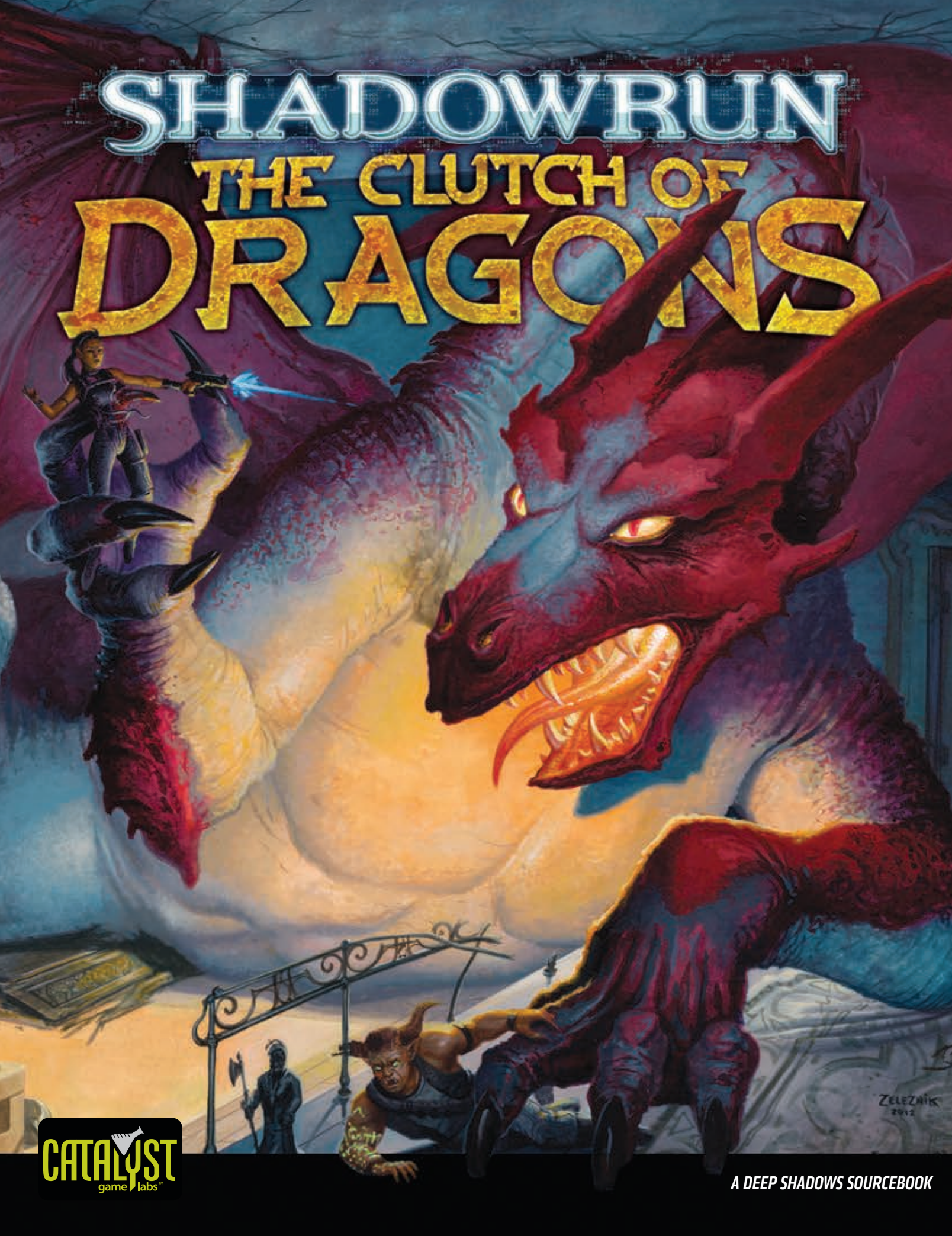


SHADOWRUN

THE CLUTCH OF DRAGONS



ZELEZNIK
2012

CATALYST
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A DEEP SHADOWS SOURCEBOOK

CLAWS AT YOUR THROAT

Never, ever deal with a dragon. Shadowrunners have heard that dictum so often, they frequently say those words in their sleep. But what the aphorism forgets to tell you is this—what if you don't have a choice?

The tension between dragons has been growing, and the big lizards are throwing every weapon they have at each other, including shadowrunners—especially shadowrunners. Extractions, industrial sabotage, theft, wetwork—there's plenty of jobs in all those areas, and dragons are finding ways to get reluctant runners to work for them. Maybe they'll hide their involvement in the run, or maybe they'll bribe the runners with large piles of nuyen or blackmail them with their past activities. Or maybe they'll just tell the runners they have a simple choice of working for them or being eaten.

Whatever tactics they choose, the dragons are going to be active and aggressive, and if runners want to survive, they better be on their toes. They need to know who the draconic players are, what they're up to, and what might happen to them if they fall into a dragon's grip. They need to be ready for anything, because when dragons go at each other, the world shakes, the earth beneath them burns—and far too often, shadowrunners die.

The Clutch of Dragons provides the information gamemasters and players need to involve draconic plots in their games, from profiles of individual dragons, their plots, and their lairs to information about the latest efforts to build anti-dragon weapons. This is a critical reference for any players who want to test their skills against the machinations of dragons—or who want to see just how much trouble they can survive.

The Clutch of Dragons is for use with *Shadowrun, Twentieth Anniversary Edition*.



