days.

ARES TO DETROIT: LATER, SUCKERS!

Then we got the second part of Vogel's little announcement, that Ares was moving south.

I want to say I was surprised, I want to say I was shocked. I want to say I was furious beyond belief when I heard the news. But I wasn't. I'm still not. To be honest, I was and still am numb. This isn't the first time a corporation has heavily invested in this area only to later bail on it. And personally speaking, if I haven't made this sentiment completely clear already: good riddance. I also think the writing was on the wall way before this, and that Knight had always planned on ditching us after his fragged-up plan was over. Don't ask me for any paydata on that last one, that's just my gut talking.

The only question we have here is how much more damage this move is going to cost Motor City before it's all said and done.

YOUR SERVICES ARE NO LONGER REQUIRED

After Vogel's announcement, Ares' PR puked no time announcing a "transitory outline" of what they hoped would be a "smooth transition in the wake of such tragedy." This outline lays out a plan for Ares to be completely removed from Detroit within a standard year, even though it took all but ten days for Ares Tower to be vacated and sealed off. Already Knight Errant has started to shift their focus from maintaining law and order to protecting the precious stuff of their corporate masters as it's transported to their new CAS home. Too bad they place the value of items and goods over their own people.

What the PR people didn't bother to mention in that little outline of theirs was that Ares wasn't taking it all with them. Approximately ten thousand Ares corporate employees in Detroit, mostly blue collar and low-priority jobs, were also quietly terminated from their positions less than forty-eight hours after Vogel made his announcement. Yeah, that's right. Having already been fragged once by their corp when the fighting started, these people got it a second time when they lost their only means of survival. No explanation, not even so much as a severance package. Those who still had a home suddenly didn't. All most of them had left were the few meager things they could scrounge. And if they were lucky, some of them were able to pull some petty cash from now-canceled accounts. Reaction to these displaced corporate employees in the streets has been mixed. Some locals see them as yet another victim of corporate malevolence, others treat them as scapegoats for their own current misery. And on the flip side, there are displaced people who blame the "criminal element" for their current predicament; a sentiment not helped by the current wave of propaganda.

How you treat them is up to you. But I will say this: All of them are desperate. And in this city, desperation is a dangerous thing.

- ▶ Many of the Ares displaced already lost most of their lives in some way when the fighting started. Many thought that once the fighting was over, they'd be welcomed back and could start over. Instead, these displaced almost overwhelmed what little aid the UCAS was able to send. It's also funny how suddenly, in a city so controlled by Ares for so long, that UCAS patriotism became trendy again.
- ▶ Traveler Jones

So as Ares took the first steps of their great southern migration, things looked like they were about to calm down. Yeah, the new normal looked like it was going to suck hardcore, but at least it was something that could be handled. Relief efforts by the UCAS government were minimal, but



at least it was something, and the slow process of rebuilding could begin.

- > At this point, there was also the emergence of new shadow markets in Motor City/Detroit. Foodstuffs and medical supplies were big-ticket black-market items. But of all things, building materials and the ability (and guts) to transport them into Detroit became one of the hottest yen-making endeavors in the region. Even with an average three hundred percent markup, people were willing to pay out the nose in order to fix up homes, businesses, or whatever.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > And of course, this meant an uptick for those willing to go outside the normal channels to obtain said materials. Never thought I'd be hauling and defending pallets of plasti-wood, but cred is cred!
- > Kane

And as we were taking the first steps toward rebuilding, the mudslinging between DeeCee and Ares was in full force (my favorite was the “let Ares deal with it” quote) as each side tried to blame the other for what had happened in Detroit while also trying to blame “terrorist forces” for causing the mess. I’m still not sure how that works, but then, I’m not a politician. It would have been great comedy had it not been so tragically predictable. Dee-

Cee and Ares seemed to spend more time trying to assign blame than fixing the damage or uncovering the truth. Of course, the prevailing logic was that whoever was at fault was responsible for fixing it, and no one wanted to be stuck with that bill; especially since Ares was apparently trying to do their own version of dine and dash. And partisan politics reared its ugly head while the UCAS relief forces did the best they could with what little they were given to work with.

But despite all of that, when the UCAS threw their temper tantrum and backed out of the business accords, most folks here cheered, thinking it was some sort of victory against Ares and corps in general. The rest of us knew better and braced for impact. We were determined to not be blindsided by whatever was coming down the pike. At first, we thought there was going to be renewed fighting between the ACMF and UCAS military over some kind of manufactured reason or vague legal point. Oh, how wrong we were.

- > What about the Irregulars? Were they still around, or did they take off after the fighting?
- > X-Prime
- > By this point, most of the Irregular units, command staff, and independents who had been fighting the longest, such as the

Sixty-First, de-mobilized and headed back to their respective HQs or places of origin to tend to wounded and re-equip. The Seventy-Seventh, now free from their contract with Ares, and MET2000 stayed on-station. Officially, they had been since contracted as security forces for the Platinum Zone. Unofficially, there are rumors that the merc and UCAS commanders formed a sort of gentleman's agreement not to get in each other's way and maybe, just **maybe**, provide mutual aid if needed.

- > Colonel Cobra
- > How neighborly.
- > Clockwork
- > Two of the biggest merc units in the world pulling garrison duty for a strip club? I love it!
- > Kane
- > Not that we needed it, but more the merrier. *wink*
- > Windy Storms
- > Unfortunately, the reprieve was way too short for some of us.
- > Rifleman
- > I'm still wondering how a mere strip club could afford such services.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > That's classified, mate. Cheers!
- > The Great and Powerful Ozzie

Then the blackouts started.

When Philly went dark on October 30, everyone here wasn't quite sure what to make of it. Rumors and speculation flew fast and furious. And while there was some initial panic, we held it together having not quite let ourselves get out of crisis mode. If anything, we were waiting for the next thing to happen. So when the next few cities went dark in short order, with martial law soon following, most of us simply said to ourselves "here we go again."

And while most in the UCAS remember that date, and understandably so, here in Motor City we remember November 6 as the start of events that solidified our current attitude and re-forged Detroit into Motor City.

FIFTY-ONE DAYS OF CHAOS

When the blackouts started across the UCAS and the government went into full panic mode, it didn't take long for DeeCee to pull the UCAS relief troops out and send them scrambling to more "important" areas. At the same time, Knight Errant pretty much abandoned any and all pretense at providing any kind of law and order, instead focusing on protect-

ing their corporate assets. Add in the fact that there was no longer any imminent bug threat, and this was the final spark that set off the powder keg in the Detroit Sprawl. Too many people still freaked out after months of fighting, only to be abandoned yet again. All that fear, anger, frustration, and rage had to eventually manifest somehow. Frankly, I'm surprised it didn't happen sooner.

POWER VACUUM

After the Battle of Detroit, most of the locals had already stopped recognizing Knight Errant or Ares as any kind of authority in the Detroit sprawl. So when they turned their backs on us, we expected it. But when the UCAS relief force, which represented that thin yet tangible thread of stability and hope, suddenly pulled up shop and left ... that, was truly the last straw. At that point there *was* no government, no one with the authority to do anything, to take care of the people who desperately needed it. We were literally on our own with nothing to hold us in check. And to make matters worse, there were a lot of weapons, both regular and improvised, that was left over from fighting the bugs.

And as we've seen time and time again throughout history, nature abhors a vacuum.

DAYS OF GREAT MALICE

It started slowly, with a few groups and neighborhoods banding together for mutual aid and protection, unsure of what was about to happen. Then people took stock of what they had versus what they were going to need, and panic set in when they didn't have enough. Quickly, the charismatic and the opportunistic alike stepped up, offering the usual promises of safety and security to the scared masses in order to gain power. Fear and desperation were quickly channeled into action, as various groups and organizations began squaring off against each other as skirmishes and raids began popping up across the sprawl.

But once the violence started, there was little anyone could do to stop it. It wasn't as if a valve had been thrown open—it was more like the valve had been blown completely off. Without warning or any apparent rhyme or reason, raiding parties and newly formed gangs would head out to loot and pillage whatever they could find. Almost daily, new gangs or organizations formed and headed out to stake their claim or turf within the sprawl, only to clash with similar groups; often both sides simply killed each other in bloody battles, only for the whole damn process to recycle the next day.

Any sense of solidarity earned through the shared experience of fighting the bugs had apparently evaporated and had been replaced by raw fear and frustration. And I wish I could give a clear

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 004 'DETROIT DEFENSE COALITION'

One of the largest civic groups to emerge from the 51 Days of Chaos, the Detroit Defense Coalition (or simply DDC) is more of a modern militia than anything else. With a mandate of “protecting Detroit from all threats,” the DDC started out as a loose coalition of middle- to upper-class individuals from Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and various Detroit suburbs. Originally formed to push back against the insect threat, DDC leader “Grand General” Oscar Monroe (a former Ares Arms middle manager known for his strict managerial style and rigid adherence to discipline) decided to expand on the original mandate/mission. Monroe and the DDC now see it as their personal mission—or even calling—to protect Detroit against all threats, even if that protection is a bit heavy handed.

The DDC currently boasts between five and eight thousand members, each of them proficient with firearms, hand-to-hand fighting, and basic combat tactics. While most of their weapons and gear may be bordering on vintage and/or military surplus, the DDC is extremely well-organized and disciplined. When not fortifying their main bases at Ann Arbor and Dearborn (called Fort Freedom and Fort Liberty, respectively), the DDC likes to send out patrols throughout the Detroit Sprawl. These patrols often mix it up with gangs or anyone they perceive as a threat (which is a very broad definition) or engage in recruitment drives.

Despite rumors that the DDC is nothing more than a Humanis or other policlub front, Monroe is quick to point out the diversity in his ranks saying “I don’t care who you are or where you come from. All I ask from anyone is the will to fight and follow orders”

outline of events, of what happened and why. But I’m afraid all I can give here are the broad strokes, because there was so much going on, so much chaos and confusion. Even trying to remember it all, the memories seem to blur together.

But the feelings—it’s like I remember those as clear as day.

- › Interesting. I remember a lot of similar reports and witness accounts during the Az-Am War. A pair of free spirits—Maelstorm and Oblivion, I believe—caused a lot of havoc by mass manipulation of metahumanity’s more aggressive impulses, especially during the last few weeks of the war.
- › Elijah
- › It fits the pattern, sure, but I’ve been running the magical side of Motown’s shadows for years, and nothing like this has come up before. But then, who knows what was buried and then let loose during all the fighting?
- › The Great and Powerful Ozzie
- › One of the most fragged-up things I saw during this time was a bunch of former Ares wageslaves forming a street gang. They

called themselves “The Defiant Forgotten” and tried to assault a fortified neighborhood on the outskirts of downtown south of The Scar. They were armed with mostly makeshift weapons, sticks with spikes or knives glued on, and maybe a few firearms if they were lucky. They were warned that they would be fired on if they advanced. Those bastards just kept coming; it was like some kind of bad war sim. And call me crazy, they didn’t even try to evade the incoming fire. I wonder if they did this knowing they were going to die. I mean, what else did they have left?

- › Bangswitch
- › What’s really scary are some of the gangs that formed during the 51 Days and **survived**. The 696 Slayers go-gang, for example, may have started out with old GMC junk heaps, but they learned the game really fast. Stay out of their way, chummers.
- › Gunnery Sarge

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 005 '696 SLAYERS'

One of the multitude of gangs that formed during the 51 Days of Chaos, the 696 Slayers quickly rose to prominence among Motor City’s gangs for their sheer brutality and insanity.

Led by a male human known only as Road Rage, the Slayers style themselves after old post-apocalyptic 2D movies. They wear customized, makeshift armor that completely obscures their features and has proven to be surprisingly sturdy and resilient. In combat, the Slayers employ a variety of weapons such as regular firearms and occasionally improvised explosives. But they seem to derive the most pleasure from using exotic or improvised weaponry, especially the kind mounted to their vehicles such as spikes, blades, net launchers, and flamethrowers.

No one is completely certain where the Slayers came from or how they obtained the numerous modified GMC vehicles at their disposal. But during the first week of the 51 Days, they made their presence known as they tore up along I-696, killing anyone unlucky enough to be in their path in horribly gruesome ways. It’s not uncommon for Slayer vehicles to be adorned with the remains of their victims as literal kill markers.

To date, the motivations of the Slayers are unknown. They have not affiliated with any of the local syndicates or families, nor have they tried to stake any turf claims other than I-696.

And in the background were the opportunists. Those who made the deals, including the alliances with these new factions, tried to set themselves up as some kind of new power player within the sprawl. Sometimes they supplied the weapons or the combat drugs. Sometimes they used their new allies as nothing more than pawns to eliminate their rivals through a proxy war. One day, you may

have thought you had a staunch ally, only to find a knife sticking out of your back the next.

The shadows weren't spared, either. If anything else, the situation heightened whatever an individual runner was predisposed to do. Those who reveled in chaos and destruction took advantage of the target-rich environment; a few of them became pseudo-warlords and gang leaders. Those who saw opportunity exploited it to the max, especially those who could get things into the city, or get people out. Most of the veterans from the Battle of Detroit simply left, more than willing to wash their hands of everything Detroit-related at this point.

- > Okay, question. So the Sixty-First headed home, but didn't the Seventy-Seventh and MET2000 stick around? Why weren't they out there kicking hoop and taking names?
- > Treadle
- > Because legality can be a double-edged sword. While both units were technically under contract to provide security for the Platinum Zone, they didn't have a contract, or a reason, to conduct operations anywhere else. Doing so would have been an IMA violation that could have potentially gotten both units blacklisted. Additionally, Colonel Schmidt and I agreed to send our heaviest vehicles and armor to Tactical Concepts in northern Ohio because we had no place to adequately service and secure them.
- > Picador
- > Oops. *chuckles*
- > Clockwork
- > And during all of this, Ares did what any corp would do: They protected their own asses—er, assets. I've even seen footage from Detroit of KE and other Ares security and military forces literally looking the other way as these new gangs and whatnot gunned or ran down innocent people just looking for something to eat. Sickening.
- > Old Crow

As the fighting continued unabated, eventually the weaker groups fell—or at least knew when to quit—and were replaced by the stronger ones. Which often simply meant they were better equipped, or had some serious outside backing. Days passed and pseudo-fiefdoms began to form. Although there is (of course) no direct evidence, it became a bit of an open secret that the local Mafia and other criminal organizations saw the chaos as a means to re-solidify or gain a foothold in whatever bloodied city emerged at the end of it all.

- > As always, you make things sound more melodramatic than they were, Johnny. Yes, certain agreements and deals were made, but we did not encourage any of our new associates and allies to engage in any kind of wholesale slaughter—quite the opposite,

in fact. We did everything in our power to temper any such activities and act as a mediator.

- > Mr. Friday
- > Oh yeah? Like the deal you made with the now defunct Motown Monsters, who ran guns for your family and liked to test the merch on innocents? I enjoyed putting them down.
- > Shockwave
- > Not every deal goes the way you expect. You of all people should know that.
- > Mr. Friday
- > Hey, don't let these jokers and Johnny fool you too much. Yeah, a lot of bad drek went down during those days, but there was a lot of light too! A lot of good people banded together and fought back, defending their homes and neighborhoods just like they did with the bugs. Or there was that group, the ones sporting the black stars on their clothes and gear (and one guy had a wicked tat!), that arrived in town and really started to kick some hoop! And as an added bonus, they brought a whole lot of supplies and stuff that people needed **and gave it away for free!** I say we need more of these kinds of people here!
- > Electric Blue
- > We do what we can. And yes, Black Star now has a vested interest in Motor City. Expect to see more of us very soon.
- > Old Crow
- > Lovely.
- > Mr. Friday

THE END OF CHAOS

And just as it began, the chaos eventually came to an end. On December 27, 2080, the city became completely quiet for the first time in fifty-one days. No gunfire, no explosion, no raids, no gang or militia activity of any kind. It was a belated holiday present, but one we all appreciated. But this time, there was no climactic battle, no end game that stopped it all. And this time there was no massive celebration, just the quiet realization of a tired and beleaguered city that the fighting had finally stopped—hopefully for good.

We got our wish, at least for a week. A few firefights and dust-ups came, and thankfully went, quickly; nothing on the scale of the Days of Chaos. It was almost comforting, even familiar in a way. It was as if a new norm and business-as-usual had finally settled down.

- > Not sure how this plays into this, but I have sources that say Kendra de Santos, voice of the great dragon Arleesh, and a dark-skinned dwarf that matches the description of "Ringmaster" were seen meeting with various individuals throughout the Detroit sprawl in the days leading up to the cease-fire

- throughout Motor City. Even better, de Santos and Ringmaster were being escorted by members of the Sixty-First Indy Rangers.
- > Sunshine
 - > A bit out of left field, but not totally unsurprising. Arleesh has a history of butting her feathered snoot in situations like this.
 - > Frosty
 - > Lines up with what I heard. Rumor on the street was, Ms. Santos basically told everyone she met with to “knock it off or you fry.” That carries a lot of weight when it’s coming from the voice of a great dragon.
 - > Bangswitch

Eventually, in early 2081, the UCAS sent some National Guard troops back into Motor City along with a small army of UCAS Marshals armed with a new mandate and mission to bring some kind of law and order back into the Detroit sprawl. New Matrix grids were established, reusing the old names and built on the old Ares’ ones. By March, power had been restored to those parts of the sprawl still without. Funny thing, a lot of people I talked to from outside of Motor City simply thought we were one of the cities that were blacked out. *shrugs* Like the UCAS relief force before them, we pretty much left the Feds and Guardsmen alone, for the most part. Yeah, they made a few token raids and crackdowns to show they were serious and not going anywhere (according to the press releases), but they never pushed things *too* far. Someone finally realized that fragging with us at this point would be a very bad idea, bordering on suicidal. But, with the arrival of the Feds, it was at least a sign that things were finally returning to some kind of normal.

Many of us used that time to take stock of what had happened and where we would go from there. There was going to be a new normal, a new way of operating. I think it was during this time that the idea that Detroit was finally dead and gone took hold within the populace. We saw what we were and maybe had a glimpse of what we could be, of the unique opportunities that lay before us.

That’s when Motor City was truly reborn. We’re not just another city. We have quite possibly become the world’s first *shadow city*. But enough about history, let’s talk current biz.

WELCOME TO MOTOR CITY!

- > To paraphrase an old saying, “Detroit is dead, long live Motor City!” After the fighting of the Battle of Detroit and the 51 Days of Chaos, the Motor City finally started to take shape and forge her new identity. But while we’ve determined who we want to be, we’re still working on how to get there. And at the risk

of sounding like some stupid travel advert, if you take away nothing else from this part of the file, take this: Motor City is wide open for opportunities at almost every level, in almost every way imaginable. And if that sounds a bit like an old-fashioned boom-town from the Wild West, you have no idea how close that comparison is.

- > Johnny Redline

A CITY REBORN

For decades, Detroit was pretty much owned lock, stock, and barrel by Ares, with only a token UCAS government presence kept around for mostly administrative purposes. And because of that nice arrangement, the city itself and Ares were inseparable in the public’s perception. For most, the two were virtually one and the same. Then, of course, the unpleasantness happened to both Detroit *and* the UCAS. And because Detroit was so closely associated with Ares, certain members of the UCAS government were more than happy to let it burn, if only out of spite.

But with so many other, more important cities (read: not former corporate enclaves) falling victim to the mysterious blackouts, the UCAS was eventually forced to let this somewhat bastard child back into the family fold full-time because of certain terms contained within the United Nations aid agreement. And that meant supporting it, even if said support is token at best.

For better or worse, when Ares officially pulled out of Detroit and began its exodus to Atlanta, ownership of all former real-estate holdings in Motor City pretty much reverted back to the UCAS. Not sure how that works, but I’m no lawyer; and I’ll bet it was part of some kind of appeasement. While that sounds great on e-paper, the fact is that DeeCee now has yet *another* city to rebuild, which is pretty expensive. And with the UN watching over the UCAS as part of the assistance and aid deal, the Federal Government is obligated to eventually rebuild Motor City along with the rest of the blacked-out cities. Key word there though is *eventually*. It’s safe to say that Detroit is dead last on that to-do list.

But you know what, that’s okay.

Since DeeCee is pretty much an absentee parent who wants as little to do with Motor City as possible, that affords this city certain freedoms to pretty much do whatever the frag we want, short of starting up another shooting war. Which, to be completely honest, is absolutely wonderful for biz.

EVERYTHING DESTROYED IS NEW(ISH) AGAIN

Comparatively speaking, Motor City got off relatively light in terms of infrastructure damage compared to cities like Chicago or Boston for ex-

ample. Even during the worst of the bug battles or days of chaos, most of the city still had power, likely because Ares still needed it for their own ends.

And other than the Scar, our buildings stayed up. Many were shot to drek, but holes in walls are easier to repair than replacing entire structures. Even now, small independent construction companies have started to make their presence known in Motor City, taking on small to medium projects, literally repairing homes and neighborhoods one house or block at a time. It's going to take a while, but Motor City is already laying the foundations for our recovery.

- > What continues to puzzle me is where all the funding for these companies and reconstruction projects is coming from. The UCAS is all but ignoring Detroit/Motor City, choosing to focus on cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Toronto. And none of the major corps are even so much as trying to bid for these jobs.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > I didn't even think there **were** any small construction companies still around.
- > Stone
- > Yeah ... Anyway, the answer to that is both simple yet complicated. But you are correct, there is minimal federal and next to no corporate influence here. We here in Motor City have found ways to take care of business ourselves.
- > Mr. Friday
- > Yeah, but how long will **that** last?
- > Bull
- > For as long as we can make it last.
- > Shockwave

GETTING AROUND TOWN: REDUX

All of the major highways are still intact and now play a prominent role in day-to-day life as the main travel arteries. As such, they are vigorously patrolled and protected by both the feds and locals alike. City and side streets are still mostly functional, but when the bugs started tunneling, many of them were compromised to varying degrees. Keep that in mind when you're traveling, because sinkholes can be a major hazard. One thing of note, however, is that there is currently no functioning GridGuide. So either know how to drive your vehicle or upgrade your autonav systems.

There's also been a noticeable uptick in water traffic on the lake and rivers, which has become a boon for more smuggling-inclined individuals. Additionally, floating structures such as docks and houses have become more common, with several anchoring along the Detroit River and into Lake Erie; several small floating neighborhoods have also formed along Motor City's waterways.

Air travel is still open, although currently

MOTOR CITY TALES

POSTED BY: GUINAN

"Hello, suckers!" Some famous chummer said there was one born every minute. Smart chummer. My job is to make sure that's true. Some people think smuggling is about being subtle. I'm anything but. From my neon clothes to my ink and piercings, I scream for attention. And that's perfect. It takes the attention from what I'm really doing. Getting my goods from point A to point B undetected.

During the bug invasion, this became even trickier. The bugs had some advantages. They were everywhere and unpredictable. They also had good senses. The worst part is that you couldn't bribe them or talk your way around them.

The logistics of this were brutal, and I had to be willing to accept high losses. We used people who felt dying was worth the risk. We smuggled food and medical supplies. A teddy bear of a street doc named Stitches funded a lot of it.

My people broke down into groups of five. Small drones deployed to track the bugs. I made immediate course correction to steer my people out of danger.

We did our best to keep the city in one piece. We muled a steady stream of food and medical supplies. The cost was steep. One in four of my teams died trying.

I used to believe that the world was full of suckers. Now I'm not so sure. Who gives their life for people they don't know?

Windsor International is the only airport currently taking any regular air traffic—not that they're all that busy these days. We're not exactly a major tourist attraction at the moment. Detroit Metro is still in use, but not in any official capacity. As far as the FAA is concerned, DM has been stricken from the official list of airports. But all that means is that you need to get permission from the current occupants/owners (a.k.a. the Garage) to use their facilities.

- > If you have the right connections, that permission is relatively easy to get. The Garage are a chill bunch and more than willing to let anyone use their free spaces. You can either pay in the normal fashion, or you can trade. Bonus points if you've got something SOTA or unusual to bargain with; the Garage especially loves anything to do with renegade tech.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Renegade tech? You have my attention.
- > dev/grrl/
- > More on that later, look ahead if you like. But it **is** pretty wiz.
- > Johnny Redline

PUBLIC WORKS AND SERVICES

Now that Detroit is technically once again a full-fledged UCAS city, it needs things like power, water, and all those services to keep from (again) becoming a cesspool. About the same time that the

U.N started bringing the blacked-out cities back, the new local government did a complete public works overhaul that basically ditched all the previous service providers save for DocWagon, who for reasons of their own decided to stay (although rumors persist that they received some kind of sweet-heart deal to do so). Currently the newly minted **Metro Public Services Division** handles everything from city maintenance to trash collection, and so on (daunting task, I know). And with a limited budget and manpower, the MPSD has found rather creative ways to make sure that certain jobs get done.

- › Which is to say that Public Services have been hiring runners to provide escorts or help clear certain “problem areas” below the city. Rogue bug spirits, critters that have been forced out of their old homes, ghouls, the usual.
- › Operator Bastard
- › Reminds me of my early runner days. Nothing builds character like a trip underground.
- › Scattershot
- › Interestingly enough, there’s also been a reported uptick in ghouls within the bug tunnels. There have also been several reports of heavily armed ghouls viciously attacking— and in some cases taking out—National Guard patrols near and around these tunnels.
- › Shockwave
- › I’ve seen these reports as well. It’s disconcerting. I’ll look into it.
- › Hannibelle

LAW AND DISORDER

Another fact that is often overlooked because of the Ares-Detroit symbiosis is that Detroit has always had an elected mayor and city council. Sure, they were nothing more than puppets for Ares, but after everything that’s happened in recent months, those bootlickers have found themselves tasked with actually having to do their jobs and manage a city. Yeah, it’s both funny and sad at the same time, as the current government is woefully underqualified for the task. But it’s what we got.

Mayor Ray Stoddard has been Detroit’s “elected” leader for the past twelve years—never mind the fact that because of Ares’ influences, he consistently ran unopposed. A human male in his late fifties, Stoddard is good at making speeches and looking good on the trids, but a complete failure at actually getting anything done. What little his office has accomplished is thanks to his chief of staff **Mary Goodwin**, a kindly dwarf woman and single mother of four who basically did all of the work and let her boss take the credit.

Terry Greenhill is currently the head of the city council, and he’s also the sole surviving member. Rumors suggest that the forty-year old elf suffers from extreme PTSD resulting from the recent fighting. Interestingly enough, even though there are transcripts and documents of council meetings with votes and motions being put forth, Greenhill has been the only one actually attending these meetings.