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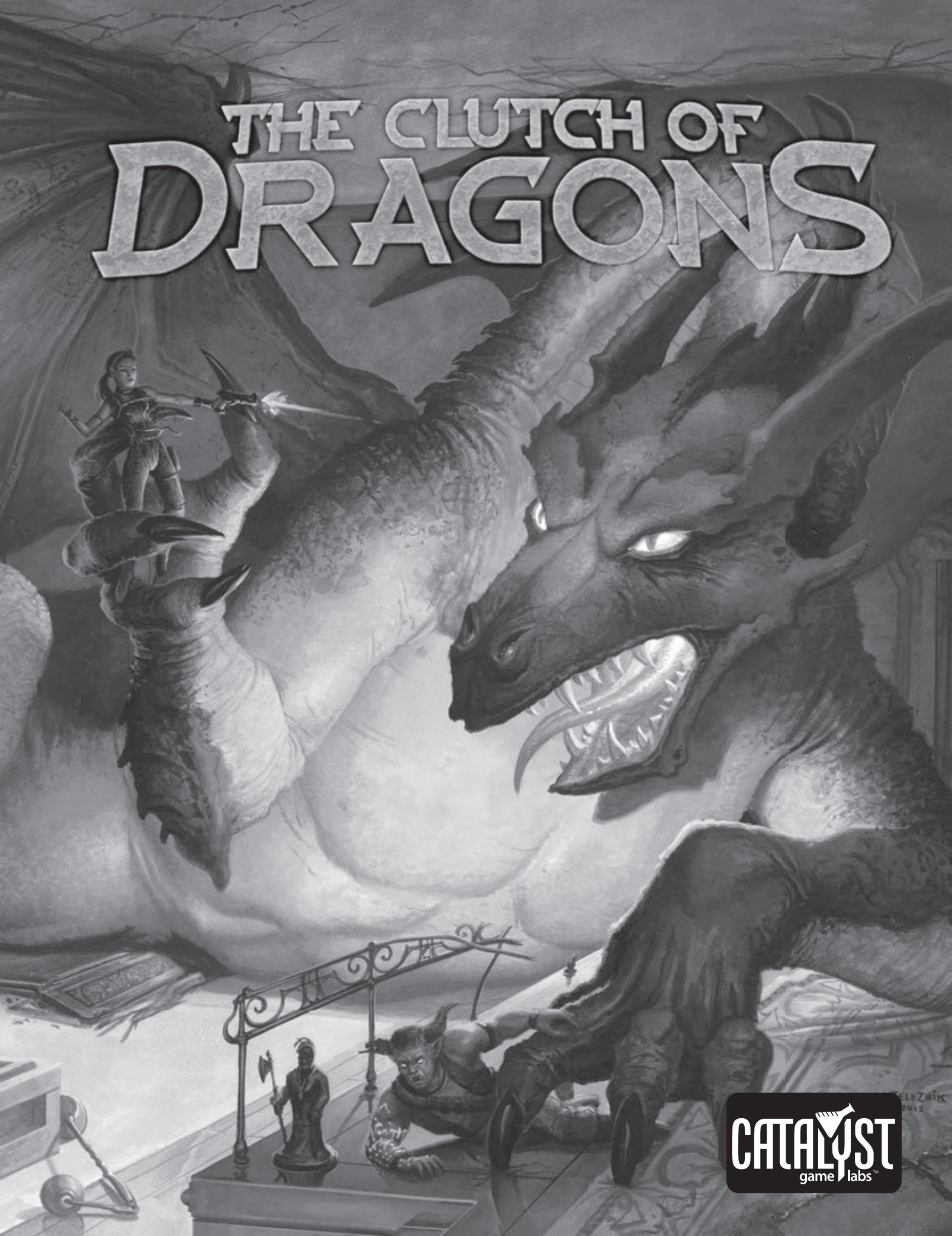


SHADOWRUN

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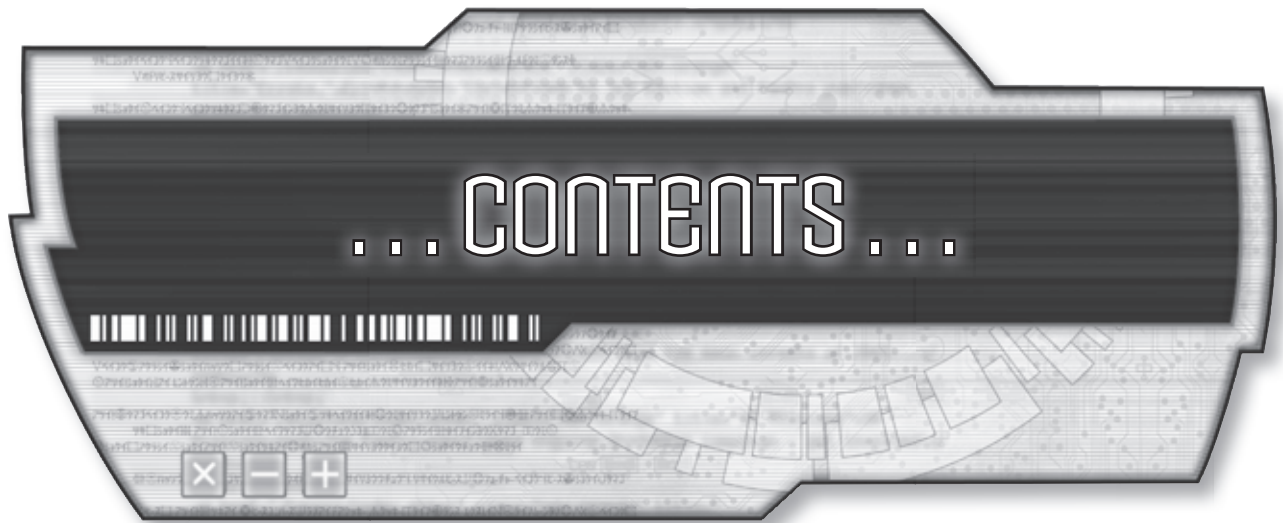
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THE CLUTCH OF DRAGONS



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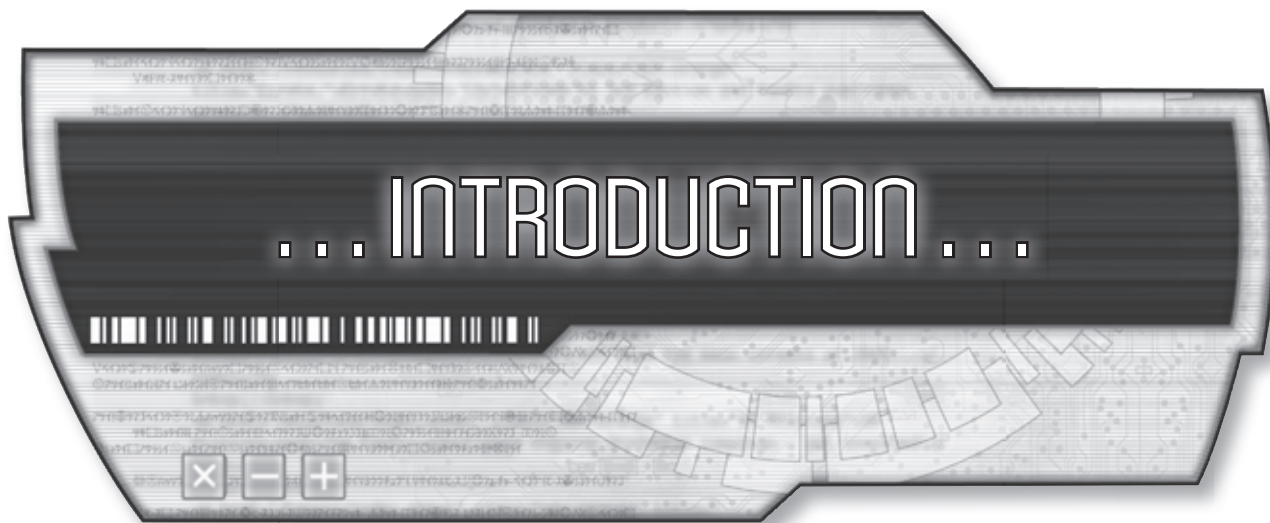
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... INTRODUCTION ...

Posted by: Fastjack

Let me get this clear right out of the gate: I'm not telling anyone to deal with a dragon. What I'm telling you is that there are some things you need to know about and possibly some precautions you need to take, or before you know what's happening you'll find out that dragons are dealing with you. And that's a position you don't want to be in.

Now, having dragons pulling strings in the shadows is nothing new. Like powerful beings the world over, they have schemes that are percolating and work that needs to be done, and some of that work is going to be done by people like us. That's always been something we have to look out for. What's different now, though, is the tone they're taking, of the edge there is to the missions. Think of the difference between a boxing match and a street fight. In both contests, you've got two sides who are trying to beat the living shit out of each other. But in the first, there are certain rules of conduct that both sides agree to obey—no kicking, no kidney punches, no biting (usually). They go at each other full of fury and strength, but when their opponent goes down, they back off. Once one of them falls hard enough, the other stops entirely. The knockdown was all he wanted.

All that goes out the window in a street fight. There are no rules. There is no conduct either side is expected to follow. And when one fighter goes down, the other's not going to back away—he's going to pounce and finish him off, if that's what he's of a mind to do.

Usually dragons go at each other like boxers, landing hard blows and looking to gain an advantage, but holding themselves back at a certain point, wounding without going for the kill. Now, though, it's a street fight. That's not to say they're dropping all the rules. Lofwyr remains Loremaster, and there are traditions he fully intends to uphold, no matter what else is going on. And on top of that, these are dragons, not gutter punks. They don't just pull a switchblade every time they feel slighted. Their revenge is slower, more elaborate, and less violent on the surface (though inevitably, the guns come out from time to time). In other words, they fight their war with the weapons we use regularly.

That's why it's tempting to get involved. The jobs are there, the money's certainly there, so why not make a play for it? If that's what you want to do, do it. I'm not here to talk you out of anything. Just remember, though, that dragons are completely unmatched by anything on this world in terms of memory and capacity for revenge. So if, in the course of your efforts, you make an enemy, it could well be one that follows you until your dying day. Which may not be far off, because while dragons show some restraint in violence against each other, they don't worry about boundaries when it comes to us. There may be a side in this conflict that is more sympathetic to metahumanity than the other, but there's not a great dragon on the planet that sees us as their equals.