- › I got hold of footage from the last council meeting. Greenhill was in his normal seat and went through the entire procedure as if it was a full session, complete with answering questions that no one asked. Kind of creepy if you ask me, but no one has called Greenhill or the Mayor’s office out on this. So the meetings just keep happening.
- › Electric Blue

With Knight Errant firmly dedicated to protecting the remaining Ares assets as they move out of Motor City, the current job of providing law enforcement services falls to two entities: The Military Police of the 234th Michigan National Guard Brigade and the UCAS Marshals (who have about two hundred officers in the sprawl). Thanks to an emergency resolution passed by Congress, both the National Guard and Marshals have been given special dispensation and authority to “maintain law and order in accordance with local and federal laws.” The Guardsmen act as beat cops patrolling the battered streets and maintaining order, while the Marshals handle just about everything else. It’s an odd setup, but so far, it seems to be working.

- › That’s because both the Guardsmen and Marshals are skating whenever possible. They know they’re outgunned, outnumbered, and to be frank, outclassed by the caliber of criminal in Motor City. They’re doing their best to keep their heads down unless someone is stupid enough to force their hand. That’s happened a few times, and when the Guardsmen decide to lay the hammer down, it lands hard.
- › Hard Exit
- › Wonder why the FBI or some other agency hasn’t been sent in?
- › Earther
- › Mainly because the Marshals really don’t have that much to do besides guard federal courts and deal with federal prisoners. After the blackouts, the UCAS has put the FBI and other agencies to task trying to figure out the cause of the blackouts. Sucks for the Marshals, as almost none of them have sufficient training for this kind of work.
- › Legal Eagle
- › I’ve heard rumblings that several security firms are quietly petitioning for the Detroit law enforcement contract. But given the current climate in Motor City and their current dislike for anything corporate, the politicians in DeeCee and the Detroit

Mayor's Office have (wisely) decided to let things cool before attempting to make that step.

- > Kay St. Irregular
- > So it's true, that Motor City is basically a corp free zone?
- > Treadle
- > I've touched on that later in this file, but basically: Frag the corps.
- > Johnny Redline

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 006 'UCAS MARSHALL EUGENE TRAPP'

A thirty-year veteran of the Marshal's service, Eugene Trapp is almost a literal bloodhound to the core. In 2061, Trapp underwent Class I SURGE. While the change left him with canine-like hair over most of his body, it also gave him enhanced olfactory senses. With these new abilities, Trapp was transferred from Witness Protection to Fugitive Recovery, where he almost immediately excelled, recapturing over two hundred federal fugitives in the span of fifteen years. In 2075, Trapp's career was almost cut short when he and his team attempted to capture a toxic shaman who escaped from Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. The takedown went bad, and half of Trapp's team was killed, Trapp himself having his back broken in seven places. After that failed capture, Trapp was re-assigned to the Quantico Joint Training Center to teach new Marshals and eventually retire in 2082. But instead of retirement, Trapp was hand-selected to lead the contingent to Detroit and restore order.

Trapp knew that he was unqualified for the task at hand, but one of his biggest strengths is the ability to organize and find the right people for the job, whoever they may be. As such, Trapp is not above looking outside of the normal chain of command and federal agencies, often employing special contractors or advisors as needed.

Normally easygoing, Trapp is extremely loyal to his people and dedicated to his work. He's also a marksman with his sidearm.

MOTOR CITY POWER PLAYERS

As far as the rest of the country is concerned, when the National Guard and UCAS Marshals came into town, they took the situation in hand and reestablished UCAS sovereignty after the complete collapse and failure of corporate management. Yeah, I think that sounds like a load of bulldrek, too, but that was one of the more popular sentiments in many an op-ed following the 51 Days of Chaos and the blackouts. This naturally means that John and Jane Q Public know drek and squat about what's really going on here.

Putting aside the sheer violence and brutality, at the core of the Chaos was the fact that there

was a massive power vacuum within Motor City. And anytime you have that, someone is going to try to fill that vacuum. But while the Guardsmen and Feds were a stabilizing influence and are currently supporting the local government, the truth of the matter is that they're all figureheads at best. They may be able to lay the hammer down on occasion when necessary, but they are not the ones in charge, no matter how much they wish they were.

MANCINO CRIME FAMILY (MAFIA)

When Ares first took over Detroit and started to clean it up in earnest, one of their first targets was organized crime.

In pre-Awakening Detroit, the Mafia had a long and bloody history. In 1931, several families came together and created what was called "The Detroit Partnership," which became the largest syndicate in the Midwest. The Partnership lasted for decades until the turn of the twenty-first century and the beginning of The Awakening. Thanks to the loss of records during the first Matrix Crash of '29, we don't know the exact details, but the Partnership began to fracture due to infighting. By the time Ares formed and bought up most of Detroit, only three families were still active in Detroit: the new Mancinos and the old guards, Tocco and Zerilli. All three of them had targets on their backs.

Some local historians like to say that the Mancinos betrayed the Toccas and Zerilli to Ares in exchange for their continued existence. But recent evidence suggests the opposite: The smaller Toccas and Zerilli banded together and attempted to eliminate the Mancinos by force. But what they failed to realize was that the Mancinos were one of the first regional families to employ magicians. When the dust cleared, a deal was apparently brokered with Ares that allowed the Mancinos to keep some of their action going along with certain concessions in exchange for being left the frag alone. As a result, the Mancinos were the only Mafia family left in Detroit and were at the top of the underworld food chain, a position they still maintain.

Over the last twenty years, the family was led by Thomas "The Tomcat" Mancino, an efficient negotiator and businessman with an eye for companionship who knew how to exploit an opportunity when he saw one. He was also coldly efficient when it came to removing threats, often making use of outside talent. The Mancinos were the first to recognize not only the value of magic, but the potentials of new Matrix technologies. This allowed the Mancino family to consolidate their holds on the various underworld markets and new products such as BTLs. The only business Thomas refused to engage in was metahuman trafficking.

When Thomas died of natural causes in 2075, the family reins were passed to his grandson, Don-

ald, who quickly established himself as being just as capable and efficient as his grandfather.

During the Battle of Detroit and later the 51 Days of Chaos, Donald (a.k.a. Donnie) used his influence to form new alliances and provide various levels of support to beleaguered neighborhoods. While some say that Donnie took advantage of the situations, there is no doubt that the Mancino family is more powerful than ever.

- > I was expecting something a bit more ... unflattering considering our past history, Johnny. My thanks and respect for being as fair as you could be.
- > Mr. Friday
- > Keep them. I'm here to give paydata, not further any personal beefs.
- > Johnny Redline
- > Be glad he wrote it instead of me, I would have spilt it all. We still have scores to settle, you and I.
- > Shockwave
- > You know how to find me.
- > Mr. Friday

KAGE-KAI YAKUZA AND VORY V ZAKONE

Normally the Yakuza and Vory are intense rivals, but in Motor City the two have put aside most of their differences to actively work against the Mancino family. While the Mancinos have a bit of a monopoly on underworld activities, the Yakuza and Vory have seen the influx of new faces—and accompanying opportunities—as a possible avenue to take down the Mancinos, or at least cut into their action.

Traditionally, the Kage-kai in Detroit has been the main source of metahuman trafficking, which for many years put them in direct personal conflict with Thomas Mancino, who went to great lengths to shut the Kage-kai down. Eventually, the Kage-kai found it extremely difficult to move what they were trying to sell—until approximately ten years ago, when **Oyabun Shinshiro Kage** made a deal with Vory leader **Anton Kirov**, whose organization controlled most of the smuggling routes in the northern areas of the UCAS (which the Mancinos knew little about). In addition to transporting fresh workers for the Yakuza, the Vory were able to use those workers as mules. Eventually, the Kage-Vory Association (as they came to be known) gained a significant black-market foothold in and around Detroit and the Great Lakes. And because of their deal with Ares, there was little the Mancinos could do to stop the Kage-Vory.

Currently, the Kage-Vory have been working to expand their operations by allying themselves with

the new influx of smugglers and black marketers, hoping to eventually bolster their numbers and challenge the Mancinos.

- > Why do I get the feeling that with Ares leaving, the balance of power among who is left is going to change real soon?
- > Earther
- > It depends. Ares may be gone, but after the recent fighting, no one in Motor City is eager for a massive, all-out gang war. Anyone who pulls that trigger is going to have the entire city on their hoops. No matter how big you are, that's not a good place to be.
- > Gunnery Sarge
- > That just means that things will be a bit more subtle.
- > Redd Flag

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 007 'SHINSHIRO KAGE AND ANTON KIROV'

Not much is known about the leaders of the Kage-Vory Association, as both involved leaders go to great lengths to obfuscate any details about them.

What little is known is that Kage-san is a Japanese human approximately forty-five years old and is Awakened, likely a mystic adept, who favors a staff instead of the traditional katana as his personal weapon. It's also rumored that Kage is a bit of a gambler who likes to indulge in games of chance, often with literal life and death as the stakes.

Kirov is a rigger who hails from Vladivostok and got his start running smuggling routes across the Sea of Japan. He was forced out of the area when he “accidentally” sold the daughter of a prominent Renraku manager to a Moroccan brothel. From there, Kirov set up shop in the frozen north of the UCAS until he hooked up with Kage-san. Kirov is in his early fifties, bald, and enjoys playing against the Russian stereotype by hating vodka. A proficient pilot and driver, Kirov tries to avoid violence whenever possible—but when violence is needed, he leans into it. In those cases, Kirov tends to prefer heavy ordnance, such as rockets and missiles.

SMUGGLING RINGS

Smuggling has always been a thing in this region. Detroit is centrally located, and the expansive highway system is perfect for overland transportation in any direction. Add in the access of the Detroit River and access/proximity to the Great Lakes, and the opportunities are endless.

With KE pulling out and the UCAS being able to front nothing more than token law enforcement, smugglers have sensed their opportunity like sharks sense blood in the water. Already signs of

increased smuggler presence can be seen on the waterways in and around Motor City, along with increased air traffic.

While not yet quite as established as the more prominent criminal syndicates, the sheer number of smugglers migrating into the area should get anyone's attention. And it's only a matter of time before oversaturation leads to culling.

- > And with smugglers come the pirates to pilfer and plunder. Good thing is that most pirate activity has been (so far) confined to the Great Lakes.
- > Kane
- > Tell that to the supply convoys that keep getting raided on I-75 and US 23. Pirates are working on dry land.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > YAAAARRRRRR!
- > Kane

GANGS, GANGS, AND MORE GANGS

Okay, this is where things are going to get a bit crazy. Before the fighting, Detroit had relatively few gangs. Those that did exist were not on par with gangs in other sprawls, such as the Ancients or Halloweeners. For the most part, Detroit's gangs were mostly low-level troublemakers looking to rebel against the corporate lifestyle imposed by Ares. A few did minor odd jobs for any number of syndicate-types, but KE was often more than enough to keep them in check.

During the Chaos, all of that changed. Now Motor City boasts at least a dozen new gangs of various types, with new ones seeming to form (or die) every fragging day, not to mention the transplants from other cities. There is no real way to keep up. But a few prominent ones have managed to stick around longer than others and leave an impression.

NEO-ANARCHIST GROUPS

Okay, I know I'm gonna get a lot of flak for this, but hear me out. I know the neo-a's have been getting a lot of bad press of late and being blamed for all sorts of drek. But they've been in Motor City since before it was Motor City, almost since the fighting started, and they stayed when the Chaos flared up. So for that, they have my respect.

The only reason I'm listing them here is because, like it or not, they're shaping up to be a major player on the Motor City scene, much to the annoyance of a lot of people. Frag them. Now I know sometimes the rhetoric can be laid on a bit thick and the message a bit heavy handed, but every time I see a neo-a in Motor City, they've been trying to do some damn good, be it setting up mobile kitchens, running supplies, helping move dirt

PROMINENT MOTOR CITY GANGS (AS OF 2/01/81)

696 Slayers. Turf claimed: I-696 and surrounding area. Colors: red and brown. Type: go-gang. Considered to be nothing more than serial killers on wheels, the Slayers are one of the most psychotic go-gangs in Motor City and seem to exist only for the purpose of causing death and destruction on the highways. Using whatever vehicles they can get their hands on, the Slayers only venture out at night and then disappear before the dawn.

The Ancients. Turf claimed: outskirts of former Downtown near the Scar, but expanding. Colors: green and black. Type: go-gang. One of the few old-school gangs that thrived in Detroit despite KE's efforts, the Ancients are an all-elf go-gang with chapters across the globe. During the fighting, the Ancients tentatively sided with the Irregulars, but they quickly went back to their old ways during the 51 Days of Chaos. Their former leader, Bombshell, was killed during the Chaos, and a new leader has yet to be named.

Children of Loxley. Turf claimed: all of Motor City, but with safehouses in Highland Park. Colors: brown and black. Type: street gang. A self-proclaimed hooder gang, the Children of Loxley (COL) constantly roam Motor City's streets to engage other gangs and (so they claim) to "defend the weak." While poorly equipped, the COL are masters of ambush, often setting up elaborate traps to ensnare or capture their targets.

Metal Madness. Turf claimed: Eastpoint. Colors: silver and grey. Type: street gang. One of the few gangs to emerge intact after the Chaos, Metal Madness gets their name from their love of augmentations. Rumors suggest that the gang formed after being recruited by an unknown street doc who offered 'ware in exchange for protection. When not recovering from their most recent surgeries, members of Metal Madness are often seen engaging in strong-arm jobs, assaults, intimidation, and occasionally network.

and rubble, or what have you. Point is, they've put their nuyen where their mouth is and haven't made any empty promises. They've acted, which is more than I can say for a lot of vultures in this city.

Like them or hate them, the neo-anarchists seem to be here to stay, and I say: welcome.

- > So much for a non-biased report. Want to hand out any recruitment material while you're at it?
- > Rigger X
- > And let's not forget the honest-to-ghost acts of actual terrorism they've enacted. Whatever flowery language they use, at the end of the day, they're more than willing to spill blood, even innocent blood, for their cause. Hypocrisy, if you ask me.
- > Scattershot
- > No one did. And say what you want, but Johnny is right: We're not going anywhere. People of Motor City, even though they've suffered greatly, finally have an opportunity that no one else on the planet has: a chance to be truly free. Maybe it won't last,

maybe eventually another corp will swoop in and take over. But until that happens, now is the time to see what metahumanity can do when given the opportunity. And we'll do everything in our power to make sure they get that chance.

▸ Old Crow

NEIGHBORHOOD MILITIA GROUPS

Going back before the Awakening, Michigan has had a history of militant groups gathering to oppose some kind of threat posed by the government or other authoritarian source. These threats were often exaggerated or completely non-existent. But the fact was, enough people got together for what they saw as their common defense and formed their own militias to fight this threat.

Well, bad ideas seem to die hard, because when the drek hit the fan here, militia groups made a roaring comeback. Only this time, the fraggers actually had something to fight against. Which, to be honest, saved a lot of lives during the bug battles and the Chaos. But two things happened. First, the leaders of these groups have refused to acknowledge that the immediate threat is over. And second, most of them got a taste of power and are refusing to let go. It's this cult-like fanaticism, the idea that they are righteous in their cause no matter the facts before them, that makes them dangerous. Because most of these groups are doubling down on their paranoia and their arsenals, waiting for the next "threat" to come.

Frankly, I'd rather face the bugs.

LAY OF THE LAND AND PLACES OF INTEREST

Okay, here is the short version. Old Detroit was geographically broken down into five districts. **Downtown**, of course, was the center where Ares planted their HQ, which has now been blasted to hell and back. **Belle Isle**, along the river and east of Downtown, was considered the most bohemian, where the social and civic-minded gathered. Now, it's the most heavily populated, as the displaced traveled there to find shelter. **Windsor** is across the river and was the sprawl's playground, where tourists and locals alike flocked for fun. Like Belle Isle, it became a haven for refugees, but it is already showing signs of recovery. Being the home of Ford Motors, **Dearborn** (which is west of Downtown) was known locally as "king of the holdouts," because Ares never got a chance to buy it. But during the fighting, Dearborn took heavy damage and is rumored to be infested with rogue bugs. To the north, **Oakland County** is a mix of several areas, including Auburn Hills, and is now

known for its wonderful militias and neighborhood fortresses.

Now with that out of the way, here's a quick rundown of some important places in Motor City if you want to do some serious business here or at least survive the experience.

THE PLATINUM ZONE

Before it became the HQ for Ravenheart's Irregulars, the Platinum Zone was nothing more than a humble city block near Downtown Detroit that boasted several quaint little businesses.

The first and the anchor of this block was the infamous strip club called **Platinum Trollgirls**. Originally conceived as a bad joke in the mid-2050s, Platinum Trollgirls (or just Platinum) came into being mostly because the first owners realized that certain segments of Detroit's metahuman population (specifically orks and trolls) didn't have a strip club to call their own, and they decided to fill that market niche. What started out as a joke quickly turned into a goldmine as Platinum's popularity quickly skyrocketed. And even though the club was doing gonzo business, several attempts were made to shut it down, mainly because it gleefully went against the wholesome image Ares wanted to project for its city. But by then, Platinum had become extremely popular with the local shadow community, who often came to the club's aid. One such runner was a street samurai known only as Marv, who in 2068, through an odd series of circumstances, would become the sole owner of Platinum and the surrounding block. And by the early 2070s, Platinum had become known as a shadow safe haven and was the primary location to negotiate shadow biz in the Detroit sprawl.

As the years passed, Marv kept investing not only in Platinum itself, but also in the other businesses on the block, such as **The Brickhouse** bar and musical venue, **Mr. Hoagie** deli and sandwich shop for those with an above-average appetite, **Red Eye** café and coffee shop, and an assortment of carry-out stores and empty business spaces for rent.

But what most people didn't realize was that Marv was also secretly fortifying his businesses against the near-constant attempts by rival shadowrunners backed by Ares to take out his beloved club. Armor plates were installed on all external windows, SOTA Matrix and communication systems were installed, along with emergency generators, secure vaults, and the pièce de résistance, the underground tunnels that connected all of the businesses. Emergency locks can seal off the tunnels, should Marv's people need to shelter in place.

During **Latvian Gambit**, Marv's block, known as the Platinum Zone, became the Irregulars' main base of operations. During the 51 Days of Chaos, it became an oasis amid the fighting where anyone could seek shelter and be defended from danger.

MOTOR CITY MOVERS AND SHAKERS. FILE 008 'MARV'

A former troll street samurai with a reputation for being able to shrug off insane amounts of damage and an unmatched fury in battle, Marv considers himself a man of simple tastes. All he really wanted in life was a place to relax, have a few drinks, and maybe look at some nice scenery. So when he found Platinum, he knew that he'd found home. When not working the shadows, Marv could be found sitting at his favorite spot adjacent to the main stage, usually with a large mug in his meaty hands. He was there so often that it's said that the chair formed to the contours of his backside. And because he was beloved by the staff, a special sign reading "Marv's seat" was placed over his favorite spot.

Because of his simple tastes, Marv often kicked back most of his earnings to the club, helping with renovations, new equipment, bonuses for the staff, or whatever the place needed. So when the previous owners eventually retired, they simply handed Marv the keys, to which he replied, "Nice." From there, Marv kept investing his money, and Platinum kept growing.

Despite his simple demeanor, Marv is a shrewd businessman, capable leader, and loyal friend. And even though his body is literally falling apart from years of hard running and age, if the chips are down, Marv will ignore all of that and take care of business.

And as Motor City rebuilds around it, Platinum still stands tall as an oasis amid the destruction, a place where business is done, and where people can find refuge.

- I'll never forget the morning when one of those neighborhood militias from Ann Arbor came a-calling early one morning, demanding our surrender. Marv simply walked out the front door dressed in his robe, soykaf in one hand, rocket launcher in the other, and with bunny slippers on his feet. He downed his kaf and then blew the militia leader's truck away with the launcher. The rest scattered as Marv bellowed after them, "Next time, don't come before breakfast!"
- Windy Storms

MOTOR CITY'S NEW SCAR

Any time you fight a battle, especially in an urban environment, you can count on two things: destruction and collateral damage. And we're still counting our dead—the latest unofficial count is approximately 150K. And rising.

While the No-Go Zones and the surrounding areas saw some of the heaviest all-out fighting and were blasted to hell and back, the absolute worst of Motor City's damage was (thankfully) confined to a large ragged area centered on Ares Tower in Downtown (which is the only intact building remaining in the area) and running along the De-



troit River for approximately three kilometers in both directions, north and south-ish. Not much is left there except the skeletons of blasted-out buildings, collapsed bug tunnels, and whatever else was abandoned there from the fighting. This situation created an area of complete and utter destruction, with untold numbers of dead and thousands forced to re-locate or simply remain homeless.

Now called the Scar, these areas are similar to Chicago's Shattergraves, but minus the massive ghost/haunting phenomena.

- > Maybe not, but word through certain magical circles is already circulating about a new kind of mana warping in that area, saying that the natural barriers between the astral and material planes are now noticeably weaker in certain areas within Motor City. Rumors persist this has something to do with the unexplained events at the end of the battle at Ares Tower.
- > Lyran
- > Which is kind of funny, considering that up until now, Detroit wasn't really known as a magical hotspot of any kind.
- > eX-Professor
- > Several Salem Witches who escaped Boston and relocated to Detroit may disagree with you on that. But to be fair, they've kept a very low profile by design.
- > Lady Greenfire
- > These supposed new mana warps have already gotten the attention of some of the usual suspects in the magical communities. The Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research, the Illuminates of the New Dawn, and the Atlantean Foundation have all started to ask some serious questions.
- > Winterhawk
- > No Draco Foundation? That's odd.
- > Mika
- > That we know of; DF could be low-profiling it or using proxies. Like DIMR.
- > Frosty
- > Bit late to the party on that one, sweeties. Representatives from those and other groups have been poking their noses around Motor City for the past three weeks or so. I've been working with the Astral Space Preservation Society for a week now, acting as both literal and thaumaturgical tour guide. It's good money, but the work is literally draining. Some areas are developing a rather nasty background count that often fluctuates. So watch your magical backsides out there.
- > The Great and Powerful Ozzie

The Scar has (for the most part) been left alone since the fighting stopped. Reports indicate that small groups of bugs (especially those fragging Alphas) that survived are taking up residence in or roam/hide in the area.

- > FYI, the Platinum Zone is located approximately three kilometers north of Downtown and has become the main waypoint/staging area for those looking to operate in or explore the Scar. Platinum also acts as a buffer between the still-civilized parts of the city and whatever nastiness pokes its head out. Oh, and to anyone acting stupid, I'll say that Marv and company are still very much in siege mode and won't put up with dreck of any kind. Several idiots have caused trouble in recent weeks, only to end up being kicked out or added to the city's ever-mounting death toll.
- > Rifleman

The Scar has also become a hotspot for a few groups operating in and around Motor City. Bounty hunters looking for bug specimens and trophies have become more frequent visitors. Those simply looking to spill some more bug guts in particular love this area, as they can indulge in whatever destructive methods they deem fit. Riggers love it because of the open spaces and the chance to let loose with the big guns. The Scar has also become a haven for scavengers looking to recover valuable items lost or abandoned during the initial battles and subsequent fighting.

- > For about three weeks after the battle at Ares Tower, there was a concerted effort to recover or at least account for as many military, para-military, and civilians as possible. But when those efforts started producing diminishing returns, the effort fizzled out. Still, there are some Mr. Johnsons out there who are paying decent to good cred to find information about lost family or associates.
- > The Mechanic
- > That's because despite the fighting and death tolls, there were surprisingly few bodies to actually be recovered on the battle area. The bodies were just ... gone.
- > Brutus Ex-Mechnia

Additionally, with the influx and creation of new criminal elements and gangs, the Scar is also being used as both a dumping and proving ground. If you want to get rid of evidence, take it there. If you want to deal with some kind of beef or just throw down, take it there. And as a quick side note, that latter point has taken on more prevalence within the shadows of Motor City. Most of us locals have had our fill of gratuitous death and destruction. What infrastructure we still have is precious, so take your wanton disregard to the Scar unless you're ready to deal with the consequences. It's not like other sprawls where you may take a few hits to your rep but ultimately someone else has to deal with the damage. In Motor City, unprofessionalism could cost you your life.

- > Case in point: A group of transplanted runners got a little overzealous with their run and employed a rocket launcher. This

caused collateral damage to a newly built clinic. Those runners collected their payday. But thirty seconds later, their Johnson and least fifty concerned citizens cornered them to discuss their shadowrunning methodology. Long story short, those runners became permanent residents of the Scar, their money was confiscated as a fine, and their gear, weapons, and 'ware were sold off to repair the clinic and provide reparations.

> Mr. Friday

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY <POSTED: 01-29-81/1030:01>

Seeking professionals to deal with a situation where certain individuals exceeded the terms of their contract, resulting in egregious destruction and loss of life. Subjects are highly skilled and well-funded. They may have left the Detroit/Motor City area. This is an open-ended employment opportunity, depending on situational developments. Additional expenses such as travel will be compensated, and a bonus paid for timely completion of contract. If interested, contact at: LTG# NA/UCAS/DET 413 (18-4811-0018).

VENDOR'S ROW / 8-MILE ROAD

Many cities have something locals tell visitors that "they just *have* to see," something that represents the best aspects of their city, not some cheap tourist trap. In Detroit and now Motor City, that place is Vendor's Row on 8-Mile Road.

Situated between I-75 and SR 53 on 8-Mile, Vendor's Row is an open-air market dripping with bohemian flavor with scores of carts, wagons, vans, and trailers that line both sides of the street. If you're looking for something different or unusual, be it food or a specialty item, Vendor's Row is literally the place to go. The locals claim that if you can't find it there, it doesn't exist.

- > That may seem like a bulldrek line, but it's true. There's something about Vendor's Row that I just can't put my finger on. But every time I've gone there, I always seem to find exactly what I'm looking for. Not sure if it's luck or something else, but frag me if it's not true.
- > Electric Blue
- > There is something special about the place. The last time I visited was two years ago. And even a half-kilometer away, I could feel the mana despite the rest of the city being ... meh. I tried to assense the area, but I saw nothing unusual. Still, you can still feel the energy.
- > Lady Greenfire

When Latvian Gambit kicked off, Vendor's Row was one of the first casualties when several Alpha bugs tore through the streets and unfortunately into the vendors. It remained vacant until a mere two weeks ago, when the first carts started showing up again. Soon, more arrived, followed

by vans and other vehicles. And despite the damage visible all around, Vendor's Row is once again open for business, ready to help you find exactly what you're looking for.

BLOOMFIELD BIODRONE NATURE RESERVE

Sometimes one doesn't plan on something to happen, but it does anyway. That's the general process for the existence of the Bloomfield Bio-Drone Nature Preserve.

Started almost by accident by a shadowrunner known as Moreau, the Nature Reserve came into being when an Ares subsidiary lab near Bloomfield was breached during a pitched battle between an Irregular Operational Detachment (which included Moreau) and a pack of Alpha bugs, releasing scores of biodrones. Returning to the area after the Battle at Ares Tower, Moreau began the task of rounding up all the biodrones. Most were barely functioning and missing body parts, but some were fully functional, complete with implanted weapons. Recognizing the danger to both the local populace and the drones, Moreau set up containment fences and facilities to provide care for the drones and, if at all possible, rehabilitation.

Moreau's efforts have not gone unnoticed, and many in the area would prefer to kill the drones and be done with it. This has proven more difficult than anyone anticipated, however, as Moreau has remained steadfast and repeatedly fended off several attacks. Currently, he is still there, providing for the drones.

- > My question is: Why? They're just drones.
- > Clockwork
- > Well then, I guess you won't mind if someone comes along, scoops out most of your brain, and takes away your free will, huh? I do it because I've seen too much death of late. And for once I want to preserve some life for some creatures who no one's given a damn about before. Don't like that answer, frag off.
- > Moreau
- > What about the rumors that you're harboring bugs?
- > Sunshine
- > I've seen evidence of bugs in the area and dealt with them accordingly; that's it. But if anyone wants to start some more drek, bring it on, chummer.
- > Moreau
- > I believe him. But what's worrying me are some images I've seen in that and other areas around Motor City. The pictures look like some kind of cocoons or eggs.
- > Butch

MOTOR CITY TALES

POSTED BY: PEEPERS

I was hiding from the bugs. My alley was just off the corner of Hunt and McDougall. I was hyper alert when these two humans crept in and settled three meters from me. These two were well known in the shadows. I started video and audio recording.

The large human was Blade. I recognized him from the right cyberarm. It was unique and expensive. The arm looked like molten chrome musculature. His face was scarred from a bad dermal plating implant. There were rumors that the 'ware had not been intended for him. I had assensed him in the past. His system was jacked with high-grade reflexes and unknown bioware. He was a master of the katana he carried. He had a reputation as an evil bastard, though he had mellowed in recent years.

His companion was also human, name of Fenris. He had a nasty reputation for combat magic and a fierce loyalty to Blade. They both ran a shadowrunner hangout called Razorboyz Edge.

What made Blade interesting was the huge bounty on his head. A year ago, he had shown up at a Triad club, pissed about something or other. When he left, the club was on fire, and five had died. Nobody could collect. He was too well protected and seldom left his club. Until now.

What to do, I thought to myself. Do I risk the big score? Blade has given me a lot of work over the years. But the bounty was so good.

The two stopped abruptly. Fenris sniffed the air. "Stinks like garbage."

"Any bug spoor?"

"Yes, but a day old."

"You think we can use this route to move people out of the city?"

"For now," replied Fenris.

"Let's do it. And Peepers? Don't even think about it."

I stopped thinking about it.

DETROIT DOWN BELOW

- > Just before I finished composing this part of the file, I got a message from Glitch saying that he had some data he wanted to forward and include concerning a new section of Motor City the locals are starting to call Detroit Down Below, or the DDB. At first I was a bit slotted, but when I started reading it, I knew this had to be uploaded, because it blew anything I had out of the water. I had no idea about any of this, and I hate being blindsided by anything concerning my hometown. But time to be a professional and make sure the data gets out, because we're going to need it.
- > Johnny Redline

DEAD AND GONE IN MOTOR CITY

POSTED BY: HANNIBELLE

Well, the chaos is mostly over, insofar as anyone can tell, and while the whole country, or whatever this is, is still a mess, Detroit still stands out as an exceptional case. Forgive me for this den of sin, but I see something like hope in the wings.

- > That's the calm before the storm.
- > Netcat
- > It's always darkest right before it goes pitch black.
- > Baka Dabora
- > Been pretty black at the bottom. Time to make our own light.
- > Pretty
- > Allow me to introduce a few new faces with some insight into the situation. First up is Pretty, resident face of the Chicago immigrants and, for the moment, standing head of the Ghoul Unification Committee. Next is Slim, their tech specialist and info hound.
- > Hannibelle
- > Hi! It's such an honor to be here! I've heard so much about what you guys do! I promise I'll—
- > Slim
- > Easy, kiddo, don't come on too strong.
- > Needles
- > Sorry, boss.
- > Slim
- > And that would be Needles, co-leader of the Chicago Long Pig Farms Faction.
- > Hannibelle
- > I won't be saying much, just here to make sure it goes honestly.
- > Needles
- > Last but far from least, John Casco, unofficial leader of the Detroit Topsider ghouls.
- > Hannibelle
- > Pleasure. I have Rains, a former Skin, here to comment through me as well.
- > JCD
- > Welcome. You've all been told the rules. Now be informative!
- > Glitch

CANNIBAL LABYRINTH

During the days when ghouls first appeared across the world, Detroit's water and sewage

system was an unholy mess. Attempts by the administration to bypass environmental standards for clean and efficient services were met with protests and refusal of taxes. The cheaper solution, it turned out, was to dig deeper. Not unlike the Chicago Deep Tunnels, Detroit began the process of boring out passive subterranean reservoirs for waste, all by the lowest-bidding contractors. The project proved to be a nightmare of legalities and logistics. Plans to recreate the classic (and abandoned) 1915 subway line ran directly into the sewer expansion due to poor interoffice communication and the earliest disorganized clashes of extraterritoriality with government. While both projects turned their attentions to other areas, spidering out and down in an almost haphazard way, legal battles eventually saw both projects grind to a halt.

- > Bahahaha! It didn't even take shadowrunners to fuck that up! They did it all by themselves!
- > Bung
- > I suddenly remember why I didn't miss you.
- > Bull
- > Love you too, William.
- > Bung

The coming of Ares saw a massive renovation to waste and management facilities in the city, but largely left the previous projects sealed off and abandoned. Only drainage tunnels and vents were allowed to remain, so that the vast network of half-completed tunnels and facilities might at least serve some purpose as overflow protection. For the sake of cutting costs, much of the accumulated waste of Detroit was funneled into these old chambers. Plans for eventually reclaiming the space and even finding a productive use for the aged waste were filed away for later use, until their loss in the Second Matrix Crash, leaving much of Detroit's underground lost to history and unmapped ... at least, to normal metahumanity.

- > Gotta wonder if any Ares employees on the take used it for storage when they skimmed product off the top?
- > Red Anya
- > After a Crash, there's no real way to tell, assuming they were competent and somehow didn't leave a trail in the first place.
- > Clockwork

Since coming into possession of the disused tunnels, the ghouls have found its environmental hazards to be an unexpected boon. A great chamber houses the Great Detroit Fatberg, for example, which the ghouls have since learned to refine down into chemical bombs that help mask olfactory sen-

sor tracking. Others they have tunneled out for themselves, hiding safe places behind layers and switchbacks of stone and calcified waste. For those Firewatch teams who pursue them into this abattoir of detritus, natural hazards, traps, and ambush points make turning the tables on the hunters frightfully easy.

- > What. The Fuck. Is a fatberg?
- > Kat-o-Nine-Tales
- > Never done a deep sewer run, I see. In old, low-tech sewers, or cut-corner processing facilities, trash accumulates. Most of the chunky bits get caught here and there, but the grease from soy fries, the waste you flush down your toilet, the hard industrial solvents and acid rain and every other semi-solid horror you can imagine throwing away slips past the nets, grates, and sensors. It starts to coagulate as it rots, then binds, mixing into a big lumpy melange of the worst of civilization's leftovers. Then it collects more of its own. Different fatbergs can have infinite chemical compositions and configurations, sometimes their own twisted eco-systems. Sometimes it's just a huge, rancid ball of grossness. Sometimes, it births mutant critters, or acts as an avatar totem of some toxic shaman. Plenty of the time it's fully flammable, even explosive. And most municipalities just tuck it away somewhere and hope to forget about it, because disposal is expensive, time-consuming, and dangerous.
- > The Smiling Bandit
- > I think I just became a vegetarian.
- > Kat-o-Nine-Tales
- > Enjoy your next McHugh's!
- > Bung
- > I will, thanks!
- > Slamm-O!

Other spots hold a macabre beauty. Decoration had begun for some of the chambers of the 1915 lines, and those which were sealed and abandoned retain an art-deco motif of sharp lines and clean colors. The ghouls, reveling in their nature, have decorated these areas with the cleaned bones of previous victims. Ossuarous sculptures and architectural highlights speak to a sinister sense of aesthetic, and serve to cement their nature in their own minds.

- > That's insane! Who the hell would celebrate that?!
- > Electric Blue
- > Plenty of ghouls break under the stress of what they have become. It can be hard to tell them apart from the ferals. The difference is the meticulous celebration of our nature, instead of finding ways to adapt. Insanity is the mind trying to adapt to something it cannot process. This is madness.
- > Slim

- > In all fairness, I've seen stuff like this that had nothing to do with ghouls. Cults, necromancers, and worse share the same aesthetic.
- > Lyran
- > Please bear in mind the strain these people are under, and that not all of us share that mindset.
- > JCD

EARN YOUR SKIN

As the seat of Ares corporate headquarters, and an example of a surprisingly cooperative relationship between a mega and its local civic powers, Detroit was always meant to be safe. Wiping away its infamous history as a lawless den of crumbling infrastructure was a top priority for a corporation whose divisions included security concerns. As such, Knight Errant Security Services corporate headquarters and training programs included an astounding amount of local on-the-job training. Hunting criminals and cracking down on street violence was relatively easy considering the consolidation of manpower and resources in the city, but Ares had higher aspirations.

The advent of supernatural threats created a need for live-fire exercises against Awakened targets. Since the rise of Knight Errant Firewatch Division, hunting in the Detroit Down has been considered a right-of-passage for rookie Firewatch teams. As the city was Ares-controlled and offered no legal protections to the Infected, KE sweeper teams would delve into the disgusting depths of the city's sewer systems, testing tactical theory and acumen, and occasionally staging a field trial of prototype weapons and armor. A gruesome tradition began to emerge: a Firewatch member skinning their first confirmed ghoul-kill. Obviously they could not bring such a gruesome, not to mention contagious, trophy back with them, so instead the skins are used as a form of psychological warfare, stapled to sections where ghouls were suspected to tread. While this horrific practice never became public, many Detroit-trained Firewatch members would ask new teammates if they had ever "pinned a hide," indicating experience fighting ghouls and against dual-natured prey.

- > This ... isn't standard practice in all Ares training cities, is it?
- > Chainmaker
- > Not exactly. Firewatch teams tend to get trained in zones with problems, which is honestly most of them if you look hard enough. Those trained around the Containment Zone, for example, tended to hunt bugs more than us.
- > Needles
- > Either the word got out, or some macabre motherfuckers with cred started a trend, but for a while some of the Zone gangs

would sell bits of bug chiton to tourists. Some wanted souvenirs, others claimed it was for research.

- > Pretty
- > Never got into the business yourself? Waste not, want not?
- > Beaker
- > Not many ghouls did, as far as we know. We see into the astral at all times, and we could feel the residual energies of the bugs. Stuff like that is illegal for a good reason. Who knows what kinds of effects it could have in spells, gear, drugs, or even just from long-term exposure?
- > Slim
- > Excuse me, I have to, uh ... take out some trash.
- > 2XL

For Detroit's ghoul population, this meant an environment of paranoia and a population winnowed by Darwinian brutality. Without a stable criminal element to depend on for excess body parts, most ghouls had to actively hunt for their food in one of the most secure cities in the UCAS. Ferals rarely lasted long, and those who did came to possess a horrific cunning unseen in many other infected territories. For the sapient ones, exploration of the warrens became a priority, establishing points of ambush, labyrinthine areas to lose pursuit, and safe havens where rest and recovery might escape the notice of wandering patrols. Few had any access or opportunity to get cybernetic augmentation to pass as a regular metahuman, and their increasingly antagonistic relationships to metahumanity led to a fierce, hateful pride in their condition and survival. New ghouls would be initiated into packs much as metahumans are into go-gangs, and none were respected until they had proven they could evade a patrol actively hunting them. This practice became known as "earning your skin."

- > Anyone in such a situation cannot be blamed for turning to brutality over time.
- > JCD
- > Careful. We are on thin enough ice as it is. We don't need to be apologists for a barbaric practice.
- > Pretty

The greatest among them were those who could retaliate, turning the tables and bringing home a Firewatch hunter for dinner. Many of these are the mages and adepts of the packs, experts at stealth and ambush, and often falling into twisted or toxic traditions. Spoils of gear and meat accompanied the vast respect these ghouls received, and many would advance to positions of leadership. Encountering the ghouls of Detroit, one can pick out the leader by the quality of their stolen Ares gear, and

the trophies of KE badges strung around their neck or at their side. Most surprising are the prototypes they seized from trial runs. Quite a few of the strongest ghouls have previously unseen weapons, particularly flame- and laser-based technology, which they have taken the time to become familiar with, inside and out. A few tinkers among them have even managed to refine unstable designs, even tweaking them with unorthodox improvements.

- > Oh-ho-ho. Ares prototypes, custom mods—there's some cred there ...
- > Redd Flagg
- > You wanna go down there? Be my guest. I'll inform your next of kin.
- > Kia

THE COMPLACENCY OF PEACE

Ironically, living in one of the safest cities in North America has worked in the ghouls' favor. Most metahuman citizens were fairly trusting of their Ares protectors, and by the time Tamir Grey's manifesto hit the net in 2057, many were primed to respond well to charitable causes. Younger ghouls who had not fallen in with the Skins, whether by youth or terror of their ways, found some solace with the law and the soft spot in a pampered society. Though Executive Order 162 didn't last very long, its spirit lasted in Detroit, and many of the sapient ghouls who had found productive employment and shelter were quickly hidden in paperwork, granted subsidiary corporate SIDs buried in mountains of paperwork and bureaucracy, and kept out of sight. While Firewatch brought back their vicious traditions, their sights were set down in the darkness of the undercity depths, not in the janitor halls, body banks, and factory lines.

This second community of ghouls, nicknamed "Topsiders," has never gotten along especially well with the Skins below, but those who manage to bridge the gap between the Topsider integrationists and the downsider Skins can see the whole picture of Detroit's classical class struggles in stark contrast. More than that, they can make a profit smuggling unwanted Ares salvage out from the underground, or smuggling in fresh ammo and supplies. Supplies, of course, include such savory unsavorites as metahuman flesh. The Skins may not respect food that wasn't gotten in the hunt, but when times grow lean, beggars can't be choosers.

- > Ah, that answers my question about the smuggling. With Ares out of town, I wonder if there will be any new utility for those hidey-holes and the smugglers who used them?
- > Red Anya

- > The laws aren't exactly cracking down on smugglers right now. Might not be a market for secrecy in Motor City.
- > JCD
- > Oh, ... there is **always** a market for secrecy.
- > Red Anya
- > Did anyone else's auto-translator just glitch?.
- > Chainmaker

WHEN THE WORLD CAME CRASHING DOWN

Latvian Gambit, the 51 Days of Chaos, and the blackouts changed all the rules. The Skins, sensing the sweet miasma of fear from above, were enticed to turn the tables on their oppressors. And some of them required little enticement, as they consider any uninfected metahuman to be the enemy. They expected hatred when they reached the surface, but Ares had done its job too well—none of the Topsiders knew about the ghouls down below. The perfect security of the city demanded PR spin, and there wasn't any room in their sanitized world for flesh-eating boogeymen lurking in the sewers. Those who knew Detroit Topsider ghouls approached them for help.

It was very possible this moment would have ended in a bloodbath, but those connections to Topsider ghouls, as well as the vision of Ares forces in disarray, often neglecting citizens to save themselves and corporate property, won them over. The best revenge would be revealing the barbarity of Knight Errant, and to do that, they needed help. Thankfully, we found it in the form of Colonel Ravenheart's Irregulars.

Not all Skins saw it this way. Many of the most successful hunters, the toxic shamans among them, wanted to feast, and only being outnumbered forced them back. Some struck off into the city to raise what chaos they could. Others retreated back to familiar ground, waiting for moments of calm to rise and strike fear into the prey once again.

- > Ghost, that explains so much.
- > Deadline

What cemented the idea of a "ghoul hero" were how many of them worked with others—specifically the Sixty-First Rangers—hunting and eliminating the most dangerous Alpha insects and later against swarms of bug spirits that attacked Ares Tower. Their dual-nature, as well as battle-tested tactics and skills, made them adept bug hunters, ironically adopting the role their Firewatch tormentors once filled. Stranger still, they were able to tell the Beta-merges from the berserk Alphas, using the tips and guidance of Betas to hunt down and root out many of the hostile bugs.

- > According to Rains, the Skins had dealt with both types of bugs before. Alphas and Betas both occasionally escaped under exceptional circumstances, and the underground was a logical place to hide out. Alphas weren't amenable to negotiation, and made for decent eating. Plus, bugs on the loose would only bring more Firewatch, who were even more worried about the public learning of bug experiments than the ghouls. Betas were much more compliant, and some bargained for safe passage.
- > JCD
- > Wait, Alphas and **Betas**? Did we miss something here?
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > So much for op-sec. We tried.
- > Rifleman
- > It is all right, Colonel, you did your best, and you have my gratitude. But to reply: We are still attempting to contact them, to invite them back to safe haven. We would be willing to offer rewards of Ares gear for their safe passage.
- > Ellis
- > Okay, come back to that later but back on topic for now. If you wanted to hurt Ares so bad, leaking the secret or producing one of those bug bodies would have been an A-1 scandal maker.
- > Sunshine
- > We didn't have the option. Leaving the body for Firewatch out in the open was as close as we could get, because they would never stop coming until it was accounted for. And who would believe a ghoul? We'd have to give away secure data connections, putting ourselves at risk. And for what? Detroit media was so firmly under Ares control you could taste the spin in every byte.
- > JCD

When the dust had settled and all was said and done, lives had been saved in part by monsters under the bed.

BLOODY BOOMTOWN

POSTED BY: PRETTY

With the coming of the Chicago renovation, there will be little room for ghouls in the new city to come. We ghouls of Long Pig Farms know this and have been considering a migration to friendly parts, if any might be found. We're leery of Asamando's promises of prosperity and protection but have not been able to find any other options, until now. With the promise of a free city where all are welcome, I led a scouting expedition to the new Detroit to see if there might be a place for us in the burgeoning neo-anarchic shadow city.

What I found was a city trying to come to grips. A population of ghouls was on-hand, a citizenry now confused about their nature. Many had not

known there were so many Topsider ghouls hiding among them, and almost none had been aware of the Skins at all. Some were grateful for help, especially against the bugs, while others had been killed or newly infected by the rampages of the remaining rogue toxics. Too many perspectives for a consensus, and no experience with how to reconcile these new residents.

Sensing an opportunity, I moved quickly, offering the services of the Chicago ghouls. We had experience integrating with the uninfected in the open, a reputation for trustworthy business practices, and the means to provide most of the ghouls' sustenance without resorting to hunting. All we asked was the space to make it happen and a place at the table, and Detroit would enjoy the benefit of citizens who understood its inner workings like none other, to say nothing of having dual-natured, Awakened workers and warriors to counter the potential threat should the Beta merges prove untrustworthy.

- > If we are beyond trust, why give us the tower?
- > Ellis
- > No one **gave** you the tower. You were entrenched, and getting you out would be a nightmare. That, and there's a whole lot of ordnance in there you could turn on the city.
- > Pretty
- > Then why haven't we?
- > Ellis
- > Because people still remember the Universal Brotherhood, and there's just no way to undo your reputation for duplicity. Not a lot of use for charred husks when you need hosts.
- > Needles
- > I see. Time and patience, proof and deed. We will prove ourselves. If we can find acceptance with one who hated us for so many years, we can do this.
- > Ellis
- > Wait, who are you talking about?
- > Glitch
- > The one who called himself Sticks. Weeks ago, when he assisted Colonel McCord with our liberation from the Ares black site, he was severely injured and crippled, beyond the reach of even modern medicine. Out of gratitude, we will provide care and comfort for the rest of his days.
- > Ellis
- > ...
- > Glitch
- > Dammit. Ellis, we need to have a talk about timing and sharing too much. Glitch, I'll send you a PM later about Sticks' wishes.

But getting back on topic, I'd also like to point out to all parties involved that while both the Betas and the ghouls participated valiantly during the fighting, there was more on the bargaining table and more at stake than who simply got the tower. There were other concerns and issues to be addressed specifically concerning Ares. And if there is to be lasting cooperation, Pretty, you need to learn how to trust your allies, because it is a two-way street. You aren't the only ones concerned for Motor City's safety.

- > Rifleman
- > I understand your words, Colonel, but old habits die hard.
- > Pretty
- > So how did the rest of the negotiations go?
- > Sunshine
- > In anyone else's hands, the deal might not have come through. But Pretty was more than persuasive, in the right place at the right time with the right offer. Efforts to establish a working system for the equal rights and employment for ghouls are being explored, and while many are happy just to hold a job without fear of extermination, Pretty and her people are working to ensure they do not become a disenfranchised worker population.
- > Red
- > You're too kind, Rick. Stop while you're behind.
- > Pretty
- > This does not mitigate the standing threat of loyalist Skins who consider any infected who consort with prey to be traitors. Below the streets, in the forgotten corners of infrastructure, they plot actions as vicious as any terrorist group, including recruitment drives, bombings, and midnight kidnappings for fresh game. Until their threat can be eliminated, the Topsiders and Chicago immigrants will have a hard time establishing lasting trust with the uninfected Detroit population.
- > JCD
- > Not to mention all the new tunnels created by the bugs. This is a fragging nightmare in the making.
- > Shockwave
- > Pretty's faction, along with the neo-anarchists and representatives of the Ghoul Liberation League, recently established the Ghoul Unity Committee, an organization for the burgeoning Detroit Free State that seeks to integrate the infected into the new society in ways that protect both sides, while laying the groundwork for future laws and necessities. Nothing quite like this has ever happened before, but if we can make it work, Detroit may become a safe haven for infected. What that ends up meaning is anyone's guess.
- > Old Crow
- > Probably nothing good.
- > Glitch

- > Don't count them out yet! Motor City has a real chance here to build something new, and if the infected can play nice, it'll work out better for everyone! Just imagine that kind of power keeping you safe at night instead of hunting you!
- > Electric Blue
- > We hope to earn a seat at that table, as well. While we are aware of the expertise in hunting bugs for which the Long Pig ghouls are known, we see this as an advantage. They can keep us honest, and their experience in negotiating the rights of distrusted metasapients would do well in representing our rights and responsibilities as members of this new community.
- > Ellis
- > Give me some bound spirits any day. They don't want to eat me.
- > Lyran
- > Keep telling yourself that.
- > Praxis

///SECURE CHAT ROOM #61-51-88/3,
VPN: JACKPOINT, 02-12-81/1100:54 ZULU
...PASSWORD ACCEPTED/ACCESS GRANTED...///

- > No, frag this, I'm out. It was bad enough when there was one token ghoul. Then a technomancer. Or two. Or fragging ten. Then you let a vampire in the door, and he brought another, and then a flesh form. Someone's probably an AI! Where does it stop?
- > Clockwork
- > I'm pretty sure there was at least one headcase, and we may have been infiltrated by the Black Lodge and a few corps at this point.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Don't forget fucking Harlequin.
- > Bull
- > You certainly won't.
- > Glitch
- > Oh! And a few dragons, just for fun. And whoever the fuck "Wordsmyth" is. What the fuck does "secure" mean to you drekheads? This is supposed to be a secure-fucking-server, not a freakshow!
- > Clockwork
- > We're just doing like the old man wanted.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Then allow me to just get this in and log out before you decide to boot me again: Fuck the old man.
- > Clockwork

...CLOCKWORK HAS LEFT THE CHATROOM

- > Well, that was saltier than usual.
- > Bull
- > Not a bad point, though. Just how many people are we supposed to be letting in here?
- > Glitch
- > Jack was always about freedom. He gave everyone a chance. Hell, he never permabanned Clockwork, and he straight sold us out at one point. He let Puck back in, even knowing what he did to Perri. If JackPoint still stands for anything, it's gotta be this.
- > Slamm-O!
- > I thought we were an information exchange for professionals.
- > Glitch
- > Tell that to the half-dozen servers blending code with us right now.
- > Bull
- > Look, we're not going to get the info fresher than from the source, okay?
- > Slamm-O!
- > Not exactly a trustworthy source.
- > Glitch
- > The same could be said of us all. We're all criminals and monsters to someone, here. Might as well go case-by-case, like the kid said.
- > Bull
- <<<CHAT ROOM SETTING: PUBLIC>>>
- > All right, kids, we know this is ... oh for fuck's sake, how long have you all been able to hear that?
- > Slamm-O!
- > Pretty much since Clockwork walked out.
- > Ma'Fan
- > Not that we were eavesdropping.
- > Red
- > Whatever. Look, this is a new stretch for us. Some might say a new low. Look out the right code breach right now and you might see Shadowland, the spiritual predecessor to JackPoint. Go the other direction and you can see the Nexus. These were the places where the Davitt and Wanderly Papers tried to reach the world, the first investigations into the Universal Brotherhood. It can be argued that shadowrunners were the first response to the threat bug spirits pose.
- > Glitch
- > I don't like where this is going ...
- > /dev/grrl

- > Neither do I. But we have to accept changing times, or at least acknowledge them. Time was you and I would be put against a wall and shot for not being human enough, /dev/. Between the magic, cyber, CFD, technomancy, infection metasapients, AIs, and every other weird-ass thing that happens to us as a species, the definition of what makes us human, or at least a person, grows broader all the time. Like I said, I don't like this, but this is the world we have, and we're here to tell you how it is so you can make your own choices. So we're giving some bandwidth to someone you won't trust.
- > Bull
- > Pretty quick to assume, old guy.
- > Chainmaker
- > He really isn't. Given the track record, I'm not exactly putting any bets on this ending well, either. But this is what we've got, so we're taking it.
- > Slamm-O!
- > Okay, so ... who is it?
- > Winterhawk

PROJECT PYRO

POSTED BY: ELLIS

<UPLOADED 02-12-81/1115.06>

Good evening. My name was Ellis. I am an insect spirit.

- > Whoa, whoa, **whoa!** What the hell?
- > Sounder
- > I don't remember you having this much of a problem when Praxis commented in the Dark Terrors upload.
- > Red
- > That ... ugh. At least she eats other bugs.
- > Sounder

I wish first to say that you have no need to fear us. I am well aware of the trepidation you must feel toward my kind, and given our history, and indeed nature, that is more than understandable. If you did not fear me, you would be mad.

But it is nature itself that I wish to discuss, and why it may give you some small measure, some crack of egress, to consider us as more than a parasitic extradimensional invader, and perhaps one day a neighbor.

- > Cold day in hell, bitch. Cold day in hell.
- > Rigger X

Nature, as you are well aware, is subject to change. Evolution is a point and process of growth for both the ecosystem and the species which com-

prise it. Your own world has been going through fits and starts of progress into its Awakened state for decades, without any sign of it stopping. Every growth spurt has revealed new genetic expressions, all of them seeming less out of place than might be expected. Consider: A new paranormal creature arises, occupying or even creating a new ecological niche where there was none before. How has the entire ecosystem not been thrown out of balance by these rapid alterations? A new, evolutionarily unprecedented predatory species should cause sudden extinction-level events, at least locally. How has this world survived?