This is a tricky conflict to look at, so I tried to get us a look at three different levels. **The War at 10,000 Meters** is the high-level look, seeing how the battle lines have been drawn between the dragons and what they're up to (including the latest news on Ghostwalker). **Echoing the War** looks at how the fight has spilled over to draw in other powers of the world, while **Trickle-Down Effects** talks about how all these activities among the powers of the world spills down to the street level. After that, I've compiled information on some dragons around the world and their lairs. These can be as varied as Celedyr's Albuquerque cave, Urubia's burgeoning complex in Seattle, and the Sea Dragon's underwater kingdom. I didn't cover everyone—since when can we cover everything?—but instead put in what I think is the most urgent and/or overlooked news. Finally, there's the **Tools of the Opposition** file, where Fatima looks at some the latest technology being worked on in an effort to get metahumanity on more equal footing with the dragons.

- Um, actually, Fastjack, I wrote that. Fatima's dead, remember?
- Beaker

As always, I hope this information either makes you money, keeps you alive, or both.



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

 > Enter Passcode

 ... Biometric Scan Confirmed.
 Connected to <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>

"Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons." —Richard III, V.iii.

JackPoint Stats

133 users currently active in the network

Latest News

* <072074> I've asked Glitch to make some upgrades and perform some general maintenance. Show him the same patience as you would me. Or hell, show him more. —FastJack

Personal Alerts

- * You have 3 new [private messages](#).
- * You have 2 [messages](#) queued for anonymous re-routing.
- * You have received 5 new Metalink Friends add [requests](#).
- * 8 individuals have dropped you as Metalink Friends
- * You have 11 new [responses](#) to your JackPoint posts.
- * PDA: You'll be breathing fire if you don't take an antacid before going to Tommy Troll's Chili Palace tonight.

First Degree

You are hidden from all contacts.

Your Current Rep Score: 89

(87% positive)

Current Time: July 20, 2074, 15:43

- PREFERENCES
- FEEDS
- TASKS
- LINKS
- HISTORY

Welcome back to JackPoint, omae; your last connection was severed: 17 hours, 45 minutes, 33 seconds ago.

Today's Heads Up

- * I miss my cyberdeck. Do you miss yours too? [Tag: [Shadowrun 2050](#)]
- * Because sometimes you want to fire shots from a car that's plunging out of a plane. [Tag: [Runners' Black Book 2074](#)]

Incoming

- * They've pulled back the veil, only to reveal more veils. [Tag: [Land of Promise](#)]
- * Sammies need love too! [Tag: [The Way of the Samurai](#)]

Top News Items

- * Johnny Spinrad invites Wu Quintuplets to lavish party; the five are said to be "anxious to attend." [Link](#)
- * Kenneth Brackhaven vows peace and order will be maintained in Seattle, regardless of Proposition 23 outcome. [Link](#)
- * Nicholas Whitebird has refused all interview requests, saying there is "nothing related to Ghostwalker and his situation that needs to be discussed publicly." [Link](#)



- CHAT
- MESSAGES
- FILES
- POSTS
- NEKUS
- SEARCH

Active
 IomStar Firewall
 Active
 Jack-in-the-Box Antivirus
 Active
 SpamWitch Filter
 On/Receiving
 Commcode
 Excellent
 Signal
 Active
 Hidden Mode
 Local Map

THE CLUTCH OF DRAGONS
 Posts/Files tagged with "The Clutch of Dragons"
 The War at 10,000 Meters
 Echoing the Roar
 Trickle-Down Effects
 Nests and Hoards
[\[More\]](#)

CONTINUE
 ADVANCED SEARCH
 SAVE

... ENTER THE DRAGON ...

Percivale scanned the cavernous room from the safety of a shadowy corner. He cycled through vision systems trying to get the best lay of the land for the team. Thermo gave him nothing but the cold blue of the distant walls. Low-light was useless in the pitch black. He had no desire to use ultrasound after the incident with the bats near the cave entrance. Radar turned out to be the best option; it revealed the next security obstacle in this strange cave-crawling shadow-op.

He looked over at Lancelot. Even with the poor visual information he had right now, he could see that the ork was doing his best to resist the urge to step out of the cave mouth and start shooting. Percivale's feed ran to Gawain's tacnet setup, and for the first time since the team had crawled into this corporate-sponsored dungeon crawl, they had a tactical advantage. Percy's HUD created six red arrows that turned into ghostly red silhouettes as he shifted his line of sight up. The tactical software was awesome, providing indicators for directions to targets and then silhouettes for the targets themselves if you were looking their way. Portions of the silhouettes would go green when they came into view. It was an amazing system, giving anyone with an image link all the data they needed even if they didn't have any other vision systems.

As he was scanning the room he saw a yellow box form around Lancelot's icon. That was the biomonitor providing feedback. Percy wasn't convinced he needed that information, but Galahad insisted it was best for all of them to know each other's condition, and Arthur agreed. So Percy got the info, even if he wasn't always sure what it meant. All six of the other icons in his display were still highlighted lime green, the color for all good.

"Lance, able five?" Galahad whispered over the comm, just loud enough for his subvocal microtransceiver to pick up. Percy knew Galahad had seen the yellow box and wanted to know what was up. The medic didn't like to have to guess what was going on with any team members during a run.

"Bravo two-point-five," Lancelot replied in his smooth ork baritone.

In the group's code, the "two-point-five" reply meant he was good but something else was happening.

"Easy big boy. Wait for Art's call," Lionell said. Percy saw Lionell's icon move, putting a hand on Lance's shoulder to keep him calm.

"Quiet!" Arthur said, managing to make a subvocalization sound like a drill sergeant's bark. Percy couldn't remember how many times he had heard Arthur's lecture about the perils of non-essential communications, but he had no desire to hear it again.