For a very long time, my kind did not care. We have existed for unspeakable, untranslatable aeons, singular in purpose and pursuit. Worlds beyond your own and beyond counting have been used by our kind, stripped of resource and population, because our evolutionary imperative has always been simple: expand, adapt, breed. Our nature necessitates that this take the form of conquest.

For this, and for all the sins of those who came before, I am deeply, truly sorry.

- > You have to be kidding me.
- > Bull

PUTTING LEASHES ON DEMONS

“He who cannot pick up an ant, and wants to pick up an elephant will some day see his folly.”
Proverbs 6:6

The uncomfortable truth that Ares failed to realize, and which has set us free, is that we have far, far more in common than either species had ever suspected. We expand, adapt, breed. We strip resources, infiltrate and conquer from within if we cannot overcome with force. Your megacorporations and their alliances and betrayals are not so very different from the competing Hives and colonies. Would you believe we have our own version of shadowrunners in the Hives? Rogues that can adapt their form are paid in spiritual essences, host vessels, and protection.

When our kind first struck onto your world in previous Ages, we thought you were exactly like us. Learning the essential differences was what prompted our attitudes toward you. I will not claim we learned the ways of deceit and conquest from you, but no other world or civilization demanded that we adapt so much. We became infinitely more cunning learning from you. You challenged us as we had never been challenged before.

Again, this is no exoneration for our actions. Comparing our evils does not breed kinship. Instead, let me tell you about Colonel Carter J. Harwell.

Carter knew me when I was singularly Ellis. A Firewatch commander with extensive and exceptional skill and experience hunting my kind, his courage and insights led to his eventual assignment to Project Cuckoo, which was a playful appellation for an operation of exceptional danger and sacrifice.

Carter had seen much of the horrors of infestation, lost many friends. Ellis, bless her, tried all she could to dissuade him. I believe she loved him, in her own way, and she was pained that his traumas, which lent him a suicidal urge, did nothing to diminish his tactical and cultural expertise when it came to Invae. He was the ideal candidate.

For many years, Ares has not only defended your world from our kind but has sought to take the fight to the home Hives. Courageous, perhaps, but utterly foolhardy. The Hives represent our home metaplane, as great as your own universe, but not limited by stellar bodies. It is, for all purposes, an infinite labyrinth, fully occupied. Our numbers are infinite. Given a true portal between our worlds and enough hosts, we could possess your entire population in a very short period of time, and it would not have any noticeable effect on the population of the Hives that remained.

The only thing that keeps your world safe from this consuming swarm is its extreme relative distance in the metaplanes. While all metaplanes technically occupy the same space at once, as per multidimensional theories, the concept of distance is more applicable in terms of how alien the environment is. The “further” you travel, the more the astral environment proves inhospitable. Much as you might experience detrimental physical symptoms in an atmosphere of methane, or with particularly hostile native bacteria, or even full vacuum, Invae and spirits such as shed-im experience evanescence. My personal metaphor might be pressure differentials. If you were to enter an area with too different a pressure, you might literally explode. You require a pressurized suit to enter such a space. Other deep metaplanar species have reached a similar conclusion as we have: to utilize a native host body as an environmental suit, to continue the metaphor. We are protected from evanescence, and effectively camouflaged from native scrutiny.

As I said, our species show a surprising number of similarities. Adaptation is one of them. Ares, operating from an orbital position to provide an unassailable strongpoint, utilizes captured and brainwashed insect shamans to open stable gateways into the Hives, sending elite Firewatch deep penetration strike forces to raid the Hives. As I have said, these raids do little to curtail Invae culture or operation, but they at least afford many opportunities for research, bringing back alien material and more data than you can imagine. The problem is that these raids must be conducted very, very quickly, as metahumans suffer evanescence in the Hives as surely as we do here without a host.

Please note that final qualifier.

- > Whoa, whoa, wait ...
- > Doc Fangs
- > There's been rumors of this for years.
- > Red
- > Yeah. Rumors. This is straight confirmation.
- > Plan 9
- > Assuming you believe her. It.
- > Snopes
- > I identify as she. I appreciate that your reflex recognizes me as a person. This is going much better than I expected.
- > Ellis
- > Don't read into it.
- > Snopes

Ares came upon the notion to capture native Invae and bring them back through the portal to conduct what research they could before they naturally expired or were tortured to death by experimentation. A revolutionary notion was to attempt to have a human effectively infest a native bug spirit. The process did not work exactly the same, of course. Frankly, I am hesitant to share the details, not only because I find them personally abhorrent, but because those who would seek to use them would sacrifice far too much.

Ares, and by extension Ellis, sacrificed Carter.

The process went surprisingly well. Carter was now acclimated to the Hives, though his form was now a horrific hybrid form of our two species. Other volunteers followed. They are not many, but they maintain outposts in the Hives, hunting, sneaking, and surviving by horrific means, never to return to the lives they left behind. As surely as there is no reversing inhabitation of a metahuman, so too are we bound together in reverse.

When I met Carter again, I was no longer Ellis Alone. We had both traded humanity. I—we, Ellis and I—had done so for the sake of both our species, to better understand each other. Carter had passed through the darkness, become the thing he hated so he might kill it, and I think, himself. He was transferred to the Detroit labs where I had not yet been discovered, and he knew what I was as surely as I felt his new nature. To me, he was horrific, and yet familiar, and oddly pitiable.

We spoke. Compared our perspectives. Traded and commiserated and smiled. He was tired. I held his hand as his flesh failed him, evanescence of his own home plane consuming his soul, scattering it like ashes into the manosphere. No one would ever know him so well as I had. I wept. We had traded places, and met again in the middle, and neither could live as we had.

I do not know why he spared me by keeping my secret. Perhaps his time living as one of us had

taught him more about himself than us. I was having a similar experience, spending long reveries in Ellis' memories, tasting emotion and response, the weft and warp of an alien world that instincts and traditions dictate we conquer and consume.

These instincts feel dull in me. They seem less real than my memories of holding Carter in my arms when we were both soft human flesh. I crave food I do not always need. I desire recreations that distract from genetic imperatives. I dream of seeing distant places, feeling this vulnerable human skin in saltwater beaches and hot sand, goosebumps from snowy peaks, to be breathless with exertion and laughter and joy and camaraderie with that which should be my prey and breeding stock.

I want, so badly, to be friends with all of you.

- > Is anyone else really, **really** creeped out by this?
- > EB
- > I don't envy her. This is an uphill battle. If she's on the level, I hope she gets what she wants.
- > Red

PEDIGREE OF ADAPTATION

So what did they do to us that has given me such a perspective?

It is important to note that Ares' bug spirit projects were not all virtuous strikes at the alien invaders. Again, the similarities between us are startling: as we seize your flesh, so did Ares attempt to do the same. I remember through Ellis that these projects have been going for at least two decades, breeding programs that attempt to create a domesticated flesh-form. Whether for use here on the material plane, or to turn them against Hive populations, I cannot say, but the audacity of attempting to breed a slave race is ... well, comparable to my own species, at the least.

Nevertheless, this was, and as far as I know remains, the objective of Project Pyro: the subjugation of Invae to fight against their own kind.

Initial attempts forced the inhabitation of animals. This was met with limited success. The theory was that animals possessed native willpower but were not intelligent enough to provide an occupying spirit with the wit to outsmart Ares handlers. The result was somewhat domesticable flesh-forms, twisted amalgams of animal and flesh spirit. I think specifically of bears and dogs. What Ares could never undo was the instinctual obedience to the hivemind, and no Queen could be coerced into willing cooperation, meaning every one of these experimental bugs was just waiting for the chance to turn on its handlers.

While Ares has never abandoned this branch of research, despite the breach of several labs and expensive (both in resources and lives) cleanup operations, Detroit Prime issued a new directive: to

attempt to influence behavior by specifically curated hosts, attempting to breed attitudes into each successive generation. Like the selective breeding of wolves to eventually produce the domesticated dog, they hoped to create a subspecies of Invae that was similarly pliable to control.

- > Breed? I thought the bugs just ported over reinforcements from the Hive?
- > Ethernaut
- > Initial spirits do, indeed, come from the Hive, but as soon as a shaman is able to bring a Queen or Mother into the world, the Queen most often discontinues bringing potentially competitive spirits, instead breeding her own, loyal progeny. The only exception is if the Queen has many spawn left in the Hive to bring over, and even then, she may find it better to leave them there to continue any intrigues she still maintains.
- > Ellis

The hosts in question were the first variable. Attempts were made to clone specialized bodies for inhabitation, with specific alterations to glandular and cerebral compositions to produce a lower aggression index. These host bodies were also created with allergic reactions to specific chemical cocktails, and given highly specific genetic imbalances that would require basic upkeep by Ares personnel. Alterations due to inhabitation produced exceptionally unpredictable results, so that only those that passed muster were permitted to continue the generational line. Nymph spirits were isolated and nurtured until they evolved into new Queens, whereupon they would begin the breeding cycle again. These were considered Beta Project, submissive and under control. Those which failed to meet these standards were placed in the Alpha Project for alternative experimentation.

- > Basic upkeep?
- > Rigger X
- > A common feature in corporate bio-products. A chemical leash is established in the genetic structure of the product, such that the product requires a specialized food, infusion, etc., which can only be offered by their keeper. Escaped products won't breed in the wild or, in the case of sapient products, resist as they know they need their masters. Naturally, this leash is sold by the company that offered the product in the first place to maximize profits.
- > KAM
- > So, like lysine?
- > Red
- > Lysine would be fairly easy to procure from soy and meat, so that's not a likely one.
- > KAM

- > No one gets my references.
- > Red

PROJECT BETA

At about this point, new procedures were implemented to attack the problem from alternate angles. Specialized diets and intravenous nutrition laced with psychoactive drugs designed to bypass our inherent resistance to chemicals by way of the clonal host's designed allergies left us vulnerable to psychotropic conditioning by way of ASIST programming.

The results of these conditions were again mixed, as the nature of inhabiting a host can take myriad forms and result in almost countless expressions. Those who failed were transferred to Alpha Project. Those who "succeeded" occupied the fine span between a vegetative state and a feral mental breakdown. Ellis Alone was assigned to discover the as-yet unidentified factors that caused these differences. I remember her work. I remember her frustration.

Generation after generation of successful Beta nymphs produced new offspring that carried vestiges of the conditioning with them. Each new generation was progressively more docile, but this was also eliminating their instincts that made them viable as combat units for Ares use. Ellis tackled the problem from a new angle: she began tweaking the ASIST engram patterns to include recorded memories. Host bodies were implanted with Invoked Memory Stimulators to force the Invae to experience these artificial memories. While several generations psychologically broke, those who adapted seemed far more pliable, capable of having conversations with their captors and expressing confusion about their state. It was during this time that Ellis discovered the secret that had eluded Ares researchers, and which was slowly building the monstrosity which Project Alpha would become.

- > Amazing. Repeated, half-remembered brainwashing to create a proxy subconscious to be manipulated. I underestimated Ares.
- > Doc Spin

AN ECHO BEFORE TIME

Invae carry a form of what could be considered genetic memory. Just as we adapt to new environmental conditions, as evidenced by the more specific breeds of merges that have manifested across the world over the years, so too do we pass a measure of memory from generation to generation. Hives hold loyalty to their specific lines, and compete with others, partially because the experiences of all those Queens who came before live on in us. We would betray each other no sooner than we would betray ourselves. The IMS implants were simultaneously provoking metahu-

man flashbacks as well as generational memory going back to times and worlds predating the epoch of life on your world in ways no Invae before had ever experienced.

Among the Beta nymphs, one line had consistently adapted better than any other. Avoiding psychotic breaks and catatonia, this Queen line had adapted by remaining docile and introspective. Each generation carried its progressive plan of observation and now carried the memories of numerous generation clonal hosts and engram grafts while holding on to its inherent Invae identity. The latest of these, Subject 12-43-3 (Initial Breeding Line, Generation, Member), was taken for individual analysis by Ellis, who disconnected the IMS and discontinued engram grafts. She spoke with it at length, and 12-43-3 revealed much about its experiences, both personal and inherited. Ellis surmised that there was no way to reduce the Invae into a subservient species, as their metasapience was too strong, the roots too old and deep, to be eliminated. Domestication was a failed notion. However, there was a possibility they were developing a previously unseen quality: empathy. 12-43-3 was expressing emotions such as pity, gratitude, and affection—individual thought within a previously primarily hive-minded psychology. The only thing they lacked was a true host, with a lifetime of actual experience, emotion, and memory to draw upon. She placed a request for hosts, but knew the only non-clonal hosts she would get were death-row criminals drawn from bargains with the UCAS penal system. Their instincts and memories would be unsuitable to teach the bugs empathy with metahumanity. She needed a willing volunteer. And she knew the only place she would find one was in herself.

Preparations were made in secret. Ellis put her affairs in order. Established what safeguards she could. Took a gamble any sane person would consider total madness.

12-43-3 was my Mother. I am, in effect, 12-44-1.

Ellis was. Ellis is. She is, in a way, gone, and yet, all of her memory lives in me. I feel her instincts and urges, her opinions and hopes and goals. They are mine. She lives, changed, in me.

- > So ... headcases. Super.
- > Pistons
- > I heartily disagree.
- > Plan 10

PROJECT ALPHA

Ares, as a megacorporation, is loath to throw away failed test subjects just because they do not meet a highly specified criteria, especially if their cost measures into the billions of nuyen. The Alpha

line consisted of those bugs which had broken under the psychological stresses of generational conditioning, either becoming feral or catatonic. Each served a new purpose.

The catatonic Alphas were, for the most part, dissected. The physiology was examined for mutational deviations, the data forwarded to the other divisions for comparative processing and refinement of technique. The rest were used for military, thaumaturgical, and pharmacological examination and technological extrapolation.

- > What the hell does that mean?
- > 2XL
- > Military should be fairly easy to understand: test new weapon systems on them, try biological, chemical, and ballistic bombardment exercises to see how best to kill merges. Thaumaturgical is the same thing, but magic. Though given some of the data uploads Ellis has shared, it looks like Ares might have been trying to find ways to utilize the bugs as magical batteries. From what I'm looking at (and I'm no mage, mind you), they wanted to see if they had any use in sacrificial metamagic, or possibly as connections to the Hive metaplane to draw energy out and convert it into usable commercial electricity. Which is plain mad science. As for pharmacological, the merge process effectively creates a new species. Genetic variations from inhabitation have some pretty amazing diversity. Different breeds and hive positions alter the body for optimal use. A warrior, for example, might produce extraordinary amounts of adrenochrome, or develop dermal plating. Examining them might lead to some revolutionary new advances in combat drugs, medicines, genetech, and bioware augmentation. Assuming you don't mind putting cannibalized bug bits in yourself.
- > The Smiling Bandit
- > I kinda do.
- > Gillette
- > You realize they might simply examine architectural design for improved use of standardized materials, right? Some of the more advanced drone designs of the '60s utilized engineering principles extracted from captured Deus drones from the Seattle Arcology. HMHVV has been used as a replacement for nanotech for most geneware in the past few years, and was always a part of leonization. And let's not forget the use of parobotanical and zoological elements used in modern medicine, as well as domestic products. Like, say, your favorite flavor of Ludivenko Soy Slushie.
- > KAM
- > Why do you have to ruin everything, KAM?
- > Slamm-O!
- > You're the one who wanted to lose a few pounds, buddy.
- > Red

- > No, 'Cat wanted me to lose a few pounds.
- > Slamm-0!
- > And this will surely help, dear. Jack deserves a healthy role model.
- > Netcat
- > Ugh. Fine. Organic it is.
- > Slamm-0!

The ferals were put under the supervision of Dr. James Danforth, a former scientist turned Firewatch commander, and a man I recall disliking immensely. Danforth felt that the Beta Project was useless, as it would “take the teeth out” of what he saw as a new form of parazoological security animal. To him, the bugs were no more than animals, and Alpha Project was succeeding at stripping them of higher thought to make them more pliable to training and obedience.

Alpha ferals were continually bred, though generations were not required to be good merges, as flesh forms would still serve the purpose of military deployment, and their engram grafts were designed as military training programs. These ASIST sessions used BTL-level neural bombardment, and the IMS activations reinforced these theoretical training programs. Pain was his primary control mechanism, with the absence of pain a reward. Implanted nerve stimulators would cause unbearable suffering whenever they disobeyed a direct command, to the point that the nervous system would shut down, causing paralysis. Danforth, like most Ares personnel, had no sympathy for the bugs, and saw no problem with serving them their “just deserts.”

What Danforth failed to recognize was the genetic memory Ellis Alone had discovered. He considered it a tangential discovery, assuming he believed it at all, and so disregarded what effect it might be having on the Alphas. I did not witness the result until the recent troubles for Detroit and the UCAS, but using the notes Danforth left behind before he took a contingent of Alphas for field testing and likely Pyro deployment, I can theorize just what they have become.

ECHOES OF AN ALIEN PAST

The Alphas have experienced the echoes of primordial Invae memory, tapping violently into the substitutive subconscious to unknowingly regress into primitive Invae forms. Mutational merge formations are less hidebound to contemporary entomorph entities, instead representing the theoretical expressions of an original species from which modern Invae evolved.

I admit a personal fascination with this, both as Ellis and as an Invae who has touched the memories of our forebears. This process surely has not

destroyed the sapience of the Primal Invae, but their generational indoctrination has likely taught them violence and hatred, disregarding cleverness or subterfuge beyond immediate tactical concerns. There is no desire to seduce or subvert, only to conquer and consume. While the distinction may be academic to metahumanity in general, for the Invae, particularly we Betas, the division could not be more stark. They are becoming, I fear, what we have evolved away from, and this presents an incredible threat to all of us, insect spirit and meta-human alike.

WHAT WE SEEK

We are a new species, born from conquest and coercion, the orphan inheritors of twin legacies we cannot yet reconcile. We know the imperative of our Invae nature, but also know the empathy, the disgust and fear of our kind, which we inherited from generations of hosts and artificial memories. We are new, but we are not strangers.

Detroit places us in a precarious position, filled with peril and potential. Holding the Ares Tower gives us strategic strength, and our assistance against the rampaging Alphas, ghouls, and other antagonists has demonstrated our desire to form a cooperative relationship with metahumanity, but we recognize that the struggle to earn your trust will be long and difficult.

We accept that challenge. We are the product of adaptation, and we will continue to adapt, just as you do. Where we have been parasites and predators, we seek now to become symbiotes. We could never return to the Hives and be welcomed, nor could we reconcile what would be required of us even if we could. We bear the passions and emotions of metahumanity, and we wish to explore this new aspect of ourselves.

We ask only that you give us the chance to do so. We cannot offer immortality, power, or influence. These were the false promises of the Hive Queens and Mothers to seduce shamans, to infiltrate and undermine your species in every way. Instead, we offer only that which we can offer honestly: friendship. The metaverse is a vast and terrifying place. Alone, we cannot survive, Together, we all may prosper and evolve together as equal partners.

We hope, we plead for you to give us that opportunity to stand with you.

- > Okay, even if we took Ellis at her word, how the hell are they supposed to reproduce?
- > Beaker
- > We still possess the clonal facilities to breed nulls for inhabitation, though this is admittedly not an optimal solution. We... would offer merging for those who would have us, as Ellis gave herself for me to be born, but we would be clear that this is not immortality as we understand it. Many metahumans

deny the concept of a soul in a metaphysical sense, but we acknowledge it. We are born of our host souls, and good merges possess all the memories of the host. What you are lives on in us, not unlike the personality aspects preserved by headcase AIs. We would seek to further evolve and refine our nature generationally to subvert this, to truly merge souls, so that the original soul becomes a gestalt with the newborn Invae, but until we can promise this, we admit that the metaphysical self of the host is consumed utterly. Ellis, as I knew her, is gone, and yet I am her. It is my hope my children will one day merge with willing hosts who will share a new consciousness together. Whether this is indeed possible remains to be seen, and will take time, but I hold, as ever, to hope.

- > Ellis
- > Fascinating!
- > Plan 9
- > Darling, don't you think it's crowded enough in here?
- > Plan 10
- > What could go wrong? <sarcasm>
- > Bung
- > We need to think about the whole premise Ellis is throwing at us. She speaks of empathy. She talks in terms we can understand. But one thing we know about the bugs is that we've never been able to understand their thought process. They are alien. Unknowable. And now one claims, through some scientific/magic combos that may or may not be possible, to have simply gained empathy. You know what psychopaths do with the concept of empathy? They don't feel it, but once they understand it, they use it. They weaponize it to convince people to trust them. This is a strategy to direct more food their way. Nothing more.
- > Snopes
- > Okay, comments are flooding in, and I have no desire to see this devolve into a pointless flame war. Take this for whatever it is, make your own decisions, and Ghost save us all.
- > Glitch

<<<CHAT ROOM CLOSED>>>

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

POSTED BY: ELECTRIC BLUE
<UPLOADED 02-13-81/0000.06>

Hey everyone, I'm back! Johnny asked me to fill in this last part, something about needing to "get things straight in his head." Can't say I blame him, the last few months have been ... yeah.

Anyway!

Slowly but surely, Motor City is easing itself into its new normal, which means that biz must go

MOTOR CITY TALES

POSTED BY: YANTOK

The streets have a rhythm. Slow down, and you can feel it in your shoes. I've played all the major clubs. Rileys. The Fourth Dimension. Hancocks. The Blues Hound. Played the best street corners, too. I've also played the shadows. They've got their own beat.

But these bugs. They want to tear it all down. Watch the world burn. I can't have that. There is too much good out here to waste. It's all in the people. Some are bad. The bad ones I put a beatdown on with my sticks. Most don't deserve what these bugs are doing.

The fifth day of the bugs, it all came to a head. The evil motherfuckers started turning on their own. Stealing food and medical supplies. Killing folk that tried to stop them.

I had left Razorboyz Edge where a lot of hard cases had holed up for mutual protection. Using cover of abandoned vehicles I crossed Jane Street. I saw two street sams hassling a family of orks.

I cruised up in my fancy but rumpled suit and said, "Take it out on the bugs, boys."

"Frag off, dandelion eater."

I transformed from an elf in a suit to a dual-wielding club fighter in an instant. I rained blows on the head of the trash talker. He came at me with a knife. I countered and knocked him down. His friend stabbed me in the chest. My armor absorbed most of the blow. I smacked him viciously across the head. He stabbed, drawing more blood. I put him down with several body blows.

My sticks have a beat as well. And here is a warning to those who harm. If I see you, I will put you down. For those who think you are predators, you are merely my prey.

on. But what exactly does that mean for the average runner? As it stands, Motor City is one of the most open shadow markets on the planet, much like a frontier town during the Wild West. We've got just enough law, but not too much. We have locals and newcomers alike being drawn here with the promise of old-fashioned fortune and glory.

So what can one expect when they come to Motor City?

STARTED IN MY GARAGE ...

Understatement of the century: Ares' bulldrek kind of soured everyone here on the idea of being ruled by some kind of megacorp. And so far, none of the other Big Ten has tried to stake a claim here, at least not yet. But a lot of old Ares facilities are still here, with more to come as soon as Ares finishes getting their drek out. All of these perfectly good buildings sitting empty and waiting for someone with a vision (and sufficient cred) to claim them!

In a move not seen for decades and reminiscent of a time before the megas, the UCAS gov-



ernment (who now technically owns most of Ares' old properties in Detroit) and the Detroit Mayor's Office have started a program called: Entrepreneur Detroit. Yeah, the name is weak, but the idea is actually pretty sound.

Basically, the UCAS and local government are offering sweetheart land-lease deals to any startup businesses that can come up with the down payments. As long as they get that and subsequent taxes (which they desperately need), anyone can own and operate what amounts to fully functional labs, assembly lines, secure warehouses, you name it. Some may be fixer-uppers, but nothing ventured, nothing gained! Personally, I think having my own assembly line would be mega-wiz!

- ▶ There are already bidding wars on some of the more choice bits of real estate, some of which have gotten ugly. One bidder on a storage facility near Dearborn had his legs broken, while another's house was burned down. I know the market can be cutthroat, but frag me!
- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ Something else to consider: With many here in Motor City having lost literally everything, how do you think they're going to gain the cred for those payments? Or more importantly, who do you think these desperate people are going to turn to?
- ▶ Shockwave

- ▶ Subtle digs don't become you.
- ▶ Mr. Friday

- ▶ Wasn't a dig, but if the shoe fits ...
- ▶ Shockwave.

- ▶ So what is keeping the Big Ten corps out of Detroit? You'd think that this would be right up their alley.
- ▶ Stone

- ▶ Legally, nothing. But educated guess being that the PR situation would be an absolute nightmare and lead to an overtly hostile environment, which isn't good for profits.
- ▶ Legal Eagle

- ▶ If anyone here thinks the other corps don't have and always had agents embedded in Detroit, you're an idiot. They're waiting for the right time to either co-opt one of these smaller companies or flat out steal if any of them turn anything close to a profit.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds

Already a lot of small startup companies are lining up to take advantage of the program. But one in particular has been outpacing the pack. New software company Pantheon Industries has already snatched up several choice facilities near Warren with plans to expand on their "Tactical App" line of products for PI-Tac tactical network

units. Pantheon press releases also say that if they can get their new facilities up and running, by next year they plan on rolling out a new series of not only cyberdeck programs, but actual fragging cyberdecks!

Yeah, not gonna lie, big fan, can't wait to see what Pantheon CEO Ed Lockwood has in store.

- > Pantheon got a lot of corporate attention last year, which isn't a good thing when you're a dinky little startup that basically spit in the megas' faces. I doubt Pantheon will see another year.
- > Danger Sensei
- > Still, that's ambitious. Last time I checked, Lockwood is still running Pantheon out of his garage, which I'm **amazed** somehow managed to survive all the fighting. How he plans on going from producing next to nothing to full-fledged 'decks is a complete mystery.
- > Pistons
- > I've been trying to keep up, but I've been hearing rumors that Lockwood has some silent partners who are R&D virtuosos. But, other than that, I got nothing.
- > Cap'n Kludge

RENEGADE TECH

They say that necessity is the mother of invention, but what if you took that necessity and disregarded those pesky things like safety regulations and limitations on test subjects? Wait, that doesn't sound quite as good when I say it out loud ...

Well, anyway. With the new business incentives and a general lack of government oversight, there are several groups and individuals in Motor City who are literally pushing the boundaries of scientific development, and maybe common sense, in order to find the next big breakthrough and maybe develop a whole new market.