He knew the others were growing antsy. Lancelot in particular was itching for a fight—the biomonitor showed that the sight of targets on his HUD had set the big ork's heart racing.

What are they Percy? The message came as a text, sent using Arthur's headware. The text would be scrolling over everyone's HUD even though it was only intended for Percivale.

Six, no thermo, tweaking now. Percivale's reply was also in text.

He sent mental commands to his goggles to fine-tune the thermal feed, shifting it to read heat dissipation rates instead of surface temp. Living material dissipated heat at a different rate than stone, so the

change would give him a better read on whatever it was that was dangling from the ceiling of the cavern. The system took only a moment to update, but gathering and interpreting data took extra time.

While he was waiting he sent a quick text to Gawain. *Careful with my feed of thermo to tacnet, .3768 sec delay for processing temp data.* By the time that was done he had more info for Arthur, so he shot another text out. *Biological, bone skin, 1.8m, dual-natured, no other threats present.*

With that sent, he tried to get a better handle on the room layout. They had a seven-meter ceiling over most of the chamber with steep walls. The room was nine meters wide and eighteen deep, almost a perfect rectangle with only a few small sections of rock jutting out. There were four entry points, three at floor level along with a crack near the center of the ceiling. There were six targets in the room; the team had seven men, but at least two of them had to concentrate on support roles. Percy knew they wouldn't risk exposure, but he also knew these were not the sort of targets you just sneak past. He wanted to know what to do next, but he knew there were dozens of plans running through Arthur's mind, and he just had to wait until the right one poked through.

All at once, the waiting ended in a flurry of texts from Arthur. *Percy: On mark, hush the crowd, mass stun, overwatch, seal exit Beta, defensive measures.*

Lionell and Lance, slide exit Alpha, fire for drop and draw.

Gawain and Galahad, hold rear cover, block exit Null.

Bors, drop longshot, hold Null, drop runners, cover exit Delta.

I'm on Percy cover, Delta backup, and Conductor.

Percy read quickly, then started a fifteen second countdown to "mark." In his tacnet feed, designations appeared over each exit. There were no questions, or responses of any kind, from the other team members. They had ten more seconds to breathe slowly and make what final preparations they could.

Gawain was never comfortable in places like this. The only things coming in were the signals from the team, and he had no connection to the Matrix. It was a technomancers' nightmare, but he did it so often these days it didn't bother him near as much as it used to. There was a comfort in the smothering Matrix, but he had begun to feel a distant sort of numb comfort in the void, with only the familiar signals of his teammates 'links. He controlled them all, or at least his squires did. Each member of the team had a resident sprite in their commlink that answered to him. They all looked like squires—most people would assume they were agents, but in truth they were so much more. With their help, Gawain had maintained the team's comm system through some brutal assaults. It seemed like overkill right now; they hadn't touched a signal in hours, but he reminded his squires to stay alert. He read all the texts—his, one from Percy, one from Arthur, and all the others. He entered a little variance for the thermal input. He finished prepping by verifying the vitals on his HK MP5-TX. Full clip, ninety-six percent battery on the electronic firing system, all systems green. Gun at the ready, he watched the clock start to tick down through those long final seconds.

Urgent Message.....



Galahad watched each member of the team cascade through the rainbow on his biomonitor ColorWatch system. Adrenaline levels rose on Lionell and Lancelot, shifting them from lime green and yellow to a deeper hunter green. Cyber systems activated in Bors and Arthur, and their icons gained a silver lining. Gawain's icon started to pulse as his heart rate accelerated. Percivale's icon took on a purplish hue as he cast a few spells, but that wasn't part of the automatic update. Seeing magic was beyond the system's abilities. Percy had manually activated the "spells up" setting on his biomonitor, since he knew that was information Galahad wanted. Everyone was looking good as he toggled the thumb switch from safe to three-round burst on his archaic MAC-10. The heavy weight of the old gun felt good in his hands, and he shifted a few steps up to get ahead of Gawain, ready to move.

Bors pulled his SM-3 tight into his shoulder, raised it up, and marked the farthest target. That target image changed from ghostly red to solid red while the other five faded a little more. The marking helped him focus. The pale ghosts held only a scant bit of his attention while he crept forward.

The ghostly forms reminded him of his early days in the shadows when he went by the name of Pac-Man. He'd earned the nickname because he was always afraid that the ghosts would get him. Back then, the ghosts were more literal—Tir Ghosts, his former brothers in arms. Now the enemies were wispy red critters dangling from the ceiling of a cavern in the middle of the Sierra Nevadas. Different, but likely just as deadly. Slow and silent Bors lowered himself to the cavern's cold, damp floor, laid the rifle across his arms, and began crawling forward waiting for the red on his HUD to turn green.

Lionell ritualistically clenched and unclenched his fists one finger at a time. He used the movement as a focus and prepared for the battle ahead. He liked when Arthur used him for what he was good at instead of leaving him to guard the rear. Close combat was a fine art, especially when focused on defending a ranged warrior. He was the sword and shield in defense of the archer; it was a noble position, and it gave him a chance to get into the fray. The HUD displayed on his contacts showed the countdown. When it reached two, Lionell channeled mana through his physique. He rose up onto the balls of his feet and writhed like a snake, feeling power fill his muscles. As time ran out, Lionell sprang into action.

Lancelot was ready. He was always ready. He used the countdown the way he always did—quick mental inventory and tactical decision. He was carrying his custom Bloodhawk, a highly modified FN-HAR, and a cut-down Panther. On his belts and in his satchel he carried two fragmentation grenades, four flash-bangs, two high-explosive grenades, six flashpaks, and two kilos of C12. Tucked up his sleeve he had a short Cougar Fineblade, and high on his back he carried its longer brother. He ruled the explosives out immediately, since the blast could bring the roof down. He knew he needed more punch than the knives would offer, so they were off the list, too. The Bloodhawk had some power, but these were deep-dwelling paracritters with stony skin. That might not be enough. He was down to the FN and the Panther. The FN was loaded with APDS, had an integrated flash and sound suppression system, and the underbarrel launcher was loaded with a custom sand round that would put a troll on his ass. The Panther was cut down to make it more portable, but little else had been done to the big cannon. Lancelot was tempted by the one-shot stopping power of the cannon,

but he pulled the FN-HAR up to combat ready because he was a little worried about missed shots taking down the roof or a few stalactites. It was disappointing to have to dial back a little, but at least he'd finally get some action. As the seconds ticked down he sent a signal through the smartlink to chamber a round, then set the weapon on full-auto, relying on his own control to fire bursts. He caught Lionell starting to move in the corner of his vision and raised the assault rifle up, pointing directly at the cluster of red ghosts. As the countdown rolled to zero, he started to move.

Arthur watched his team get ready. Postures changed and guns came up while he ran through contingency plans. He played out events in his head quickly, considered different ways the plan could fail, and made a handful of adjustments in his head. By the time the clock reached zero and Percy was casting his first spell, he had reviewed ten fail-points and ways to correct for them. It was his favorite way to waste time and he was proud that his team usually made it just that—a waste of time.

Percivale scanned the room one more time and left the thermal imaging active as he moved the goggle lenses out of the way. With the clock at three, he shifted his vision to the astral and counted the last few seconds down in his head. He wasted no time as he began to channel mana into the massive cavern. The cavern was not loud to begin with, but as the mana dampened what little noise there had been, the silence became eerie. Percivale had only an instant to appreciate the success of his spell before he realized something was wrong. The auras of all six creatures flashed violently, and suddenly they were in motion. Percivale didn't have time to utter a warning that the plan was already hosed.

Lancelot moved eagerly when the time came. He saw Bors ahead of him, moving inhumanly fast, firing once, twice, then moving without seeing what his bullets had done. Lionell was moving too, darting to the exit he was supposed to cover. Lancelot was in step with him when he saw movement, a creature that turned green even before he hit the threshold. He was in position, target green, when he caught motion an instant after the world went silent. He opened fire, still moving but slowing down to make his shots more accurate. He had initially planned to drop at least one before they could respond, but they were already moving. He acted on instinct and reflex. While walking sideways towards the cave exit designated Alpha, he squeezed the trigger, firing long, poorly controlled sprays. He filled the air near the creatures with armor-piercing rounds, hoping to wound as many as possible and draw them to him. That part of the plan may have sounded crazy, but Lancelot wouldn't have it any other way.

Galahad kept a close eye on the team's biomonitor icons and stayed ready just in case. Gawain divided his attention between the empty tunnel in front of him and the tacnet feed. Something was wrong. The data from Percy's goggles blinked in and out twice and then went dark. Gawain only took the time to text *Getting hacked* before he dropped prone and let his virtual body take flight.

Arthur smiled. The plan had gone awry, but every member of the team was performing the alternate plans without receiving a single command from him. But then another twist hit him, a message from Gawain.



Getting hacked, it read. And then the tacnet went out.

Arthur cursed. When the tacnet data blinked out, Bors and Lancelot activated their flashlights while the others flipped to low-light. The green outlines from the tacnet were now visible as real creatures swooping down from the ceiling. Five of them unfurled their wings and launched into attacks around the room; one crashed to the floor, the victim of Bors' SM-3. Their massive forms darted lithely, more lithely than Arthur would expect from their size. Arthur could see two going for Lionell and Lancelot, another pair heading for Percy. The last was quickly heading for exit Beta.

Percivale was shocked when two of the things started towards him. They were too far apart for him knock them all out. Coiling tight in the corner, he tensed, ready to spring away. He split his attention three ways. One part focused on the approaching beasts. The second picked out the auras of his teammates, readying to jam the astral if one of these things started slinging mana. The last focused on the plan, trying to keep it moving forward if at all possible. Channeling mana, he formed a crackling wall of energy over exit Beta. The shimmering wall solidified just in time to be tested by the impact of one of the beasts. The barrier held; the creature ricocheted off and rolled across the floor toward him. It rolled, deftly gained its balance, then rose up on its limbs, two short stubby legs and two long sinuous wings. Its mouth opened wide, and Percivale was suddenly thankful for the silence spell. He could see the mana flowing into the creature, and he could easily imagine the damage that screech would do if it were audible.

As he watched, he saw another aura of the creatures go dim, while the ghostly form of its body tumbled to the ground. Bors had gotten it, finally slowing one of the things down. Percivale felt some satisfaction at the sight, and that feeling just grew when another one fell. Bors' shots were finding their targets. If this kept up, exit Alpha would remain clear. He called up a spell to make sure he got a few blows in before it was all over.

Arthur was feeling better and better about things. In the matter of seconds the team had the room clear. It was a testament to their skill that they could go in with a plan, lose that plan quickly, and pull it right back together.

"Excellent work!" A voice boomed in the cavern, startling the entire team.