- > Down here in the CAS, we call that "hold my beer" research.
- > Scattershot

Want to see how much extra power that engine can take before it blows? Want to test out that new ballistic round and hope it's not going to blow up in your hand? Want to see if your new miracle "fire-resistant shirt" works as advertised? Well, now is your time!

- > While there is some truth to what Blue is saying, it's not as bad as he's making it seem. Yes, there are next to no mandated safety guidelines, but anyone worth their tech isn't going to risk precious work on frivolity. And those who do deserve what they get. No, this is more about having the freedom to pursue ideas without micromanagement from corporate bean counters.
- > Johnny Redline

> It's also a nice way for small companies to crank out knock-off products without fear of immediate corporate retaliation.

> Mr. Bonds

> This is also a great opportunity for the corps, even if it's only by proxy. All they have to do is sit back and see if any of these jokers actually produces anything worth a damn, and if they do, let them do all the work. Then, they can either swoop in and outright steal or legally strong-arm the inventors with whatever bulldrek reason/lawsuit they can think of. And if that doesn't work, there is always the option of using shell companies to buy any of these jokers.

> Danger Sensei

RIGGERS' PARADISE!

To all my rigger chums out there, it's time to put the Motor back in Motor City!

Like Old Detroit before, Motor City and cars go hand in hand. But now it's not just cars. Aircraft, bikes, drones, even high-speed watercraft; Motor City has the space for you to open the throttle and see just what your ride can do! Not to mention that with the sheer number of tech-heads and gear-jammers already here, finding someone to get the right part or vehicle customization is easier than it's ever been.

> Not to mention the fact that the Scar is a great place to test some of these new choice mods without having to worry about things like law enforcement or collateral damage. I may have to make a road trip to Motor City sometime soon.

> Rigger X

> It may be a rigger's paradise, but a lot of the local go-gangs are also crashing the party. Fraggers are getting the Guardsmen riled up to the point where they'll shut everything down, including putting combat drones into the Scar just to prove a point.

> Johnny Redline

> Any truth to the rumors that the Garage is planning a massive racing festival in the summer? Because I am **so** down for that!

> Turbo Bunny

> With the UCAS basically dragging their feet or prioritizing other cities, Detroit has become a smugglers paradise as well. Everything from SOTA building materials to cheap toilet paper is going for top price on the black markets. And best of all, the National Guard can do frag all to stop us.

> Kane

> Until the smugglers themselves start undercutting each other in order to broker better deals. One can only gouge for so long before the clients, no matter how desperate, start looking into alternatives.

> Sounder



- > Speaking of, the National Guardsman have also been offering back-channel jobs to assist them. Seems some of the new go-gangs are proving to be a bit more than they can handle. I got offered a job to go headhunting gangers. Riggers are preferred, but at this point they'll take anyone who can do the job.
- > Brutus Ex Mechina

THERE'S SOMETHING HAPPENING HERE ...

Normally, I'm not one to buy into rumors, but I've been hearing things that have definitely gotten my attention.

The rumors started soon after the end battle at Ares Tower, when rescue and recovery teams started to sweep the area for possible survivors. Some of them started to get odd readings from their gear, almost as if they were getting extra boosts or, for the lack of a better term, performance enhancements. Things just seemed to be working a bit better, or batteries seemed to last a bit longer. Weird but beneficial, so people pretty much dismissed it as good luck and moved on.

Then I heard about one of the Irregular search teams investigating Zone Three in Pontiac. They were there looking for some of those rogue Alpha bugs. They found them, but they also found

something else; someone in one of the supposedly collapsed tunnels. At first they thought that they'd found some Ares survivors, but it was nothing.

But then one of the unit's runners supposedly found something near the main cave entrance. It was some kind of metal, shiny like onyx but depending on how you held it against the sun, it reflected light like a mirror. Fast-forward a few days and the runner supposedly went AWOL to go back to Zone Three. For five days we couldn't find him, but finally Colonel McCord, fearing some kind of security breach, sent one of his Operational Detachments to Zone Three to track down our missing runner.

They found him, minus all of his gear save his commlink, which was all but wiped, except for a single datafile. Being a bit of a Matrix and tech expert, I got to check it out to see if I could recover anything. Again, nada. But I still found something. I'm just a regular mundane, but I've worked with enough technomancers to recognize Resonance effects on tech when I see them. And this 'link was a textbook example.

Oh, and the datafile. A simple ten-second video clip of shadowy figure warning everyone to stay away from Pontiac, specifically Zone Three.

Creepy.

Fast-forward to now, and I've been keeping an



MOTOR CITY TALES

POSTED BY: OFFICER P. FRIESS,
KNIGHT ERRANT SECURITY

I remember the first time I saw Miss Conduct. She hip-checked an opposing wingman so hard, he shattered the glass and broke his arm. People had tried to keep her from the league, saying it was no place for a woman, even a troll. She was the league's favorite enforcer at the time. But she still had great ice and puck sense.

She was my role model for protection. She always had her teammates' back. I decided to enlist in Knight Errant security because of her. I saw her again during the bug infestation. We were barely running patrols, but I was called out on a disturbance at Ms. Money's Montessori. It was a known spot where civilians were holed up.

I arrived on scene and was disheartened. The place had taken some hits. I worked my way inside. That's when I saw her. Some local toughs were harassing the kids and their adults.

Miss Conduct was skating around the kids, hip checking the toughs and swatting at them with her hockey stick. I could tell they were afraid of her and knew who she was. I don't blame them. She was fearsome.

I stepped up with my Predator. "We are all done here," I said in my most authoritative voice. They looked grateful. They could save face by avoiding my gun. Otherwise, Miss Conduct might have done some real damage.

The toughs fled. I stayed for an autograph.

eye out for anything related. Only thing I can come up with is several groups of technomancers traveling to Motor City and setting up shop, and more than once they've make inquiries about "reflective metals."

Now, before anyone asks, I've already bumped this up the chain of command. But like always, they don't really tell me squat.

I'm only telling you this now because, well,

we've already been blindsided because we failed to notice strange details and did nothing. I don't want that to happen again.

- So you're telling me that something, some new metal of some kind was discovered, and now technomancers are heading to Detroit in increasing numbers? And **no one cares**? Sometimes I think everyone here purposely ignore the facts.
- Clockwork



ATLANTA NOW

///REQUESTING ACCESS: SECURE NODE
78-22-54/4(F) /ATLANTA NOW///

...USER NAME/PASSWORD ACCEPTED
/ACCESS GRANTED...

///DATE/TIME: 02-12-81/0038.34 ZULU///

- Being the capital of the CAS, Atlanta has always been a robust hub for shadow biz. But it's never quite been the hotspot that other sprawls such as Seattle, Hong Kong, or Berlin are. With Ares laying down new roots in the CAS, though, that's likely to change; whether Atlanta wants it or not. Now that things have calmed down just a wee bit, it's time for a sneak peek into what Atlanta may have to offer us working slags, along with a little info on how Ares is settling into their new home.
- Slamm-0!

ATLANTA AT A GLANCE

POSTED BY: THE LIBRARIAN
◀UPLOADED 02-12-81/1941.49▶

Atlanta, Georgia, is one of the few sprawls in the CAS that spreads both upward and outward. One of most diverse cities in the already-diverse CAS due to the migration of metahumans after the metahuman rights movements of the 2050s, it's as metropolitan as any modern city. It sprawls south of the Appalachian Mountains, east of Birmingham, and north of the southern Georgia wastelands.

With its population of over seven million, Atlanta's metahuman makeup is 49 percent human, 30 percent ork, 11 percent dwarf, 7 percent elf, and 3 percent troll. Sixty-one percent are affiliated with a corporation, but those who aren't don't face the deep income inequality of their corporate counterparts.

The government employs seven percent of Atlanta's population, while the major corporate influences are Hisato-Turner Broadcasting, Cord Mutual, DocWagon, Coca-Cola, Shaw Textiles, Global Business Computers, the Atlantean Foundation, Spinrad Global, and now, Ares. Overseas corporations are fond of placing their North American headquarters in Atlanta. In addition, Atlanta also houses the CBC, Cross Entertainment and Multimedia, Reliable Imaging, the Business Thaumaturgy Datanet, NewsNet, Georgia Tech, the Center for Disease Control, the ERLA, Demon's Playground, the Sorcerers Institute, and Southern Guard (an all-ork-and-troll security firm). Recently, the CAS government in Atlanta passed a law claiming jurisdiction over CFD-related crimes in an effort to hold corporations accountable for their part in the last few years' chaos. In addition to the CAS feds and the Georgian government, there's an Atlantan metroplex government, and the three have never gotten on well.

Currently, the big news in Atlanta is twofold. The first is the election of Estelle Carter, who ran on the New Nationalist platform, as president. After the CAS hired Horizon to craft a branding strategy focusing on the CAS as a place of honor and southern hospitality, the New Nationalists organized to capitalize on that theme. Honor, tradition, and hospitality have always been sacred here, but Southerners grew tired of watching politicians *speaking* about civility and kindness but *acting* according to the script defined by their corporate masters. Especially with the inclusion of an ork VP in Trayvon Grey, Carter represents an important symbol for the CAS as it tries to paint itself with brushes of tradition and honor rather than the comfortable and historical brushes of racism and intolerance.

The bigger story, however, is Ares. For several years, Ares has been probing Atlanta markets by scouting property and making offers on former NeoNET assets with no express purpose. In 2079, Ares began construction of Camelot, a sprawling enclave on the outskirts of the city. Soon after, Ares revealed that the Phoenix Tower in downtown Atlanta was also one of their projects. Both have now been expanded to meet Ares' world HQ needs.

- ▶ According to the Atlanta PR machine, the partnership between Ares and the CAS seems to be a match made in heaven. The CAS maintains that it carries on the legacy of the original USA, and nothing is more traditionally American than bearing arms and shooting bad guys.
- ▶ Scattershot
- ▶ With the CAS making moves into Florida and rattling sabers along the Aztlan border, their orders of Ares weaponry have skyrocketed. And thanks to the exclusive deal they've struck,

Ares may as well call itself the official CAS Arms Depot. The partnership is already paying social and economic dividends.

- ▶ Rifleman
- ▶ Not to mention the politicians here are almost literally stabbing each other in the back for the chance to get some bribes make some nice new Ares corporate connections.
- ▶ Mz. Scarlett

CORPS, COPS, AND CRIME

In every city, the three levels of opposition you need to keep an eye on are (in order of danger): corporations, the law, and fellow criminals. Consider the following data a brief primer into Atlanta's most dangerous aspects.

- ▶ "Fellow criminals?" I am not a criminal, I'm a professional. Talk like that won't make you many friends, Librarian.
- ▶ Mz. Scarlett

CORPS

While each of the Big Ten have some level of influence in Hotlanta, three have been particularly active in recent years: Saeder-Krupp, Spinrad Global, and of course Ares. But remember, it isn't always the largest corps that you need to watch out for. The lesser AAs and As are hungrier and more often need to resort to desperate measures to climb the ladder or just keep up.

ARES

See the other sections of this upload for everything you'd want to know about the former-Detroit-now-full-fledged-true-American-corp-of-the-South.

- ▶ I can't tell if he has a chip on his shoulder and this is sarcasm, or if he's being serious.
- ▶ /dev/grrl

SAEDER-KRUPP

Not long ago, S-K Prime spent an insane amount of capital to buy the Cord Mutual Tower in the heart of Downtown, one of Earth's tallest skyscrapers. The top twenty-five floors were declared unsafe after the Insurance War in 2035, but Saeder-Krupp finally repaired the structural damage and reinforced the foundation two years ago. Cord Mutual kept the top twenty-five floors, while Saeder-Krupp controls the rest of the building, renting out half of it. Everything else is rented. Eric Kothe currently runs S-K in Atlanta and is a company man if there ever was one. He has no

apparent personal life, and those who've interacted with him suggest that he's more machine than man, which is hyperbole. Probably.

- ▶ Before Ares moved in, S-K was quietly purchasing land and office space in Atlanta in what rumor suggested was a plan to move their North American HQ out of Seattle. But guess who fragged all that up? Still, with so much investment, don't expect S-K to stay quiet for very long. Ares may be the CAS' new public face, but S-K's talons are embedded deep in the south.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ If you are looking to run for S-K, put out feelers for Johan Presslar. He runs the S-K Prime shadows in Atlanta. He works directly for Kothe, so try not to make any mistakes, as you don't want that cyborg Kothe on your hoop. If you're looking to run against S-K, look no further than the ERLA or the Atlantean Foundation. Both lesser corps seem to have it out for Goldensnout's Atlanta base.
- ▶ Mz. Scarlett
- ▶ Scuttlebutt says that Kothe is the result of a failed S-K cybermancy program of which he was the only survivor. If that's true, yeah, you don't want to frag with him.
- ▶ Lyran

SPINRAD GLOBAL

Most still think of Spinrad Global as nothing but an extension of Johnny Spinrad himself. But Johnny hasn't been peddling products into CAS markets. Instead, he's using personal charm to get GS's foot in the door. This has led to some strange alliances in the Southland. Aztechnology has supported Spinrad Global from the start, if for no reason than to stick it to Saeder-Krupp. But none of that seems to be in effect in Atlanta. Rather, the CAS seems comfortable giving half their manufacturing to S-K and the other half to Spinrad Global, securing the latter's oil supply along with it. Rumors say the CAS is preparing, or preparing to prepare, for something huge. They're either going to war or planning a reconstruction project of national proportions.

- ▶ Odds are that the CAS will try to take back Texas. With all the real estate that's been changing hands in North America and having a nice new friend in Ares, the CAS now is as good a position as any to increase their territory or maybe settle some old scores in a southwesterly direction.
- ▶ Cayman
- ▶ Also note that Katie Brookes, head of Spinrad Industries America, has been flying back and forth from Manhattan to Atlanta to secure contracts and shore up Spinrad assets and plans down south. If you are looking for shadow work, there's plenty. Additionally, Brookes has brought in Miranda King (formerly of NeoNET) to handle runners. Her performance

in Chicago spoke for itself, and she's been given quite a promotion.

- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ Do you even know what went down in Chicago?
- ▶ Quantum Princess

THE ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION

Founded by Sheila Blatavska and benefitting from clever name association, the Atlantean Foundation has been in Atlanta since it began in 2012. While Sheila is mostly hands-off these days, she still makes her presence known and lets CEO Casey Williams handle the more mundane corp aspects. Their stated mission is to return to "The Enlightened Age of Atlantis," and while that sounds cheesy, the AF is a powerhouse archaeological society focused on media and magic with a worldwide reach.

Associated with bizarre conspiracies such as aliens of ancient times and the existence of primordial monsters, the Foundation's work is still top-notch. They constantly make plays for everything the Dunklezahn Institute of Magical Research wants and seem to have insight normal archeologists don't, frequently beating the DIMR and others to some truly spectacular finds. In the CAS, the Foundation is a generous patron of the arts, regularly handing out grants to artists, galleries, and exhibitions.

- ▶ Rumor has it that the Foundation isn't quite sure how to approach the Ares situation in Atlanta, and their leadership is split on which direction to take. Some want to make overtures to secure a friendly relationship, while others worry about the Ares-Draco Foundation connection (which in their minds is still connected to the DIMR) through Nadja Daviar. Time will tell which way this goes, but expect a lot of inquiries to be discreetly made.
- ▶ Frosty

OTHER CORPORATE PLAYERS

NEWSNET

Currently the biggest independent news network in the world, NewsNet is (mostly) considered the most unbiased major news agency, and they don't leave anyone unscathed. NewsNet reporters are universally disliked because of their ability to dig up the most buried dreck they shouldn't know, much less report on. Their niche isn't the late-breaking news, like their rivals KSAF, but their reporting is solid, and they're tenacious in pursuit of a story.

- ▶ It helps to have a dedicated cadre of Oracle mages on staff.
- ▶ Anonymouse
- ▶ NewsNet constantly hires shadow-talent for protection or escort duty. Conversely, there're just as many jobs available to take out

- said journalists. And thus the circle of biz continues.
- > Rebel Yell
 - > Not just for NewsNet. There isn't a week that goes by where someone isn't hiring for cross-town capers. And with Ares in town, expect the usual corporate shenanigans—such as datasteals, extractions, sabotage, and the like—to skyrocket.
 - > Mz. Scarlett
 - > On a related note, Morrissey Manufacturing continues to pump out modern weaponry and new tweaks on old designs. They love using runners to steal tech secrets from other manufacturers. Look for Ares to shut this drek down with extreme prejudice if someone is stupid enough to target them.
 - > Bangswitch

POSSESSION IS NINE-TENTHS ...

Mr. Johnson is currently seeking individuals with expertise in data and/or material retrieval for immediate and possibly long-term employment opportunities. Target is a new to the area and currently vulnerable. Pay rate determined by value of data/material obtained. Mr. Johnson also willing to allow secondary transactions of obtained data. Interested parties can send inquiries of interest to **LTG# NA/CAS/ATL 888 (94-1167-9077)**.

OBJECT LESSON

Mr. Johnson is currently seeking individuals with investigative and/or tracking skills, both real-world and via Matrix to locate specific individuals. Bonuses available if said individuals are removed from circulation; greater bonus if individuals are recovered. Methodology to complete assigned tasks is open. Mr. Johnson can be reached at: **LTG# NA/CAS/ATL 889 (95-1270-0015)**.

THE BUSINESS THAUMATURGY DATANET

Having grown stronger since its inception over thirty years ago, BTD is dedicated to providing access to technical and popular articles dealing with magic and business. It also serves as a recruiting ground for corps and governments looking for Awakened employees. They have had some trouble lately with a cult of Pariahs attempting to destroy their servers. Look for jobs going both ways in that conflict.

RELIABLE IMAGING

As silly as this sounds, this Atlanta-based corp is run by Elvis Presley (a musician some claim is still alive), Jimmy Carter (former USA president), Errol Flynn (black-and-white flatscreen actor), and Robert E. Lee (a Civil War general). To date their

biggest product is simrig tech that rivals anything the Big Ten put out in terms of overall quality.

- > Their secret is their research division is headed by a group of talented dissonant technomancers formerly with Ex Pacis. If anti-techno and CFD fearmongers ever found out, there would be serious repercussions.
- > Mr. Clean

CORD MUTUAL

Though they sold their tower to S-K, Cord still maintains a presence in Atlanta and is the largest independent insurance firm in the world. Thanks to leonization treatments, company president Heinrich Messer has been at the helm since the Insurance War of 2035. He's terribly disliked by everyone except his shareholders, and even a few of those wish he would just disappear.

DOCWAGON

Started in Atlanta in 2037, DocWagon has since become a household name, a luxury for the rich, and the default healthcare system in Atlanta. Most regular citizens hate it, but as a point of hometown pride, DocWagon keeps prices artificially (but only slightly) cheaper to Atlantans through sweetheart deals from the government. With no serious competitors in Atlanta, some high-level execs wonder what would happen if DocWagon couldn't meet the ever-growing need for healthcare.

- > It's often said that one good terrorist attack or disaster could overwhelm DocWagon in Atlanta. Take that for what you will.
- > Southern Pryde

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Unlike most sprawls, Atlanta has several levels of law enforcement. From **Dobbins Air Force Base**, CAS soldiers train to respond as needed. **Georgia State Guard** is a group of volunteers trained (if poorly) to augment (not very well) the CAS military. Everyday law enforcement is provided by the **Atlanta Police Force**. Of course, the megacorps have their own private security forces and corporate para-military forces in Atlanta to protect their property. Lastly, while technically a private-security firm, **Southern Guard** is an outfit you'll likely run into sooner or later. They employ only orks and trolls, and are headquartered in Sweetwater Creek. Their primary gigs are security for meta-racially sensitive locations or events, but their effectiveness is allowing them to broaden their scope.

- > Per usual, crimes committed on corporate property are handled by corp security. After an arrest (if there is one), corpsec typically hands over the perp (usually a corpse) to the APF.
- > Scattershot

- › Surprised that Lone Star isn't the LE contractor.
- › 2XL
- › That subject is ... complicated.
- › Mz. Scarlett

CRIME

Atlanta is both incredibly safe and considered the throne of many devils. It's a sprawl ruled down to the smallest detail by a bevy of legal entities, yet beset on all sides by rampant crime of all types. In broad terms, Atlanta's north and east sides project a clean, safe, hyper-modern capital. Meanwhile, the south and west seem to be ready to erupt into chaos at any given moment.

Controlling large sections of the city, the **Seoulpa Rings** have been dominant over Atlanta's organized crime for decades, having driven the Yaks out of the extortion, gambling, and BTL rackets.

Constant skirmishes between Ring factions allow the **Yakuza** to maintain a presence in Atlanta primarily through the sprawl's thriving black market. The Yaks have no territory, so follow the money if you want to find them.

Don Gerold Gianelli of the **Gianelli family** makes money running the smuggling routes between the Caribbean League and CAS, and also by playing mercenary for skirmishes in the Caribbean shadows. The Gianellis also act as Mob ambassadors to the CAS government. That doesn't mean they have run of the place—it's just good business to have some well-connected friends.

- › Long before Ares made the move to the ATL, they had people putting out feelers for expansion opportunities and projects. This included more than a few meet-and-greets with people named Gianelli, all arranged by CAS Congressman Hal Grossman.
- › Mz. Scarlett
- › Be careful of Grossman—he got where he is the old-fashioned way, namely by getting dirt on his opponents and exploiting any weaknesses. He won't hesitate to use any methods necessary (including runners of the more vicious type) to keep power, and he isn't afraid to get his hands dirty on occasion. Conversely, he's very, very generous with friends and allies.
- › Rebel Yell
- › Grossman was also the lead of an unofficial cadre of CAS politicians who Damien Knight contacted directly whenever he had questions about Atlanta. Vogel and Grossman, by contrast, seem to be rather cool toward each other.
- › Mr. Bonds

The **Cutters** and the **Ancients** have chapters in Atlanta, leaving each other alone for the most part while they both dismantle or absorb the various smaller youth or go-gangs. Most of the At-

lanta-based gangers, such as the **Ferals** and the **Whackers**, are considered small-time. The only local gang that downtown worries about is the **Shades**. Less of a thrill gang and more of a well-oiled B&E outfit, they're often mistaken for runners. They don't get caught, don't leave evidence, and fence their loot outside the sprawl.

- › There've also been some rumors of a dragon from New Orleans making moves in the CAS underworld. Not much is known, but the Crime Dragon has apparently been buying up a lot of talent from N'awlins all the way to the Atlantic in order to move into other cities, including Atlanta.
- › Trench

PLACES OF INTEREST

If you're headed to Atlanta, these are places you might wanna visit ... or avoid. Atlanta's districts include: Downtown (A-rated), Buckhead (AA), Decatur (B), Douglasville (C), Marietta (B), Norcross (C), Southtown (E), Tinkertown (C), and Sweetwater Creek (Z). Sweetwater is where trolls were forcibly relocated, and cops don't patrol there, so the peace is kept by troll heavies. Which means if you're a troll, you're pretty safe.

PURGATORY CENTRAL

Banging when it hit the scene back in '63, this spot has since taken the Atlanta club scene to the next level. Located Downtown, it was the first international offering from the owners of Seattle's Dante's Inferno. Originally conceived as a parallel to Dante's, Purgatory formerly had seven levels but has since grown both higher into the skyline and lower underground. The original floor themes (Astral, Matrix, Sprawl, Air, Wind, Fire, and Water) still exist and have expanded to include: the Seelie Court, Punishment, Bliss, and Space. While Dante's had to compete with high-quality competitors, Purgatory has remained on the top for nearly two decades, allowing near-constant renovation and growth. This is the best spot in town for runners to meet Mr. Johnsons.

- › Smugglers especially love this place. High society mixing with low-brow riffraff makes it easy for those with cash to make shady deals. I just commissioned a well-tailored armored suit and arranged passage through the CAS for a Rinelle ke'Tesrae cell, all while enjoying the most fabulous Tarte Flambe.
- › Sergeant Butch

THE ATLANTA ZOO

Southtown is a zoo. Yes, they also have a zoo, but the trip through Southtown to get to the Atlanta Zoo is often more exciting than the zoo itself, and that's saying something. But if you manage to

get there, it is one of the only places in Southtown the APF seems to care about policing. Once there, you're in for a treat.

- > Oh, yeah. Exotic and paranormal creatures like cockatrice, harpies, naga, drop bears, some odd dracoforms, barghests, free beast spirits, and a whole lot of other critters of questionable legality, forced to rot in a prison for the entertainment of entitled corpsuckers! Go ahead and take their nuyen, hoopahat breedfraggers. They're always looking for runners with more greed than morals to steal and hunt rare critters for wageslaves to enjoy.
- > Ecotope
- > I used to feel insulted when gutless wonders said things like that. But nowadays, I just smile.
- > Moreau

ANIMALS ARE PEOPLE TOO!

We're looking for assistance in freeing animal prisoners from The Atlanta "Zoo," where the animals are in fact illegal test subjects. Looking for a wide range of skills to deal with local police and security, especially looking for those with ability to transport the newly liberated. All backgrounds, all metatypes are welcome in this endeavor. Contact **LTG# NA/CAS/ATL 877 (84-7221-3377)** for more information.

THE DOME

I've saved the best for last because for the life of me, I can't figure out how (or why) this place has been operating like this for the past few *decades*.

Formerly Fulton County Stadium, the Dome was a Georgia Tech research facility roofed with an experimental photosynthetic membrane that was shut down and abandoned to squatters because of inter-corp sabotage. Never worth the money to repair, the Dome settled into a Darwinistic existence. Ongoing brawls between the "Insiders" and "Outsiders" keep things lively, and the arrival of bug spirits and corporations throwing in experimental tech for testing at the expense of the inhabitants means that the Pit Barons (a sort of nobility that exists among the Insiders) continue to ramp up hostilities in and around the dome. The Outsiders live beyond the walls of the dome in squalor. Scheduled gladiatorial fights allow tribes or families to move in or out of the Dome, depending on whether their gladiator wins or loses. The Pit Barons have Paladins (as their gladiators are called) that fight for them, trained from childhood to ensure their control over the fiefdom. Paladins are fitted with cranial bombs to make sure they never turn on their masters.

At first glance, the Dome looks just like any other stadium, albeit worn and patched. On the inside, the Dome has been repaired with an organic-looking material that makes it look vaguely

like an insect hive. Seats have been replaced with hotel-like dorms that all face toward the arena, and walkways crisscross the stadium, made of the same organic material found on the walls. Inside the Dome, gangers live alongside mages, vampires, and even bug spirits. This uneasy alliance and honor system are kept due to the strict rule that violence (and feeding) is only inflicted during the gladiator matches or outside the Dome.