Arthur yelled out a cover command, but no sound came out. The silence spell was still up, yet somehow he'd heard that voice. By their reactions, so had everyone else.

"No sense in continuing to strain yourself Percy. The silence spell is unnecessary," the voice boomed again.

Boss, Percy sent the text to Arthur.

Drop it, whatever it is. We have bigger concerns. Arthur replied, then he sent a separate text to Gawain, *How'd this guy get into our system?*

Gawain's reply came verbally over the audiolink. "No one's in our system, sir. I locked out the hack attempt at Percy's goggles. What's the trouble?"

Arthur realized the difference between the sound of his audiolink and the sound of the voice, but the only answer he could come up with to justify what was going on was utterly ridiculous. He didn't even register Gawain's question until it became the last piece of evidence in what was really happening.

"Back to your flesh Gawain," Arthur spoke out loud, which was still a different sound than the voice. "We got a switch."

Everyone heard him say it. Switch. It was their way of saying the acronym, SWCH: Situation We Can't Handle. Something too big for the ShadowKnights, which meant it was serious shit indeed. Arthur was almost certain he knew what was happening, though he was holding a slight hope that he was wrong. The rest of the knights stood at the ready with weapons hot, though barrels were starting to lower as Arthur called the SWCH.

"Please come along. Tunnel to the right. I'm excited to meet you." The voice was less booming now.

"What's the switch boss?" Lancelot asked. Arthur could hear the bravado pushing through the damaged pride. Lancelot would be the last guy in the group who would admit that there was a situation the team couldn't handle. Any other team might have worried their gunbunny would try and prove that belief, but Arthur knew better. Lancelot would keep his head. Arthur had earned their trust—at least he hoped he had. They had pulled through a lot, proving their competence time and time again, and this was the first time Arthur had called switch.

He came up with a plan and dished out orders, because that was what training and conditioning pushed him to do. "Percy, come with me. The rest of you stay here and get ready to run. Lancelot, follow extreme backcover protocol."

Arthur then moved toward the tunnel. Percy followed behind quickly, giving a quick shrug to the rest of the team.

The five remaining knights looked at each other. On this op, "extreme backcover" meant blowing the caverns as they ran. Lancelot began balling up wads of C12 and adding radio detonators. He'd drop them along the way if they needed to run.

Percy dropped his energy wall and followed Arthur down the tunnel. Out of earshot from the team, Arthur deactivated his subvocal microtransceiver and signaled Percy to do the same. Once the mics were gone, Arthur told Percy what he thought was in store and what he needed the mage to do. He was fairly certain his voice didn't shake as he spoke.

"Keep an eye on the astral. Warn me if it looks like I'm being manipulated," Arthur said. Percy was his oldest running mate and his oldest friend. His tone changed from the staccato bark of a leader to the softer tones of a friend in need.

"What's the switch boss? You never answered Lance," Percy said.

"I'm surprised you don't realize what we're walking into," Arthur said as he slowed his walk and flipped on the flashlight on his gun.

"Who said I don't? I just want to hear you say it so I don't sound like the crazy one," Percy said with a slight smile.

Arthur's smile from earlier was long gone, but it returned, just a little. "Dragon." The word was half statement, half question, spoken in a tone of desired disbelief. Arthur made a slight glance towards Percy and saw the man nodding. No more words passed between them as they finished crossing the longest ten meters of their life.

The tunnel they walked through made only one curve before the other opening came into view. The triangular split opened into blackness that was too big for the flashlight. Arthur caught the hand signal from Percy that meant "illusion spell" when he glanced over. No surprise, but it meant they would walk in blind. Though he suspected all the intel in the world would not prepare him for this meeting.

Trading one final glance, the pair stepped through the black wall and into the lair.

... WAR AT 10,000 METERS ...

Manhattan, 2058 hours, 6/3/2074

Samuel's Mystic Goods and Lore Shop was a few minutes from closing when the bell adorning the front door rang. Last-minute customers. Great. Samuel glanced at the security feeds before leaving the safety of the back office. He saw three figures walking restlessly through the store. All three of them had the hoods of their jackets pulled up, preventing any of the cameras from getting a good shot of their faces. The three that he saw he knew were up to no good. They looked like they were casing his store, planning to rob it. One of them bumped a display, and several crystals fell to the ground and shattered. Fuck. What was worse was that his wards had picked up a fourth individual entering the store, one that had an active spell. One that he did not see. Fuck.

Locking the security door for his office, Samuel nervously turned on his microphone so he could address the new customers in front. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but we're closed. You're going to have to leave now and come back tomorrow."

"We're looking for the proprietor of this establishment. Would that be you?"

Not a robbery. Oh fuck. It kept getting worse. Samuel tapped an ARO on his commlink, tripping a silent alarm with NYPD, Inc. "No, I'm sorry; Mr. Long has left for the evening. I'm merely the assistant manager. Please leave. I have tripped a silent alarm. If you do not leave now, we will be pressing charges against you for trespassing and destruction of property. So get the hell out of the shop, you hoodlums!"

The leader of the group turned to face a security camera, starting at it intently. "No, you didn't. Our hacker intercepted and terminated your alarm. Just like he's going to lock down your establishment ... now." As he said that, the security system dropped the durasteel security gate in front and locked all the doors of the building. Samuel frantically attempted to get the security system to release the locks, but the doors remain bolted.