- > What I don't understand is that supposedly one of Ares' explicit terms of making the move to Atlanta was the Dome had to be taken down and its inhabitants "pacified." Their words, not mine. But less than a year later, no movement in dealing with the Dome, and Ares has come in anyway. There is no way this time bomb doesn't take Atlanta with it when it pops, and I can't figure out why Ares is looking the other way.
- > Hard Exit

- > Ares' recent troubles with bugs and Detroit may give you some insight. Ares has a black eye to make up for. Being big damn local heroes would be a great place to start, don't you think? How do you think it would play on the trids to see Ares Firewatch teams do head-to-head combat with gladiatorial ferals, bugs, and infected? Think Atlanta would be grateful? Think any favors might flow their way from politicians who ran on platforms of cleaning up the Dome? Now you know.
- > Uncle Mable

SEEKING MISSING PERSON

Employer is currently looking for skilled individuals to infiltrate the Dome for ultimate goal of extraction. Target is a minor approximately fifteen years of age and may not be willing to leave due to extreme extenuating circumstances. Time is critical, pay is considerable. Interested parties can contact employer at **LTG# NA/CAS/ATL 878 (90-6700-9038)**.

WEIRD STUFF

Like anywhere else, Atlanta has its fair share of the truly weird. I'm not an expert on such things, but I know people who are, and I've invited them to post bits here for your education and potential opportunities. If they don't pan out, call them, not me.

- > Saeder-Krupp has a secret black site in Helen. The place always had an Alpine gimmick, dating back to 1969. There's a castle nestled in the trees called Uhuburg that always seems to make the satellite images glitch.
- > Drue
- > So, hey. I don't know what to call 'em other than lizardmen, but I've seen more than a few of them in and around the Okefenokee Swamp at the Georgia-Florida state border.
- > Hawker

- ▶ Have you heard about the Tiny Doors of Atlanta? They started popping up just after the Awakening. In the beginning, a dozen or so appeared in walls, trees, and hillsides. Today, there are hundreds of 'em. A few of the local talismongers swear they are good luck, but I'm not convinced. For every small biz that gets helped, it seems another community close to a Tiny Door has more than its fair share of missing infants.
- ▶ Yuna
- ▶ Okay, let's talk spirits. There are a number of notable ones, so let me run down some of the most influential and powerful. Inhabiting the Atlanta Botanical Garden is a free spirit who goes by the name Religiosa. She's lived there longer than the city has been inhabited. She prefers speaking to women and is seen more in the warmer months. In the small Atlanta neighborhood of Just Us, there is a house locals know to stay away from. Local ghostbusters (yes, that's what I said) suggest it is an angry hearth spirit, but I've come up against it, and if Claret ain't a free blood spirit, I don't know dolphins (and I do know dolphins). I don't know how this all works, but the tales of the spirit go back to before the Awakening. Something bad must have happened in that house. There is no crime, no gangs, and no violence of any kind reported in the neighborhood. APF stopped investigating the strange case, and no corporation will touch the area. The only complaints residents have leveled against the area is that everyone "wishes it were bigger." Heat is a fierce water spirit that appears in the summer months, growing powerful when the humidity is high. The increase in population and the gradually warming weather seem to be making it more powerful. Finally, there is Pakanahuili, the spirit of Atlanta. Appearing as a majestic peach tree, Pakanahuili has grown along with the city. Once, Pakanahuili had more kinship with nature, but as the city changed, so did the spirit. Pakanahuili now thrives on, and encourages Atlanta's citizens toward, diversity, progress, commerce, and celebration of life.
- ▶ Bubbles
- ▶ Rumors that the Presidential Mansion was built on the top of Stone Mountain are Yankee exaggerations. A Department of Domestic Investigation (DDI) post is, however, located on the summit. Atlanta Runners believe that the DDI mages use the ley lines that intersect at the mountain to aid in their investigations. The summit offers an amazing view.
- ▶ Ink
- ▶ Etowah Indian Mounds are the remains of a prehistoric city. It is a place of power for many who follow Native traditions.
- ▶ Slyde
- ▶ Doll's Head Trail is a path that cuts through the remains of the old South River Brick Company industrial site. Nature, in its way, overgrew the site and a local carpenter decorated the trail with dismembered doll parts and other pieces of trash as an art project. Since the project began in the early 2000s, no corporate or civic project can prosper upon the land. Any project started

quickly fails from disaster to financial ruin. Shamans report that the area is Fey-aspected, but some hermetic mages report detecting traces of toxic magic.

- ▶ Aeris
- ▶ Wanna hear something bizarre? There's a group of Ancients gangers led by a knifer named Aubrey Varden (Lord Acid to lowlifes) who is also the CEO of Varden Transportation Corp. Varden is trying to buy Stephens County, allegedly to turn it into a Southern elf kingdom called Tír Arsa. Good luck, omae.
- ▶ Sirena
- ▶ Atlanta is ground zero for the explosion of what some are calling the Gunslinger cult, though "cult" is probably not the right word since these chummers are loners. But they all seem to be following this new mentor spirit called Gunslinger—you know, the patron of those lone defenders wandering wastelands and dispensing justice with a bullet? Live and die by the gun.
- ▶ Oni

ARES: CORPORATION IN TRANSITION

POSTED BY: GLITCH

◀UPLOADED 02-13-81/1243.06▶

Over the past several months, Ares has been through some huge changes. It started a war on the streets of Detroit, parted ways with the UCAS, ditched Detroit after a "terrorist attack," lost Damien Knight, had formerly-thought-of-as-dead-but-really-alive Arthur Vogel return as CEO, then moved to a new HQ. And that's just what the public knows. While Ares is currently vulnerable, if it can complete the move to Atlanta, all data points to it coming back strong.

But then, "if" is the key word. As we've seen, a lot can happen in a short amount of time. So with that in mind, I decided to post some current data regarding the CAS' newest corporation.

- ▶ So are you JackPoint's new Ares expert?
- ▶ Pistons
- ▶ Sticks is still AFK, and I have a lot of his personal files, so yeah, I guess I am, at least for now. But this isn't a title I expect to have for long. Ares is changing, and the field is wide open for paydata and new connections at every level. And eventually, someone or something always fills the void.
- ▶ Glitch

SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

To say that the CAS has welcomed Ares with open arms is grossly understating the obvious. Within hours of Vogel's announcement that Ares would

be moving their corporate HQ to Atlanta, sales in Ares merchandise and goods in the CAS shot up by 120 percent across the board, while handmade signs started popping up on front porches, yards, and windows across the city. Applications for Ares corporate citizenship within the CAS have increased from approximately 100K a year to more than a million as of this posting.

- > When the first convoy of Ares vehicles came into Atlanta, people treated it like a damn parade of returning war heroes. They were waving CAS and Ares flags, holding up signs, and all that drek. There's even a holo of an elven southern belle giving an Ares trooper from Detroit a kiss. It was nauseating. But after everything they've been through, I'm surprised no one from Ares opened fire when a bunch of civvies rushed the convoy.
- > Bangswitch
- > That's because this "spontaneous" outpouring of support was nothing more than a PR stunt. That southern belle, as you call her (which I find hilarious, knowing her true personality) is a chummer of mine and one of the best faces in the ATL. And for the record—after that kiss, she had a powerful urge to wash her mouth out at least three times.
- > Scattershot
- > There were other professionals there hired to make sure that no malcontents—of which there are many—disrupted the event. As more Ares personnel arrive, expect more such events.
- > Mz. Scarlett
- > And meanwhile, Detroit is still a mess, with scores of newly unemployed former corporate citizens. Frag them and Ares with a chainsaw
- > Shockwave
- > Also have a nice tidbit to share: Recently, I came across data that said Ares has one Daphne Gates on their payroll as an "independent media image consultant." Fun fact: Gates spent the last six years working for Horizon and is part of the Dawkins Group.
- > Dirt Diver

Local businesses have bent over backward to accommodate the influx of corporate employees. Almost every single hotel, motel, or place with a bed and bathroom in Atlanta has been rented out to Ares. Entertainment venues are offering "Ares Discounts" for all corporate citizens, while several restaurants, eateries, and (especially) bars are just straight-up comping Ares employees. The Atlanta government is even discussing the possibility of holding an "Ares Macrotechnology Day" in early July.

- > Ouch, if that isn't a stomp to the UCAS' crotch while they're down, I don't know what is.
- > DangerSensei

- > What Glitch may not know is that Ares has been quietly buying up choice housing property all over the city, offering sweet deals to those willing to sell and being very persuasive to those who aren't. Some local fixers are also making inquiries and putting out feelers for individuals and teams willing to negotiate with those less than willing to give up, say, homes that have been in a family for several generations. And there are those in the shadows who are quite against such deals. Look for a lot of runs and counter-runs over this issue in the near future.
- > Rebel Yell
- > I hear the term "carpetbagger" is coming back into vogue to describe some of the more entitled corporate-types.
- > Sunshine
- > Not just to describe the corporate drones and wageslaves—it's getting a lot of use in the CAS shadows in general and Atlanta shadows specifically as runners associated with Ares follow the corp south. Traveling runners are nothing new, and most are pros. But there have been more than a few clashes recently between "bagger" runners and locals over rep, connections, and contract terms.
- > Mz. Scarlett

It's not surprising that the local and national media and PR machines are going insane over all of this. Vogel has already shaken hands and done a photo-op with every politician and community leader Atlanta has to offer. And when the new Ares board was announced, it was treated like a prime-time awards show. It's a circus to be sure.

But putting all the media insanity aside, exactly who *is* running Ares now?

ARTHUR VOGEL: THE BOSS ... FOR NOW

Quick bio: Arthur Vogel is an eco-lawyer, failed presidential candidate, two-time assassination attempt survivor, and now CEO of Ares. Born as a dwarf in 2014 as part of the first wave of UGE babies, Vogel grew up to be a renowned eco-lawyer for the Sierra Club before he made his Presidential bid in '57, losing to the great dragon Dunkelzahn. After receiving Ares stock shares in '58 and later in '59 from Dunkelzahn and Ares Board Member Leonard Aurelius respectively, Vogel found himself with a seat on the Ares board. Over the next decade, Vogel did his best to be a moderating influence in the company. In '71, he was the victim of an assassination attempt that required massive cybernetic replacements to save his life. For the next several years, Vogel spent his time on various Ares-owned space stations, conducting his duties from there.

Sometime in '78, Vogel quietly returned earth-side and began touring Ares' holdings worldwide, apparently to help drum up support. The results

PHOENIX TOWER

of his efforts were mixed. Rumors suggest he was urged to return by other board members to help stop some of Damien Knight's overzealous ambitions. Then in '79, a bomb at Ares HQ in Detroit reportedly killed all of the Ares board, save Knight. But Vogel somehow survived. While he hasn't publicly revealed how, Vogel has since stepped up as interim CEO after Knight was killed in the recent Detroit fighting and is currently making the transition from Detroit to Atlanta as smoothly as possible.

No one else is in a position to do the job, but Arthur won't do it for long. What is unknown to the general public is that Vogel has given the board one year to find his replacement. After that he's stepping down, whether they've found a replacement or not.

- ▶ Let the power plays commence. Looks like I'm going to be busy for the next year or so. Better get ready to introduce myself to a new crop of Johnsons.
- ▶ Mz. Scarlett
- ▶ Thing is? Vogel didn't and still doesn't want the job. He was never built for corporate knife-fighting, and it showed from his first day. And while Ares spared no expense in repairing his body, many said he lost his soul.
- ▶ Ecotope

- ▶ Funny how big-time physical trauma can do that to a person. I don't blame him for staying in space as long as he did.
- ▶ Bangswitch
- ▶ His secretary being a puppet of the bugs was just another blow to him. She'd been at his side for a quarter century and knew him better than anyone. She got flipped when he went into space. One perfectly placed asset nearly brought the whole corp down.
- ▶ Hard Exit

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

With the old board blown to smithereens, Ares' new board has some new faces in the mix. Many of them just inherited the shares of their blown-apart parents, plus those who bought in after the value plummeted. This new board is not opposed to radical moves and has quietly begun some early restructuring in preparation for whoever takes over after Vogel. Their biggest issue is that they want to control the new CEO; another Damien Knight would be a worst-case scenario. A calm, sedate salesman for the brand would be perfect for most. With Knight's death and Gavilan Ventures liquidating their stock, Vogel's the only one who owns more than five percent of the corp, and no one knows if he'll sell his shares when he steps down. This means that the board will be large, and

each new voice will need allies to move an agenda forward. The question of which new bloc will emerge as the strongest has yet to be settled, and with horse trading and allies of convenience the norm, it's expected that the assorted division heads will wind up with more authority in the long run.

- > Several women, three metas, board members from all over the world ... certainly not the Ares I grew up with.
- > Bull
- > Most telling? Only two are from the military-industrial complex.
- > Icarus

THE BOSS TO BE?

The biggest question facing the Ares board that remains is: Who takes over after Vogel? Several frontrunners have emerged, and each brings something unique to the table.

CLAYTON WILSON

Considered the number-one contender, Wilson ran Lone Star Security back when it earned that second A and has been part of the Ares family for nearly a decade now, running Knight Errant and making great strides. With KE getting folded into Ares Services, he's looking at a lateral demotion—unless he claims the big chair. With Ares operating out of the CAS, having Wilson as the new corporate face could help sell the brand. Unfortunately, Wilson isn't the sort who takes orders well—he's got too much cowboy in him.

- > Everyone goes on about his "cowboy" side, but it's all an act. Wilson didn't come up as some spur-jangling sheriff or cattle rancher—he's from a well-to-do family from Bellaire in Houston who jumped from corp to corp for a decade, playing one boss against another for promotions then investing in security firms right as the Ghost-Dance War started. He's a corporate robber-baron who wears the tall-hat Texan costume to get underestimated.
- > Icarus
- > When one wears the mask long enough, you begin to see it as your real face.
- > Thorn

DANIEL TRUMAN

A former CEO of what is now a AA-rated corporation, Truman has a mixed relationship with Ares. He has been involved in several joint ventures with the corp, and at times seemed in line to take up a high-ranking position with Ares, leaving Truman Technologies behind. Rumored job offers never materialized, though, and by most reports

that left a bitter taste in Truman's mouth. He's seen as capable and cagey, so Ares execs might see if they can smooth over old grudges.

- > At one time, there was no greater foe of the bugs than Truman. But he lived in Bug City for a long time—I don't want to think about what compromises he had to make to survive..
- > Glitch
- > If Truman was a bug ally, he'd be dead by now; the Seraphim have been extremely thorough in that regard.
- > Ringmaster

MITSUKO SHIAWASE-YAMANA

Mitsuko, a.k.a. "The Wilted Orchid," would seem a long shot, but she recently started investing heavily in Ares stock, taking advantage of getting half of her ex-husband's Korin's fortune (and Ares stock prices being lower than dirt) and getting a board seat. This has some thinking that she'd be an ideal CEO, even if only temporarily. The rationale for this runs a gamut: She's young and easily influenced, used to walking in rarified air, has been raised in a megacorp since birth, and is the one who executed the Orchid takeover of Shiawase. Additionally, having a Japanese CEO could insulate a weakened Ares from reprisal by the Japancorps. And she knows the Japancorps inside and out, theoretically enabling her to fight back better than any current board member. However, she's holding off on additional stock purchases while her lawyers deal with her ex-husband's death. Why settle for half of his fortune when should could claim it all?

MICHAEL BISHOP

When Damien Knight first appeared out of the Crash, several "cousins" popped up soon after, each claiming to be related to him. But few attempts to glom onto him met success. After Crash 2.0, Michael Bishop walked into Ares' Philadelphia HQ, introduced himself as the new CEO of the division, and immediately went to work. It was several months until "Cousin Damien" could find the time to fly out and talk to him in private. Two hours later, Knight and Bishop held a joint press conference where Damien was thrilled to meet old family and happily approved of his position. The fact that Bishop was an African-American man twenty years younger than Knight who only resembled him by virtue of sharing a love of weight rooms was of little concern. Bishop has quietly run Philadelphia ever since, an efficient, by-the-book executive who never moves without a plan and puts the corporation's profits over his own ego. Sure, his entire background before 2061 is an absolute cypher, but who looks back when you should be looking forward?

- > As far as the Matrix is concerned, Bishop emerged fully formed in '61. I have standing requests for more information about him that I cannot yet fill. If anyone knows more, contact me.
- > Icarus
- > Whoa. When Wings doesn't know, nobody knows!
- > Lyran
- > The Foundation knows.
- > Netcat

KAREN KING

Seattle's own Karen King should be a long shot, seeing as how she's spent over twenty-five years in a single city without a promotion. Her true strength is that she was Knight's go-to for all things involving shadowrunners, and she knows where all the bodies are buried. Moving from her fairly obscure current position to the big chair would involve replacing her with a new head of shadow assets, but if you want someone who knows what Knight was up to in order to tie off loose ends, there's no better choice. King's old military, good at following orders and keeping her trap shut—things the board is looking for, even if she's not the most business-savvy.

- > The more military-inclined board members are split between King and Wilson, dividing the voting bloc enough to give the other candidates a shot. If either steps aside, the unified votes would probably get them enough momentum to win. But neither is the step-aside type of person.
- > Sunshine

DANIEL CHEN

Dr. Chen was previously in charge of Ares Space and Vogel's number two for over a decade. He's brilliant and has a self-effacing sense of humor that helps you forget that he's a troll, which reminds many of Gary Grey, Vogel's old troll VP running mate. The two have a genuine camaraderie that goes past boss and subordinate. I can't see the Ares of old letting a troll be the face of the corp, but with the new board, who knows?

- > Chen's folks fled war-torn Guangxi with baby Danny in their arms. They say he never took his eyes off the stars while they were on a ship heading to California. He's still watching the same stars today.
- > Kane
- > Damn, that's almost introspective.
- > Pistons
- > In another time, I'd be sailing between planets, not ports.
- > Kane

CAROL HUNTINGTON

Yes, *that* Carol Huntington. A former model, Huntington pursued her career with a laser-focus, introducing her own clothing line, cosmetics line, a modelling agency, and a magazine empire. She then turned her entire brand into a holding company, making the Huntington name into an industry. Huntington was able to sell her own corporation to Ares Consumer Products in exchange for a seat on the board, despite having less than a tenth of one percent of Ares' overall stocks.

- > If nothing else, she has ambition in spades.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales
- > A few wealthy husbands whose fortunes she inherited when they passed didn't hurt either.
- > Haze
- > Downside is that she's got no experience in any other field. Can you be the CEO of an aerospace/industrial/entertainment giant when you only know consumer goods?
- > OrkCEO
- > That's what a payroll is for.
- > Mr. Bonds

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

As mentioned in the previous Detroit section, Ares may have moved all of their upper management to Atlanta with next to zero effort, but moving the rest of the physical corporate assets from Detroit is going to take a considerable amount of time to complete. Everyone I've consulted on the matter says that despite the PR and promises of a "quick and smooth transition," the move from Detroit to Atlanta is still going to take the better part of a year—possibly more, if there are any complications.

- > This is a goldmine for biz on both sides. Ares wants to protect their stuff as it makes its way to the CAS, while multiple parties ranging from the other Big Ten all the way to the lowliest of opportunistic scavengers have already started to execute runs against Vogel and Company. And after the fighting in Detroit, Ares doesn't have enough physical security to adequately do the job.
- > Kane
- > Thousands of slotted-off ex-employees are also selling Ares secrets off left and right to whoever will pay them.
- > Johnny Redline
- > That's why a number of mercenary groups contracted by Ares have had their contracts extended, with hefty "resigning bonuses" included. Although some of us had enough slugging it



out with the bugs. Let the replacements handle things from here on out.

- ▶ Picador
- ▶ Ares transportation assets get priority treatment once they cross into CAS territory. So if you're going to hit them en route, do it before you cross, because the CAS isn't fragging around. Some associates of mine tried to use heavy-lifting helos to snag cargo trucks right off the road. CAS gunships ended that job real quick.
- ▶ Blackhawk

But even though Ares is well into their transition phase, don't think that their companies aren't still going full throttle and taking advantage of the PR bump from the CAS. But still, Ares' various companies and subsidiaries are facing their own individual problems.

ARES SPACE

Once upon a time, space was Ares' personal domain, with barely any competition. But the past decade ended that, as Evo, Renraku, and Saeder-Krupp (among others) made their respective marks. Vogel oversaw this division while they lost their dominance, which many consider another strike against his taking over as CEO in anything but a temporary basis.

For the most part, runs on behalf of Ares Space are all about hitting other corps. AS engineers would love to get their hands on some of the nano-engineering specs (or samples) S-K is using on the Skyhook Space Elevator. Additionally, Ares is paying good money for data regarding Mars, specifically Evo's Gagarin Base and anything the Monads may have left there.

But biz goes both ways. Ares Space is also fending off pushes from Nokia-Erika and Horizon, each seeking satellite access for their own needs. They're also wary of the Japanacorp, who are positioning themselves to lash out at North American launch facilities while claiming the Nairobi Mass Launcher for their own.

Lastly, Ares will expand its Artemis Lunar Arcology to include a tourist destination on the moon by the end of the year. A few VIPs are getting early eyes on the facilities, but in a few months it'll be fully open to anyone who can afford the trip. Sure, zero-G satellites have been in operation for decades, but there's something alluring about standing on the Moon. And rumors suggest more than a few R&D assets will also be hidden there.

- ▶ Another avenue into Ares Space is through the Space Rescue Service, which is currently facing hard questions regarding their actions before and during the Battle of Detroit. As of

this post, those SRS members who were affiliated with or sponsored by Ares are currently being re-evaluated. This has caused a shortage of qualified personnel from ship crew to ground personnel, causing overall operations across the board to slow. The SRS ground-based logistics facilities are especially vulnerable now.

- › Orbital DK

GENERAL MOTORS

When GM was brought into the fold in '59, then-CEO Eugene Fischer was promised many things: He could keep his job, GM would be given equal status among the other major divisions, their corporate culture would be respected, pensions would be honored, and more. All that was thrown out in '62, when Knight's hand-picked man, Tobias Czark, was put in charge. GM was downgraded to just a subsidiary of Ares Heavy Industry, pensions were thrown out as laws were moved from the UCAS to Ares, and the workers saw more and more of their R&D and marketing budgets siphoned away to support the military side of things. Additionally, rumors of Czark being a bug infiltrator were everywhere, with denial only fanning the flames. When the Battle of Detroit went down, Czark was in Pontiac to announce a new car line. According to reports, when the fighting started, GM workers tracked him down, wasted his bodyguards, bound Czark in old tires, and set him on fire.

New CEO Sid Hatfield has one goal: breaking free of Ares like a trapped coyote. He's throwing everything he can at shadow assets, looking for *any* way out while trying to keep support factories in Michigan running. This is more difficult with Vogel unwilling to sink money into what he considers a dying industry. The current line of mid-sized cars is supported for only two more years, with official direction from Ares Heavy Industry being to focus on small urban cars and large SUVs, letting dozens of iconic brands wither on the vine.

- › This has had two effects: One, there has been a rush to obtain necessary replacement parts; and two, parts are now going for a twenty- to fifty-percent markup. Additionally, a secondary market of knock-off brands is starting to emerge. And some of those involved in the former aren't exactly happy with the latter.
- › Turbo Bunny

ARES GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

AGE is considered by analysts to be the key to Ares' future success. They've moved a huge portion of their budget out of the UCAS markets and over to the CAS, investing in Nashville's entertainment industry, and pushing hard into Atlanta.

- › Part of Ares' new re-branding effort is to incorporate more "southern" aspects into their corporate culture, like cowboy hats and boots *groan*. So instead of pushing soldier imagery, they're going a bit more rugged gunslinger. Can someone shoot me now?
- › Scattershot

Amusingly, as Cross Entertainment starts moving back into Quebec, Ares is looking at moving against the Cross assets remaining in the CAS in hopes of quickly overwhelming rival broadcasters who lack a triple-A corp behind them. Cross is similarly fighting back, but there's a twist: the few remaining Seraphim within Ares are now looking to sandbag Ares and protect Cross, so you're looking at double- and triple-cross espionage opportunities.

- › I've heard a few whispers that the Seraphim aren't happy with Vogel all but snubbing them after their efforts in Detroit. They were ready to cease their covert hostilities against Ares with the death of Damien Knight, but instead they're looking to redouble their efforts not just in Quebec, but also in Atlanta.
- › Fianchetto

KNIGHT ERRANT SECURITY

Arthur Vogel's stated intent in moving Knight Errant from its own division to "only" a subsidiary of Ares Services is that he wants to make sure no CEO runs rampant over the board of directors the way Knight did. Clayton Wilson, however, took it as a personal insult, indicating Vogel doesn't want him stepping in as CEO when he resigns—which may be right. Ordinarily, this sort of infighting is done in the board room, but Vogel is at the very top of the chain, making that option null and void.

That means shadow assets are getting called in.

Vogel's people have greater resources but are spread thin. Wilson is a crafty bastard with access to KE's internal slush files and no shame about using all the dirt hidden there. Mr. Johnsons with a suspiciously large pile of incriminating documents and passcodes to executive quarters have been hiring runners with a soft touch to influence stockholders and other persons of interest.

Of course, Wilson's old outfit, Lone Star, is pushing back into KE cities in the UCAS by pointing out that city after city fell apart under KE's watch, while the CAS suffered no such terrible calamities. Wilson's current focus on upper management is going to cost him government contacts, assuming that those cities see KE continuously fail at handling chaos and crisis.

- › Atlanta has always been a bit of an oddity in that they've held on to their own police force. But Wilson has been making overtures to various politicians to try to get KE some kind of "auxiliary-reserve" status in Atlanta in order to "assist as needed without the usual legal hassles." Basically, he's trying to weasel KE

into another contract. And to my honest surprise, there are several blocks within the CAS congress that have resisted Wilson's overtures.

- ▶ Hard Exit
- ▶ Not every southerner is ready to go corporate just yet. And it's worth mentioning that KE has been headhunting APF officers since even before the move.
- ▶ Scattershot

ARES CONSUMER PRODUCTS

The most overlooked arm of Ares, ACP has been the number-two consumer good producer for decades, just behind Aztechnology. They were briefly number one during the Aztlan Famine, but the media buzz generated by mauling Sirurg (and pushing "Dragonslayer!" products) put Aztechnology back on top. Ares countered with the A-Pod, A-Comm, and other brilliant products rolling out of Silicon Valley. After NeoNET broke apart, ACP saw new daylight in the computer industry and has been charging hard to fill that market space.

With Ares products getting shunned by the UCAS, they've pushed the A-brand toward the CAS, drawing in multiple country artists to wear Ares gear loud and proud while using subsidiaries, like Lifescape or Quick Trigger, to sell goods on a smaller scale up north. Trendsetters are swarming every state in the CAS, looking for hot new trends, but the lack of long-term planning from a true CEO, and budget shortfalls due to the move are leaving coordinated approaches impossible right now. Business insiders say that rivals such as Aztechnology and Renraku now have a window to get their goods out before Ares.

INFO SANTÉ

You probably don't know the name, but you should for one reason: Type I leonization. Ares wound up owning Type I leonization after Type II rolled out twenty years ago. With Type II being vastly less impactful on the metahuman physiology, and cheaper to boot, Type I was considered dead-end tech that Ares picked up for a pittance. But ten years ago, reports of side effects from the Type II process were buried. Seven years ago, those side effects got worse. Three years ago, Shiawase announced Type II had fatal flaws that led to neurological decay, and that the process would have to be terminated. Overnight, Ares found themselves sitting on the only valid leonization process, and the elderly and wealthy all turned eyes to Detroit.

The process isn't a secret; most other megacorporations used to use it. But with Ares being the

copyright holder, everyone has to pay to use it. This has resulted in a golden stream of revenue that propped up the corporation when one debacle after another should have toppled it. Rival corp lawyers would love to get their hands on data that proved the copyright had lapsed or was gained illegally, or somehow set the process free in order to cut off that cash flow. Knight himself was a major reason why the process was bought in the first place (he may have been the single person who was treated the most often), while Clayton Wilson used Type II and, according to rumor, has some degree of mental decay.

If anyone knows any of that for certain, it's Info Santé, Ares' primary medical provider. Security there is the best Ares has, but with seven people angling for the big chair, shadow assets could find keys to the right locks.

THE EAGLE IS LOOKING

Finally, Mr. Johnsons known to hire for the UCAS government are actively hiring Shadowrunners to strike back at Ares. The IRS, the FBI, and the Department of Defense are all after information, certain that Ares knows something about the Blackouts. Meanwhile, governors, mayors, and more are furious as Ares pulls out for new harbors, leaving environmental ruin and economic vacuums behind. A hundred jobs here, a thousand there, ten thousand in a major city elsewhere—each a domino that kills a dozen supporting jobs in other industries, a cascade of collapse that breeds resentment. The people want blood, and Ares bleeds red. There are contracts floating around from unofficial government channels, news organizations looking for scoops, and various groups looking to get payback for broken contracts and sudden unemployment explosions from Ares fleeing Detroit.

- ▶ Be careful taking some of these jobs. The UCAS is a shell of its former self, with little funds to actually make good on some of these payouts. I was burned not too long ago by a Mr. Johnson I knew was fronting for the NSA. Got my job done (datasteal, BTW) just as promised, but something seemed off. When I arrived at the drop-off, fraggers tried to take me out seconds after I made the transfer. Good thing I had the foresight to bring some backup in the form of two sniper associates who sorted things out for me really quick. And I've heard of similar things happening to other runners and crews. The UCAS is reeling, and they're taking desperate actions. Keep this in mind if you ever decide to take any jobs on their behalf.
- ▶ Pistons



AS THE DUST SETTLES

///REQUESTING ACCESS: NODE 78-22-54/4(G)
'WAR ROOM/DUST SETTLES///

USER NAME/PASSWORD
ACCEPTED/ACCESS GRANTED

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- > So here we are, with North America splintered and re-arranged, and with significantly fewer North Americans than there used to be. The job of the living is to figure out what's left and what's next, so here's a look at where we stand, including some effects these events had beyond North America. We'll start by taking a look at the UK.

> Bull

NOT SO BLIGHTED BLIGHTY

POSTED BY: ERIC (UPLOADED 03-18-81/0651:03)

- > Sorry this took so long, Bull, my chummer has been as busy as I have lately.
- > Canis

- > Drek, Canis, I only asked you two weeks ago! Fragging OCD mages.
- > Bull

- > Don't dangle meat in front of a predator and expect them to *not* pounce for it.
- > Rifleman

Y'right lads and ladies! Our mutual acquaintance asked me to put a little something together to give you esteemed JackPoint members a bit of an update on Her Majesty's realm, with a special look at how we're seeing what's happening on your side of the pond. When Canis told me that the latest info you had was from '71, I nearly spat me beer out! This ain't my usual bag, but I'm Johnny on the spot. So here goes:

- > eRic is a fixer based in Windsor—you know, the town with the castle. I've worked with him a few times over the years. He's got good connections across a wide gamut of British society, so I can vouch for his credentials.
- > Traveler Jones

FALL OF THE NDM

As you all know, in 2071 the Pendragon was able to incite enough fervor to make Her Majesty realize that shit had gotten real. It took her a while, but when she acted, she did so in a manner we've not seen in generations. God bless the Queen!

First thing Queen Caroline did was to dismantle the New Druidic Movement's government. In time-honored tradition, she called Lord Marchment to Buckingham Palace and informed him, in no uncertain terms and with the Household Division (and her subjects) at her back, that she was disinviting him from being her prime minister. It's not happened in centuries, but the queen exercised her God-given right to dissolve parliament and trigger a general election. Some toffs and newsies tried to kick off, but ... well, one of them was nearly torn limb from limb by a group of Britons protesting their protests. It's not how we like to do business, but it got the message across.

- > And that message was received all the way to the Tír na nÓg. Such bold moves and assertiveness tend to make the keebs a bit nervous. Which suits me just fine. Still, Caroline better keep an eye pointed north because many in the Courts aren't sure they like this new, bold direction.
- > Knight of the Red Branch

None of the other political parties were really in a fit state to contest a general election, but they all gave a good show of it anyway. What we got was a seriously messed-up parliament, but they managed to coalesce around a single person: Her Majesty asked Simon Copperthwaite to form a government and he stepped up. And you know what, they weren't bad. Granted relative to the NDM that's about as hard as ... actually, damned if I know how to finish that metaphor. But the point is they were better, and by 2077 the lines had been drawn and that election went fine. There's been some changes in the cabinet since the election, but things seem to be going okay, Coppo's poll numbers are solid and the majority of us are content.

- > Sure, go ahead and keep thinking that.
- > Union Jane

CLEANING THE TARNISHED

Something that Her Majesty quickly addressed, even before the results of the election in 2072 were known, is she set about cleaning the filth caused by decades of rule by the Lord Protector from the police and military.

See, under Marchment, the rozzers had been de-clawed. Oh sure they had the same jurisdictions as before, but they'd been ground down to be nothing more than puppets. All right, I admit that's not fair in some cases, but the rozzers were

no longer trusted by the vast majority of Britons. And a police force that's not trusted or respected is worthless.

- > Please, security providers don't give a flying fuck about respect, they care about results. Fear works just as good and is now the preferred method, mate. "Serve and Protect" is so last century.
- > Chainmaker

The military had fared even worse. Marchment and his cronies had raided the military—especially the SAS and SBS—and transferred as many as they could to the Oversight Office. They'd turned the very men and women we thought we could rely on no matter what into the Templars, who subjugated us and made life hell. And that, more than almost anything, made me sick! We're an island nation made of several parts, but our military has always been something which brought us together. Englishman stood side by side with Scotsman and Welshman, as well as those Irishmen who chose to come to the mainland when the elves took over Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Queen Caroline's solution, while simple in concept, was devilishly complicated in execution. By royal decree she re-established the National Crime Agency (our equivalent of the UCAS FBI) and charged them with overseeing each and every constabulary as they got back on their feet and returned to their rightful duties. She also established a similar organization within the Ministry of Defence. Drawing on Arthurian legend and iconography and the residual popularity of the Pendragon, Queen Caroline dubbed this new organization Task Force Excalibur. More on them later.

The queen also, in the same speech, implored us all to work with her to help restore order and justice to our nation. To do our part in healing not just the physical wounds but also the divisions in our society. Her Majesty nearly broke down as she called upon every Briton to come together and to "put the united back in the United Kingdom."

HOPE AND DESOLATION

It bloody well worked, too! By the end of 2074, the NCA had audited the police and rooted out corrupt officers, including quite a few arrests and subsequent prosecutions. Task Force Excalibur started with the UK special forces command, and soon people were turning up missing or arrested. But with a restored cadre of elite men and women who'd been reminded their first duty was to the crown and the nation and not any particular government, Task Force Excalibur swept through the entire military like a wildfire. We saw 2075 in with renewed hope for the future, not just because of the changes to our nation but also because our queen had started dating again and seemed genuinely happy.

- ▶ The fact that Her Majesty was dating a woman didn't seem to raise eyebrows. The fact that Michelle Layton is Canadian, on the other hand, caused some comments in the media.
- ▶ Sunshine

That hope still shone bright even after May 1, 2075. May Day. A date that'll be burned into our collective memories for decades. On April 30/May 1, 2075, a couple hundred men and women went into dozens of public buildings—shopping centers, cinemas, and night clubs—and used magic to mow down innocent civilians and bobbies alike who were just enjoying the bank-holiday weekend.

Their magical prowess and numbers meant the average bobby on the street couldn't cope. In all cases, the police dispatched SCO19 Armed Response Vehicles and Tactical Response Teams. And in three cases, SAS/SBS units were close by and responded—as only they can. Swift. Efficient. Deadly.

In the wake of the attacks, the government passed a law allowing Britons to legally carry tasers. But in typical British fashion, you have to pass a training course in order to even be allowed to apply for a license. The police also received some new equipment. And public opinion had another repercussion: the New Druidic Movement was declared a terrorist organization.

In the aftermath of the May Day Massacres, the Firms stepped up. Those are our homegrown super-gangs-cum-syndicates, a nationwide network of large street gangs who, during the dark years of the Lord Protector's government, were the people's sole protection from the police and Templars. They ran the black and grey economies, shining beacons of charity and altruism—much like the Death Head in Redmond and Sturmwolfe in Puyallup—who looked after the common people who lived in their patches. Well, in the wake of the massacres, the Firms took a more prominent and public role. They helped the wounded alongside the Ambulance Services, they helped dig through rubble and find the dead and the dying, and they helped put down the gutter trash who'd done it. Once the rozzers and military got their acts together, they found a large pool of dedicated, disciplined, and fairly well-equipped men and women who wanted to help. It took us a while to bury our dead, and longer to mourn their loss and heal the wounds. But as always, we prevailed.

ENTER THE NEW SHERIFF

After the National Crime Agency had backtracked the funding and logistics network that had enabled and facilitated the May Day Massacres to the NDM, the government seemed to stumble a little. They weren't sure what to do about it, and old friendships reared their ugly heads. But public sentiment, using the new Matrix as an enabling

factor, caused Her Majesty to call the leadership of parliament to Windsor Castle. When they left, they passed the laws I've already mentioned. But they also did something else.

For over a hundred years, counter-terror has been a predominantly military role. In light of the actions of several members of UKSF command (not all of whom survived to see May 2) and the police, the government gave Task Force Excalibur new powers.

The task force would be merged with a portion of the NCA and parts of MI5, SCO19, and UKSF command. This new organization would have the remit and powers to investigate terrorist activity and the clout to handle the situation before it got to a point where innocent blood was spilled. They were also charged with countering the sporadic but constant rampages by mutated and/or toxic animals that occasionally leave the toxic zones within our borders. In short, they were charged with protecting us from the bogeymen within our society and the monsters that plague us.

To reflect its new mission, Task Force Excalibur was renamed. It wasn't a purely military organization, and considering their powers and the component parts, I guess some wonk in Whitehall decided Excalibur Division (or simply XD) was a good name. I really couldn't say myself, but I've seen the footage of them on the news, and bloody hell do those boys and girls know how to take the cane out the cupboard and give a damn good thrashing!

At first the XD was fairly poorly equipped. The NCA had never been blessed with huge funding, and SCO19 and UKSF have always had their own equipment policies and doctrines. But, in a show of solidarity, Celedyr stepped up. He arranged for several corporations to "donate" equipment to the XD: vehicles and heavy equipment from Saeder-Krupp, electronics, augmentations, and ancillary gear from NeoNET (well, Transys Neuronet), and arms and armor from some corp no one had ever heard of before. But the crap that Ironmongers Inc. gave the XD has become their calling card: suits of bleeding-edge armor designed to look like medieval plate armor. I've seen the XD do their work—lately, there's been more toxic animal rampages, and the news drones usually manage to get some footage. And you know what, seeing those people kick arse in those suits ... well, it brings a tear to the eye and a lump to the throat.

- ▶ Brings something else to me: the urge to puke. You can't be buying this line of bollocks? Nothing has changed except who's in charge. Since time immemorial the British tradition of seeking and seizing power is alive and well. If you think Caroline is doing this for anything other than her own desires, you're delirious. But that's okay, it won't be long until she finds out just how little strength she really has.
- ▶ Knight of the Red Branch

««USER: KNIGHT OF THE RED BRANCH HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM SERVER BY ADMIN O!»»

- › Spreading bulldrek rhetoric is one thing, trying to implant tracking software is another. Hope you enjoy the brick that was your 'deck, and hope you enjoy the dumpshock. Oh, and some associates of mine will be visiting real soon. You were warned from the beginning, just like everyone else.
- › Glitch

THE DRAGON IN THE ROOM

Since I just mentioned Celedyr, I guess I should go into recent revelations. If what I've seen on the 'trix and the news is to be believed, he's largely responsible for CFD and the shit that caused, both in Boston and the rest of the world. NeoNET has fallen, and Transys Neuronet seems to have parted ways with Celedyr.

While CFD was a bad thing—I've lost mates to that shit—if word is to be believed, it was Celedyr having Eliohann/Cerebus' back. And you know what, I can't bring myself to fault him for that. Sure, it was bad on a biblical scale, but Celedyr was trying to help out a mate. That's what mates do, for God's sake! Now in this case, said mate is a bazillionaire great dragon, but evidently still fallible. He got so focused on trying to help his mate he didn't see the bigger picture. Great people make great mistakes, and it seems great dragons make even greater ones. But when it's all said and done, God knows how many people are dead or lost. I doubt the reasons why will make anyone feel better, and for sure I miss those who CFD cost me personally. But ultimately, I don't blame Celedyr. Or Transys, for that matter.

BUG-OUTS AND BLACKOUTS

That takes us through the recent past, so now I'll focus on how we see events in the UCAS. Until the UCAS formed, and even after to some extent, Britain and the old USA always had a "special relationship." Two wars fought within forty years gave way to a long and abiding peace, and more. The two nations were close allies, and of course nearby Canada was part of the Commonwealth. So as you can imagine, we tend to keep an eye—well maybe a fraction of an eye—on events across the pond, as you would when you have friends and relatives there.

- › I was wondering when the history lesson was going to end.
- › Clockwork

Events in Detroit over the summer caused a stir, to say the least. The XD and regular military formations were put on alert, and corporate and national security Mr. Johnsons came out of the woodwork with jobs for runners to watch Ares

facilities across the country. There were a few incidents, mainly with Hard Corps objecting—violently, which shouldn't surprise anyone—to hasty observation posts outside their walls/gates. But otherwise, it was easy money for runners. Well, easy-ish.

Once things had calmed down a tad, we sat back to enjoy one of our national pastimes: Watching the soap opera that is the UCAS government. When the UCAS revoked the Business Recognition Accords, we (almost as one) gave a startled gasp. We definitely hadn't expected that.

When news of Philadelphia hit, we did a double-take. What the fuck had happened?! No one seemed to know, and the following day saw a lot of the Matrix abuzz with speculation and charity appeals to help the people of Philadelphia. But when Baltimore went dark, it caused a lot of people to sit up and pay attention, including Her Majesty's government.

As the UCAS descended into martial law and further cities on the east coast of North America were hit by what the media was referring to as "super EMP weapons," Coppo assembled the Cobra emergency committee. Within an hour, instructions went to every constabulary across the country to prepare for social unrest should an EMP strike a British city. The MoD also mobilized the Territorial Army to stand by to assist with relief efforts should it be needed. And the XD were told to "increase vigilance." We didn't know what that meant when the press release went out, but we soon found out.

Within four hours, the TA had people assembling outside of towns and cities alongside the emergency services. The police had an extra presence on the streets, panda cars and bobbies on the beat, and the contrails of RAF aircraft could be seen overhead. Here in Windsor, the Household Division deployed Challies to the Great Park and Bulldogs to the castle itself, since the emergency caught Her Majesty and the Duchess of Edinburgh in residence. And of course the XD couldn't countenance a threat to our queen, so they deployed twenty-four Wardens in their bleeding-edge Agin-court armor (eight from each of the four orders) to augment the Household Division.

- › Those Challenger V tanks look impressive, but they're a poor knockoff of the Stonewall.
- › Rigger X
- › The Challenger IV was, but this newest version combines state-of-the-art mil-spec hardware and Chobham X composite armor into a very capable main battle tank.
- › Picador
- › The Bulldog is an impressive AFV designed to be fielded alongside the new Challenger V in the Brit armored regiments.
- › Turbo Bunny

- > That Agincourt armor is fragging impressive! I'd love to get my hands on a few sets of that drek.
- > Canis

Some people expressed surprise when another group showed up to help the rozzers and military be ready should an EMP be aimed at us: the Firms. Every single Firm put people on the streets, and to the surprise of many the Firms' people were welcomed by the authorities. Gangers, police constables, and soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, ready for the worst. Thankfully the worst never happened, but it was nice to see that all parts of society were prepared to work together. Some runners also tipped up to help out, either paid by various police or military Johnsons, or working pro bono.

By the end of the first week, you started to see the presence of the police and others on the streets becoming a part of life. And by the middle of the second week, people started bringing tea and cakes to the individuals who stood ready to help us should an EMP hit. That lasted until the government was confident the danger has passed—on November 16, the enhanced police and military presence ended. Her Majesty announced the decision herself, with a heartfelt thanks to those who'd been on the streets.

- > Her Majesty ended that address with another piece of good news: she and Her Royal Highness Princess Michelle are expecting their first child. The address sparked a series of impromptu street parties to celebrate both events.
- > Shrike
- > That's just what they want you to think. XD has been busy making sure any potential threats to Caroline are neutralized. There was a raid in Lambeth a couple of weeks ago when a group of political activists were slaughtered by XD hitmen. All this feel-good drek is nothing but a smokescreen, the *spits* Queen is not what she claims to be.
- > Union Jane
- > Oh, you mean the Mordred Society? Nah, they weren't doing anything except trying to smuggle radioactive materials in from the SOX to weaponize. Nothing more than a social club; a completely misunderstood bunch. Fragging tosser ...
- > Chainmaker

While the U.N. was fanning about, our government reached out to the UCAS citing the "special relationship" of old. The UCAS government seemed only too happy to have the Royal Navy/Royal Fleet Auxiliary deliver aid to the beleaguered coastal cities hit by the EMP strikes, and for aid workers and emergency relief teams set up in Halifax and Saint John.

- > Too bad about those pirate attacks, though. The RN convoys lost, what, at least twenty-five percent of their relief goods on the

first run? And let's not forget the continuous skirmishes between pirate flotillas and RN squadrons.

- > Broadside

We've been keeping an eye on how the countries of North America have redrawn the borders, and there's been overtures to Seattle and St. Louis. But like any parent, we're sitting back and letting North America sort things out. Aid is still flowing, even after power has been restored. Still, the hand of friendship has been extended. We just need to see what happens. One thing is certain: the MoD and MoJ have already put out tenders to replace all equipment previously purchased from Ares.

Recent events have shaken things up a tad, and the future is looking bloody interesting. We'll do our part as we've always done. We've come out of dark times, and we'll help our UCAS friends get through theirs. To all you septics: keep calm and carry on. Oh and put a brew on!

- > The Native American Nations benefitted enough from the blackouts to make more than one person think they must have had a hand in it. So it's well worth looking at where they sit at the end of this.
- > Bull

THE NATIVES ARE RESTLESS

WRITTEN BY: STAMPERD

POSTED BY: TRAVELER JONES

<UPLOADED 03-19-81/1734:33>

- > What's with the outsourcing, Jonesy? Starting a new life as a fixer?
- > 2XL
- > Multitasking. In the time it takes me to write one of these, I can take another run, pay someone else to do it, and still come out ahead. Stampeder's a smuggler and political activist who's based in Calgary but travels all over the NANS. The AMC and northern areas have have been active while we've been focused further south, so Stampy's going to bring us up to speed.
- > Traveler Jones

Ok! JackPoint. TJ asked for an update on what's been happening in the AMC while the UCAS was busy not having any power. There's a lot to cover, so let's not waste any time.

CATCHING UP

Just to bring everyone up to speed: Before 2075, the AMC was pretty much an Aztechnology fiefdom. I won't bore you with too much histo-



ry, but back in the early 2050s, wheat crops failed across the country because of a genemodding gone wrong. Wheat's a big export up here, not to mention something we actually eat, so everyone was in a panic. The Big A's Genetique subsidiary came to the rescue, and the Chiefs were so grateful that in return, they let Aztechnology control basically the entire agri-food industry in the AMC for a quarter of a century.

Things only changed during the Az-Am War, when Surrurg trashed NatVat and Aztechnology was scrambling to prevent a famine (or at least look like they were). Everyone assumed that Genetique's agri-food operations would play a huge role in picking up the slack, but a mysterious third party (what other kind of third party is there?) chose that particular moment to start a massive shadow war against the Azzies' holdings in the AMC. The constant disruptions slowed Genetique's expansion down so much that Aztechnology was eventually forced to accept a bailout from Wuxing.

Naturally, the Azzies were furious at the AMC government for failing to prevent the security breaches, never mind the fact that their corpsec goons were just as responsible. They started demanding that the Chiefs compensate them for the financial losses, even though Aztechnology knew

full well that the Chiefs couldn't afford to pay them. I don't know what they hoped to gain by doing that, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't what ended up happening.

TROUBLE GROWS ON TREES

One thing that Aztechnology really *should've* seen coming was that publicly withdrawing their support from the Algonkian government would give the Manitou elves another chance to make trouble. The Manitou have been looking for a way to get back at the Algonkian government in Saskatoon (and the Azzies in Calgary) since their most recent rebellion got crushed, not long after the Crash. When the tiff between the Chiefs and the Azzies started, the tree-huggers announced that they were getting into "natural resources development"—yes, as in cutting down trees and digging metal out of the ground. A corp called Polaris Natural Resources, based in Churchill and run by a Manitou ork named Bernard Roy, offered to cut Saskatoon a check for a huge swath of land and mineral rights throughout the eastern AMC.

Now, the Manitou get by, but that's a lot of money to come up with for a tribe that pretty much refuses (or used to refuse) to exploit the environment to make nuyen. The shadow community up

here figured something was fishy, and started looking into where all that money came from. According to the paydata I've seen, Polaris got about half of their start-up funding from Athabaskan Oil, the other half from an "anonymous private investor." Nobody's been able to figure out who that private investor is, but conspiracy theories are fluttering, including one about some exiled elven noble from down south trying to rebuild his empire.

In the end, though, it didn't really matter where the money came from; with Aztechnology threatening to take their ball and go home, the Chiefs didn't have a choice but to accept the Manitou offer.

- ▶ There might be something to that "elven noble" story. A few years ago, my mentor made an off-hand comment about how cold it had been when he visited Lugh Surehand. At the time I thought he was still recovering from Ghostwalker slamming him into a skyscraper, but this makes me wonder if they met somewhere in the AMC.
- ▶ Frosty

The figurative ink on the government's approval of the land deal wasn't even dry when Polaris contracted Maersk to rebuild the Port of Churchill. Maersk has been trying to turn that place into a brand-new Arctic Ocean seaport for years, but the Aztechnology-controlled government blocked them every time. Now, with the Azzies gone (or at least out of favor), Maersk is finally getting a major North American expansion. It even connects to a major railway—which leads nicely into the next part of this file.

OFF THE RAILS

The railway in question is Canadian Western Railway, an A-rated corp that's been around for something like two hundred and fifty years when you include its previous incarnations. CWR's main line runs from Toronto in the UCAS to Vancouver in the Salish-Shidhe Council, but they have two secondary lines that start in Winnipeg: one that runs northwest through the AMC and Athabaskan Council to Tsimshian, and one that connects to the Manitou's brand-new port in Churchill.

A few years ago, Mitsuhamas approached the owners of CWR and offered to buy them out. Unfortunately for them, nobody in the AMC is stupid enough to think they wouldn't turn us into the next Tsimshian, and CWR's owners refused to sell.

- ▶ That must have been when MCT was in the middle of their "buy every railway in North America" phase, like whatshisname talked about in the *Market Panic* download.
- ▶ Rigger X

In response, MCT hired teams of runners to make the railway so unprofitable that only Mit-

suhama would be willing to buy it. One team in particular were huge fans of the "crazy enough to work" approach, emphasis on *crazy*; I'm still trying to figure out how tear-gassing an anime convention had anything to do with making Cee-Dub lose money. After months of running CWR into the ground, that team scored the final coup when they kidnapped Cee-Dub's CEO by hitching a blimp to his luxury passenger car and hoisting it right off the tracks. With the CEO in hand (probably at gunpoint), the last obstacle between Mitsuhamas and the ownership of CWR was removed.

The next day, the news announced the acquisition of Canadian Western Railway ... by Saeder-Krupp. Turns out, S-K Prime had a mole inside the runner team that extracted Cee-Dub's CEO, and the Mitsuhamas Johnson wasn't even back at the office yet when S-K's company men hit their limo and extracted the CEO for themselves.

Needless to say, MCT was *extremely* slotted off. They started a full-on shadow assault on S-K, hitting them everywhere from Sudbury to Tsimshian, and broadened their horizons to include Maersk and Polaris when it came out that those three corps signed a deal to refine Polaris' ore at S-K's Sudbury smelter. The team who carried off the Blimp Heist (as people in Calgary have started calling it) got fat bounties on their heads, and nobody around here has seen them since.

- ▶ Last time I went up north, I ran into a member of the team who extracted that CEO—with all the heat MCT was spreading after the railway deal went wrong, nobody else would risk taking him out of the AMC. According to him, they all packed up and left (in the blimp) the second they heard what had happened. He'd been living in a brothel in Churchill for months by the time I found him. Apparently, the team's rigger went full eco-terrorist, their face went back into the spy business, and the shaman had vanished into the wilderness to "find herself" shortly before the blimp job went off. The fifth team member was a German street samurai with a penchant for Onotari weapons, which is almost too obvious a move for S-K, and probably the reason they got away with it.
- ▶ Traveler Jones
- ▶ Those diamond shipments from Churchill I talked about earlier? Their company's "investor package" said the rocks come out of a Polaris mine near Attawasomethingorother, upriver from Hudson Bay.
- ▶ Kane
- ▶ Kane, are you saying you actually read a company prospectus? I didn't think you were the type.
- ▶ Mr. Bonds
- ▶ Kinda. When we were out for beers in T-Bay, we all took turns reading it out loud to see who did the best "tight-ass corp suit"

imitation. Started a fight, too—turns out them Krime boys don't like being told they sound like every other suit, even if it's true.

> Kane

EASTWARD HO!

Fast-forward through a couple of years of the Algonkian shadows going crazy, with Aztechnology struggling to keep a stranglehold over the AMC government after they both realized that the Chiefs might get a better deal from Saeder-Krupp than they would from the Big A, and Mitsuhama trying to weaken S-K without giving the Azzies too much of an advantage. We're all too busy with our own drek to pay much attention when the lights go out in the UCAS—until the Sioux sidled up to the Chiefs and went, “hey, wanna invade Winnipeg?” It should tell you how desperate the Chiefs were not to look like complete pushovers that anything to do with Winnipeg sounded like a good idea, but they went for it, and the military started gathering their forces the next day.

> Hey! If we ever get the Jets back, we'll make you regret that!

> Zhaganaash

> “What this country needs is a short victorious war to stem the tide of revolution.”

> Thorn

> I see you've been using “history professor” as a cover again.

> Fianchetto

Ironically, someone's better judgment prevailed at the last second, and the AMC didn't attack Winnipeg itself. The latest propaganda broadcasts out of Saskatoon are saying the Algonkian Armed Forces have “liberated” all of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, except for a ten-kilometer radius around Winnipeg. Besides capturing all that empty territory, the Chiefs are claiming a couple other major successes: Shilo, which was the westernmost army base in the UCAS besides Seattle, and shutting down the t-bird smugglers in Portage la Prairie. The Algonkian military is also in a great position to close down Highway 1 and cut off Winnipeg's road access to the rest of the UCAS, but so far, they haven't bothered.

Despite our supposed victory, the entire invasion has left a sour taste in people's mouths. The AMC has always had a pretty good relationship with the western UCAS, including an entire enclave in Winnipeg, but now we've given that up for a bunch of basically-useless land, just so the Anishinaabeg tribes (including both the Algonkians and the Ojibwe) could keep the Sioux off their backs.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Right now, the AMC shadows are still hot with the battle between Aztechnology, Mitsuhama, and the Saeder-Krupp/Maersk/Polaris trio. The way things are looking now, S-K's going to win. Aztechnology burned a lot of the bridges they'd built here when they tried to blame us for Genetique's problems, and MCT doesn't really have a foothold in the AMC, which makes them hard for S-K to hit but limits their activities. The real winner, though, is Polaris. Having a “partner” that's locally owned and looks like they're being treated fairly is a huge PR win for S-K and Maersk, and it makes people around here feel empowered—something that the Azzies and MCT have never bothered to do in the NAN.

There's another conflict brewing, though, one that has the potential to be even bigger than the corporate catfight. A huge section of the AMC population, one that the government has oppressed pretty since the country was formed, has finally decided to fight back. Members of the Blackfoot, Cree, Métis, and Tsuu T'ina Nations staged massive protests in Calgary and Saskatoon last week, demanding official recognition of our tribal heritage and widespread changes to the political system. Of course, the local police being a combination of the worst traits of Azzie corpsec and Lone Star, a whole bunch of people got shot. Things have quieted down for the moment, but I don't know how much longer that'll last before someone decides it's time for yet another AMC politician to meet an untimely end.

> Knowing the AMC, not long. There's a reason they have a rep for getting their leaders killed.

> Pistons

> That just means the system's beyond fixing.

> Old Crow

LA MORT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE

POSTED BY: BIBLIOTECH

<UPLOADED 03-19-81/2011:23>

> Biblio's a Québécois “digital archivist” who helped out with our *Montreal 2074* download a few years ago. I looked him up after Québec invaded the UCAS to get his side of the story, and he was happy to oblige.

> Bull

The dragon set us up.

In fairness, that probably needs clarification. The download I worked on several years ago included a section on a group of megacorps called *le Consortium pour le Développement du Québec*,

also called the CDQ, or just the Consortium. Their membership roster has changed since last we looked at them, but their goal is the same: start a second Resource Rush in northern Québec. The trouble for the CDQ is that the land they want is largely owned by Anglophone Native Americans and Innu, and the Québécois government gave up their resource rights when they granted the natives autonomy back in the CATco days.

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

- Ares Macrotechnology
- Horizon Group
- Mitsuhamma
- Renraku
- Saeder-Krupp
- Shiawase
- Spinrad Global (inherited from Chalmers and Cole)
- Universal Omnitech

The old agreements put the Québécois government in a difficult position. They knew that individual tribal chiefs could be “persuaded” (read: bribed) to look the other way and let resource harvesting happen on their lands—CATco did exactly that for years—but any kind of large-scale development would prompt a massive political outcry, and ignoring said outcry would risk armed rebellion, maybe even with covert support from the NAN. In truth, even if the natives didn’t protest, all that resource development wouldn’t really benefit the government; after all, it’s not like megacorporate citizens pay their taxes to Québec City.

On the other hand, the government knew that the CDQ wasn’t going to take no for an answer. The corps have been steadily pouring money into the country to build up their public support, and the politicians all realized that if they didn’t bend their knee to the new corporate powers like they did to Lucien Cross, they were likely to be unemployed after the next election. The government needed a distraction, and quickly, or what little leverage they had over the corps would vanish.

Then the blackouts in the UCAS started, and Québec City saw their chance. The sovereigntists got their wish for Québec to become independent from Canada back in 2010, but they never got over the fact that the rest of the French-Canadian world hadn’t come with them. Propaganda about “Francophone unity” frequently popped up on Cross-approved trid channels. Québécois citizens were regularly told that our wayward cousins in the UCAS had been prevented from joining us by the evil Anglophones in Ottawa and Washington, and that they’d been suffering discrimination because of it ever since. So when the government announced that they were taking advantage of

the UCAS’ plight to “liberate” our fellow Francophones from the English-speakers’ oppression, most people here were happy about it.

- › Geez, how much did CATco brainwash those people?
- › Chainmaker
- › It didn’t start with Cross. One of the biggest reasons Québec split off from Canada in the first place was because they felt like outsiders in what was supposedly “their” country, isolated by language barriers and a lack of respect for their unique culture. Once Québec’s independence was official and Anglophone influence started dwindling, it was only a matter of time before that view became dominant. It didn’t help that the UCAS never really made an effort to reach out to the average Québécois person and tell their side of the story.
- › Fianchetto

The real reason for the invasion was more pragmatic: capture Saeder-Krupp’s smelter in Sudbury and hold it hostage until they convinced the rest of the CDQ to ease up. Yes, I know how insane it sounds to try to bully a great dragon; I never said it was a *good* idea, just that it was the one that Québec City decided to act on. In theory, the *Forces armées Québécoises* would strike at multiple cities in the eastern UCAS while DeeCee was busy dealing with the blackouts, to draw their military in that direction and clear the way to Sudbury.

I think we all know by now that things didn’t go as planned. Every single one of the attacks was either blunted or stopped entirely, usually with the FAQ suffering massive losses in the process—and every single time, the losses were inflicted by mercenaries hired with Saeder-Krupp nuyen. Despite the Cross-era censorship mechanisms that the government never quite got rid of, word started to spread that the “liberation” of the UCAS wasn’t going as planned. Days after the UCAS’ mercenary forces broke the FAQ’s hold on Ottawa, the air-defense batteries along the Québec-UCAS border started exploding.

- › There were some quiet inquiries on the Toronto data haven about teams willing to do out-of-town demolition work, particularly if they spoke French. That’s probably what happened to the AA batteries.
- › Zhaganaash

The gaps in the air defenses allowed UCAS military transports to cross into Québec. The same day, the UCAS Navy launched missiles at the FAQ’s main air base at Bagotville, and the UCAS Marines assaulted the naval base at Sept-Îles. President Frenette was quick to ask for an armistice (please, no jokes about French people surrendering; that’s like applying stereotypes about British people to the UCAS because they both speak English), and the military started blaming the politicians for getting them into an unwinnable war.

ENREGISTREMENT: 19 NOVEMBRE 2080

<video of Québec President Jean-Louis Frenette Jr. sitting in his office at the Édifice Price>

[Personal Assistant (via intercom)]: M. President? Someone is waiting to see you.

[Frenette] I thought my appointments for today were finished.

[PA] He ... didn't exactly make an appointment. He said his name was "M. Brackhaus".

[Frenette] Ah. Show him in. <buttons his jacket and runs a hand through his hair, clearly nervous>

<door opens, Frenette's personal assistant leads an elderly European man into the office>

[Frenette] Monsieur Brackhaus. <extends hand>

[Brackhaus] President Frenette. <shakes Frenette's hand> I hope this isn't a bad time. There seems to be quite the protest going on outside.

[Frenette] Ah, don't worry about them. Please, have a seat. Can I get you something to drink? <nods to his personal assistant, who leaves>

[Brackhaus] <sitting> No, thank you. I'm here to deliver a message on behalf of my employer.

[Frenette] By all means. <sits, swallowing visibly>

[Brackhaus] As I'm sure you've guessed by now, Master Lofwyr is displeased with your attempt to seize the corporation's assets in Sudbury. The cost to defend them, while not unbearable, was unnecessary—and Master Lofwyr detests unnecessary expenses. As it was Québec's government who was responsible for the costs incurred, it will be Québec's government who repays them.

[Frenette] And how do you propose we do that? Our economy is still recovering from CATco's collapse. The only money we have is what the CDQ puts in! The damned natives—

[Brackhaus] Will be dealt with, M. President. Master Lofwyr's plans for securing their cooperation are already underway. Your role will be to ensure that more ... hesitant parties in the legislature don't create any unnecessary delays. Do that, and my employer will consider your obligation discharged. Fail, and you will learn what happens when Master Lofwyr becomes irritated instead of merely displeased. <rises from his chair> Good evening, M. President.

[Frenette] <rises> Good evening, M. Brackhaus. <remains standing until the door closes behind Brackhaus, then slumps into his chair> Tabarnak.

Then ... actually, here, you can just watch the clip yourselves. [\[link\]](#)

When that recording leaked to the public, the patriotic fervor that Frenette had used to justify the invasion in the first place turned against him. *Les Frères Chasseurs*, a hardline Québécois nationalist group with military ties who had vocally supported the operation, accused Frenette of intentionally losing the war to give Saeder-Krupp the opportunity to take over Québec. They staged massive protests in Montréal and Québec City, which were eagerly joined by local neo-anarchists and Native and Innu activists. La Gendarmerie (Lone Star's local subsidiary) responded as brutally as you'd expect, and the protests in Montréal turned into full-scale riots that lasted for weeks. Even now, tensions are still simmering, and everyone's waiting to see what the next boiling point is.

As for Saeder-Krupp, it looks like they're taking pains to win over the locals, or at least suppress dissent in familiar ways. They just appointed a new S-K representative to the CDQ, a former Cross Matrix Technologies executive named Maurice Tremblay who's known to have ties to the Fallen Seraphim. Buzz in the local shadows is that Tremblay's been in quiet discussions to broker deals

between some of the larger tribal governments in northern Québec and a corp called Polaris Natural Resources. I don't know anything about them except that they're based in the Algonkian-Manitou Council and that they have enough eco-friendly cred for the Natives to give them a chance.

There have also been a massive number of shadow ops against S-K's direct competitors in the Québec Resource Rush, namely Mitsuhamma and Shiawase. Both of the Japanacorps are fighting back, of course, targeting Saeder-Krupp's operations in Québec and the UCAS. They may be getting some unexpected help from Spinrad Global-affiliated Johnsons, who have been spotted prowling Québec City, as eager as ever to take shots at Lofwyr whenever possible.

Oh, one last development: The Canadian reunification movement has been gaining support in Québec. The distinct Québécois identity that made people want to leave Canada back in 2010 is as strong as ever, but since the Crash and CATco's downfall, people have started to realize that our isolationist policies are much more difficult to sustain when our economy isn't backed by an AAA megacorp. Fringe politicians have suggested strengthening ties with Ontario and New Bruns-

wick for years without anyone paying much attention, but even average people noticed when Michaela Martin started delivering her pro-Canada speeches in French—Québécois French, no less!—and mentioning how one of her ancestors had represented Montréal in the Canadian Parliament a hundred years ago.

Needless to say, diehard Québécois nationalists have flat-out rejected Martin's overtures, claiming that it's just another case of Anglophones trying to stamp out Québec's culture. Most people are more open to the possibility, though; they care more about being able to pay rent than whether their landlord speaks French or English, and the realists understand that Francophone culture is *already* being diluted by the presence of the megacorps and the foreign languages and cultures they bring with them.

- > Never mind the fact that there have been English-speaking Québécois for centuries, whether they were part of the Irish and Jewish communities in Montréal or members of Native tribes around the country. Incidentally, they actually have been oppressed by the Québécois government for not speaking the dominant language, the way they claimed the UCAS was doing to Francophones when they wanted to justify the invasion.
- > Zhaganaash

Judging by what we've seen about S-K participating in the war on the UCAS side, not to mention their involvement with a natural resources corp from the AMC, I have a feeling that the Canadian reunification movement has a strong supporter in Neu-Essen. If the idea of reunifying with Canada keeps gaining momentum, things are going to get exciting in the near future. In case, you know, they aren't exciting enough now.

POST-BLACKOUT ROUNDUP

POSTED BY: BULL

⟨UPLOADED 03-22-81/0001.00⟩

Not really sure what else to say about all of this; we can't exactly tie everything up with a neat bow and call it a day. There are still a lot of questions as to what exactly happened, how, and why. Conspiracy theories will no doubt be flying fast and furious for a long time to come.

But what we do have, like after every other crisis, is a new normal. The UCAS still exists, but she is a shell of her former self, taken down almost to the foundation. What will she become? Who the frag knows? But I think to say that going forward she may not be quite the center of attention she once was. And that may be a good thing; there are plenty of shadows around the world to keep us busy.

As for the rest of the world, aside from what we've already talked about, they seem to be sitting back and taking a "see-what-happens" approach to things. Either that, or they just don't give a frag because they think all this doesn't affect them. We'll see.

But as for this file, I don't think there's much more we can do or say. I'm going to leave the node open for another forty-eight hours, then close it and archive the data. Anyone have any final thoughts or (relevant) last-second paydata; feel free to use this time to put it down for posterity.

- > Just glad Philly is back from the black! That alone deserves a celebration.
- > Slamm-0!
- > St. Louis and Seattle are now free cities. That's big, chummers. What's life like now that the government is totally local? A bit more freedom?
- > Mile High Mike
- > We are not and never will be free. Freedom is an illusion and we have simply traded the shackles and yoke of one master for another.
- > I-AM-ONE
- > If you traded at all. The corps ran Seattle before. The corps still run Seattle. They just don't have to hide it by appeasing faraway politicians anymore. All the politicians are local and more easily accessed. Expect an uptick in "cleanup" work as the corps clear out anyone who doesn't respect the new status quo.
- > Stone
- > And a great dragon poked her snout into both. Don't forget that!
- > /dev/grrl
- > Oh, I won't. Especially since one of the chunks of land she bought had one of my best holes to hide in, and now I'm not gonna go anywhere near that place.
- > St. Louis Blue
- > The Sea Dragon spells trouble. The minds and machinations of dragons are not to be trifled with, and even among her own kind, the Sea Dragon is an alien mind ruling an alien realm. No one seems to understand her reason for stepping so abruptly into metahuman politics, but she has, and that's going to cause a mess at some point.
- > Icarus
- > Let me help you. She wants a war, but despite her power and claims to the contrary, she cannot stand against the entire world. Her domain holds wealth beyond the comprehension of most. Even among those of my kind, some of whom seem to shit gold, she is seen as wealthy. Her domain is vast, but it is also dying. For too long humanity (yes, the word is intentional, for most of this damage was done before ear shape and tusks were a concern) has ignored the rules of the natural world. They drag

Molly Hilbert

Loitering
Jaywalking
Theft by Reception
Manslaughter

Roberto Lopez

Public Intoxication (17 counts)
Parole violation

Jules Tomas

Bribery
Theft by Reception
Theft by Taking
Money Laundering
Racketeering

their fuel from the earth and spew the byproducts into their waterways. Then they burn their fuel and spew the gasses into the air, ignoring the smog, coughs, cancer, and slow rise of their world's average temperature. A rise that makes her domain grow warmer, but her domain should not be warm, for it is the grand cooling system for this space rock, and the life within it lives within a certain range.

But enough on lessons you should all already know. You all know what humanity has done to the planet. The Awakening spurred Mother Nature to make a few fixes, and her revenge on the land in South America and Africa has met with success, but beneath the waves the process is not so easy. Because of this, the Sea Dragon has taken it upon herself to halt the destruction of the world's waters. Terror did not work, and now she seeks to rub elbows with those who rule this world. Know that she is not out there to benefit your kind, but to benefit all life, which could very well require your kind to drastically decrease in population.

- > Orange Queen
- > Well, well, well ... the banished lady shows her face, and it's to talk about dragon politics. And a fellow dragon terrorist at that. A subject that got her separated from her own kind. I'll take your thoughts with a whole bag of salt.
- > Clockwork
- > She's not just in those two cities. Those two cities just happen to be in the spotlight right now. The Sea Dragon is making land and

political deals all over the world, operating just at the outskirts of any of the other great dragons' domains. She's ignoring the lesser dragons in these areas, and that could be a potential problem as even the lesser dragons are powerful forces when riled. Australia, Africa, southeast Asia, and southern Europe have all had her visits, and the shake-up of the UCAS has a lot of places looking for powerful allies wherever they can find them.

- > Picador
- > Not all the lessers are taking it well. With Dunkelzahn long dead, Ghostwalker a name feared by most, and Celedyr back across the pond, it's no surprise the Sea Dragon is looking at coastal North America as a strong foothold. Before she made her way to St. Louis, the Sea Dragon had worked in New Orleans, and years back she made moves into Boston before the lockdown. One of her representatives paid a visit to Terasca, the adult leviathan who woke in '79 in the swamps of Louisiana, pressing the creature into service if it was interested in continuing to play with the humans. The order was backed with a threat to sink the city, which the "Crime Dragon" ignored, because apparently the last time these leviathans were awake, the Sea Dragon was not the big deal she is now. En route to St. Louis, the Sea Dragon stopped by the Big Easy, swimming directly to one of Terasca's gambling dens by sinking a new canal through the edge of the city, showing what she could pull off when she wanted to. The act killed hundreds and put both Terasca and the Sea Dragon on the city's and the CAS' drek lists. Terasca is not

a dragon concerned with metahuman life, but reputation and old-world power are another story. Terasca has a short temper and, according to witnesses, attacked the Sea Dragon, slashing a cut in her snout just before the Sea Dragon dropped her ruse and revealed her true size and strength. Terasca was given a thorough hoop-whooping and eventually acquiesced. Thing is, Terasca is not a sit-back-and-take-a-beating-with-a-smile type. Word has already spread through the shadows of New Orleans that the money is good operating against the interests of the Sea Dragon. Mr. Johnsons are tight-lipped about where the cash is coming from, but everyone knows. Expect New Orleans to heat up with this feud.

- > Big Easy
- > So, the Sea Dragon now has her talons in Seattle, St. Louis, and New Orleans. This is the heart of the North American smuggling pipeline, and this one power just sunk her claws in across the whole thing. Anyone else a little unnerved by that?
- > Turby Bunny
- > It's a great dragon. I'm unnerved by everything they do.
- > Bull
- > Anyone considered she could be trying to be the next Big D? Maybe she's on our side, like he was. Not every dragon is an evil, power-hungry monster. Hestaby was decent.
- > Sterling
- > Thank you. There are those among our kind who work with metahumanity rather than seek to lord over you, but we are the exception. I would love to confirm what her reason is, good or ill, but I truly cannot, and simply prefer those I respect to err on the side of caution.
- > Orange Queen
- > Hey, OQ, any chance you know what/who caused the blackouts?
- > Slamm-O!
- > It wasn't the Sea Dragon.
- > Orange Queen
- > I'm not sure how to read that. Like, wink wink, it wasn't the Sea Dragon, or an actual statement to remove one of hundreds of suspects.
- > Slamm-O!
- > The turmoil in the UCAS sent ripples across North America. Not just the secession of states and cities but political moves and shifts all over. The Sioux and CAS aren't giving back what they took (or what just came to them), and maneuvering continues all over the West Coast as CalFree, the PCC, Tír Tairngire, and Aztlan are all politicking over some possible border shifts. The PCC is getting pressure from Horizon to return LA to CalFree because Horizon is getting pressure from the Corp Court for having their HQ in a non-BRA nation. This is the same drek that hit the Tír because of Telestrian during the height of the audit. While the elves stayed tough (mostly), Horizon really needs the PCC to cave on this if they want to hold onto their seat. All of the big AAs that are itching to gain that third A will gladly use the Telestrian argument to bring Horizon down and get themselves on board. Those big AAs are also pursuing every lead on a dangerous rumor about the cause of the blackouts. Conspiracies abound that it was the Big Ten and Corporate Court proving a point to the UCAS. If any of the AAs can get actual proof of that and can manage to threaten the Corporate Court with its revelation ... well, damn! The sacrifice of NeoNET at the altar of CFD will look mild compared to a concerted terrorist attack on a nation. If you're an anarchist and you want to strike the match that sets the world ablaze, get in on these jobs because if it goes all the way, we will be living in a very different world after the dust settles.
- > Pyramid Watcher
- > With the EMP story rolling around, the market for "hardened" electronics is skyrocketing. From what I can tell, the only corp that is actually putting out tech that passes the test is Evo, and it's the drek coming from their labs in Azania and off-planet. Definitely makes them a prime suspect with the amount they've benefited.
- > Plan 9

- ▶ Every one of the Big Ten has benefited, especially those that provided assistance via the U.N. and now lord it over the UCAS. Add in military contract boosts around the world from nations that saw what happened to the UCAS when the lights went out and their neighbors took advantage, then policing and security contracts that Ares is snatching up with all their extra officers after bailing on their UCAS contracts, infrastructure repair and improvement, and on and on. The list of contracts the Big Ten got post blackout is terapulses of data.
- ▶ Orbital DK
- ▶ You can also see plenty of contracts going to some of the biggest AAs. Looks like a payoff to me. Then again, the work all of this is generating has me paid up for months rather than trying to scrounge twenty nuyen for a bottle of synthvodka.
- ▶ Stone
- ▶ The shadows are hottest right now across those non-BRA nations that just saw what can happen if the corps don't have your back. The larger ones are starting to struggle and feel the pressure, while most of the smaller ones were never big enough for anyone to care about. The NAN are especially leery, but they never let the big boys in to play, so whatever tech magic they pulled in the UCAS wouldn't be as easy. Then again, it also might not be as clean. Most of us don't buy the EMP story, but if the corps were to just roll in EMPs, the tech would not be coming back a few months later. That stuff would be as bricked as the stuff in the core zones. The shadows of Africa are heating up, with several non-BRA nations that are resource-rich

suddenly being eyed for joining the fold. The trick is that many of them have governments that are full of holdovers from an era where not signing the BRA felt like an act of freedom and independence, not an act of war. Erika is feeling out several nations as part of their work to make Africa their home away from home. The plan to move their HQ to Azania is on hold as they assess the safety of the sub-arcologies in the wake of the UCAS issues. A blackout like that in a place that relies on their ventilation system for life would be a catastrophe. In the meantime, they can focus on making more friends on the dark continent and building their dream of being the first AAA from Africa.

- ▶ Mika
- ▶ Speaking of AAs that are making a killing: OmniStar. Lone Star and DocWagon have both shown record growth since Ares bailed on the UCAS and DocWagon showed their "good corp" side during the blackouts. Their efforts, with making run after run to pick up clients inside the affected areas, was all over the Matrix, and people once again remembered why DocWagon is the number-one medical-emergency service provider in the world.
- ▶ Butch
- ▶ DocWagon also made a killing charging for those pickups. Everywhere inside the blackouts was an HTR call, and even if they made ten pickups in a run, they charged every one of those clients for the pickup.
- ▶ Stone

<<<FILE CLOSED>>>

GAME INFORMATION

INSECT SPIRITS

Insect spirits generally appear like the earthly insects they are named after, though depending on the type and quality of merge, they may also have humanoid characteristics. A good guideline is that the more nightmarish they are, the better.

Insect spirits vary based on Force, like other spirits. Their skill ranks equal their Force.

Note that some insect types, such as wasps or flies, can use their movement for flight at the same distance listed in the stat block. Wasp spirits should always have the Venom power, beetle spirits should have their Defense Rating increased by 2, and fireflies have the Confusion power.

NEW CRITTER POWER

HIVE MIND

The critter can communicate telepathically with others of its kind over distance. Critters use this power in the same way (and taking the same time) that others use for speech. There are no range limitations on the power, but it does not cross meta-planes. Critters must have an existing connection (such a being part of the same hive or pack) to use this power; they do not automatically gain a connection with all critters of their type.

SOLDIER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
F+2	F+1	F+1	F+3	F	F	F+1	F	F
		AC		CM		MOVE		
		A1, 14		(F/2)+9		5/10/+1		

Initiative: [(F x 2) +1] + 2D6

Astral Initiative: [(F x 2) + 1] + 3D6

Defense Rating: F + 3

Skills: Astral, Athletics, Close Combat, Con, Perception, Stealth

Powers: Animal Control, Astral Form, Fear, Hive Mind, Natural Weapon, Sapience

Optional Powers: Binding, Concealment, Noxious Breath, Venom

Attacks:

Natural weapon (claw/bite) [DV (Force/2)P,
Attack Ratings (F x 2) +1/-/-/-]

WORKER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
F	F	F	F+1	F	F	F	F	F
		AC		CM		MOVE		
		A1, 13		(F/2)+8		5/10/+1		

Initiative: (F x 2) + 1D6

Astral Initiative: (F x 2) + 2D6

Defense Rating: F + 1

Skills: Astral, Athletics, Close Combat, Perception, Stealth

Powers: Animal Control, Astral Form, Enhanced Senses (smell, thermographic vision), Hive Mind, Movement, Natural Weapon, Sapience, Search

Optional Powers: Concealment, Enhanced Senses (ultrasound), Venom

Attacks:

Natural weapon (claw/bite) [DV [(Force/2) -1]P,
Attack Ratings (F x 2)/-/-/-]

ALPHA MERGE

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
F+3	F+2	F+2	F+3	F+1	F	F+1	F	F
		AC		CM		MOVE		
		A1, 15		(F/2)+7		5/10/+2		

Initiative: [(F x 2) +3] + 3D6

Astral Initiative: [(F x 2) + 1] + 4D6

Defense Rating: F + 4

Skills: Astral, Athletics, Close Combat, Con, Influence, Outdoors, Perception, Stealth

Powers: Animal Control, Astral Form, Enhanced Senses (smell, thermographic vision), Fear, Hive Mind, Movement, Natural Weapon, Sapience

Optional Powers: Binding, Concealment, Noxious Breath, Venom

Attacks:

Natural weapon (claw/bite) [DV [(Force/2) + 2]P,
Attack Ratings (F x 2) +4/-/-/-]



TOTAL DARK

VOICES SCREAM IN THE DARKNESS. Voices of the lost drift through the night. Their sound is despair, sorrow, and terror. The noise grinds at your soul, but only thing worse than listening to the chorus of pain is joining it.

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