"What are you doing? This is pointless. There is no money in the store. Everything has already been transferred into my bank accounts. All the valuable foci and reagents have been put in the safe for the evening. Anything you find in the front is more for the tourists than anything else. So leave and I won't tell the NYPD anything. I'll consider the matter settled. Please—I've got family to think about."

"You should have thought about that before you tainted your hands with the blood of dragons. Now, you are going to have to pay." The three men walked into the back. Where his office was. For a moment, Samuel was grateful that the security door for this office still used the old tumbler locks that were not based off the computerized security system.

"I got out of that trade five years ago. I knew someday that business would get me into trouble, so I washed my hands of it. I swear I will never touch another dragon pelt, scales, or talon clippings for the rest of my life! Please don't do this!"

"I'm sorry, my friend. There's no bringing back those dracoforms that you had slaughtered for your profit. There's no mercy for those whose blood you stole, blood that now stains your very essence. And my employer is paying me for your death. So you might as well come out. You know this door isn't going to stop us. And there's no way out for you. You are going to die."

Samuel watched in horror as two of the members of the crew approached the security door. They proceeded to land punches on the door, which violently shook the doorframe, snapping and cracking the surrounding plaster. Instinctively, Samuel reached for his pistol that he kept in his desk door. Just as his shaky hands aimed the pistol at the door, it exploded inward, snapping off its hinges. Behind the door stood the fourth intruder, the one who had cloaked himself with an invisibility spell. Samuel Long tried to shoot the man, but instead his fingers opened, and he dropped the gun. After that, all he could do was scream.



Posted by: Frosty

It has been months since the world has seen any significant hint of the dragon conflict that some have dubbed the “Dragon Civil War.” The last major public event linked to this conflict came when the great dragon Hestaby abruptly resigned her position as a Prince of Tír Tairngire. Since that time, the Aztlan and Amazonian war has once again flared in intensity. The front lines for the South American war have shifted more times than can be counted within the last few months, and enormous, rage-fueled battles have bathed large swatches of rainforest in fire. Thousands of soldiers, mercenaries, and guerrilla fighters have lost their lives during this intense fighting. Occurring roughly at the same time as this massive flare up, we have also witnessed Horizon lashing out at technomancers in a display of violence in the red rain that fell on Las Vegas. Ramifications from this turbulence and the damage done to Horizon’s once-illustrious reputation are still being felt worldwide. Between these two major, metahuman-led global events, the dragons and their current hostilities appear to have receded into the shadows, away from the scrutiny of metahumanity (with the exception of Sirrurg and his continued violence). Depending on whom you ask, you may get the opinion that this is precisely where these types of engagements belong. Shadow ops prevent collateral damage, and they are more in line with how the great dragons prefer to operate. Other experts, though, warn that dragons are far more dangerous and capable of doing much more widespread and long-lasting harm to metahuman civilization from behind the veil of the shadows. When they feel that no one is watching them, when they feel no one is capable of challenging them, and when they think no one is prepared enough to prevent their grand schemes from coming to fruition is when they are the most dangerous, like members of Winternight just before they attempted to bring about Ragnarok. And these same experts would say that it would be better for our society in the long run if the dragons were to be more visible and transparent with their rivalries and their schemes, bringing out their rage and aggression and allowing it to air out in the open.

No matter how you look at it, this perceived calm in the dragon conflict has led some governments and corporations to breathe a sigh of relief and focus on other pressing matters. Many are taking this lack of noticeable activity as a sign that the world has finally taken a step back from the precipice of facing a direct confrontation with the great dragons, despite the fact the dragons themselves have done very little to present a permanent resolution for the rage felt by the dragons for crimes they felt have been committed against their blood. And some were not convinced by Hestaby’s speech to the United Nations that there was ever any real danger facing them from the great dragons. Unfortunately for these people and their rose-colored glasses, my sources are revealing to me quite a different story from what these groups wish to believe. I am discovering from my ongoing research that the animosity and vengeance that so many of the dragons have directed at metahumanity is still very much active and continuing to grow. Even as some dragons look to settle scores with metahumanity, old tensions and rivalries between the great dragons themselves are bubbling to the surface, creating unique fractures within dragon culture and making this scenario even more unstable and tenuous. It is my opinion that as each new day passes; the dragons are more likely than not to lash out, toward the members of their own race as well as metahumanity.

To further add credence to the theory that this conflict has yet to reach its climax are the prophecies that many followers of mentor spirits and totems have been receiving recently. Since the assassination of Elliot Eyes of Wyrms, prophecies about bloodshed and the dragons have continued to be received and have not abated a year later. Many of these prophecies still revolve around Hestaby and Lofwyr, but others are beginning to involve Lofwyr and his sibling, Alamaïs.

Despite the overwhelming number of these emerging prophecies, some scholars adamantly point to the fact that violence against talismongers and magic groups that have dealt with dragon reagents is beginning to subside, suggesting a lull in this conflict. They believe this to be a sign that things are returning to the status quo. I know Lyran would agree with me when I say that this is only one part of a much bigger story. While it is true violence is down against this particular segment of the magical community, most of the talismongers that have dealt with dragon reagents in the past have dumped their entire stock of these enchanting materials. The United Talismongers Association has likewise begun putting significant pressure on its members and those reputable talismongers who follow the practices of the UTA to get out of selling or using dragon reagents for the good of the profession. This pressure from the UTA, as well as the attacks on talismongers around the world, has reduced considerably the amount of dragon reagents available on the market today as well as the number of talismongers willing to sell these materials. As of April 2074, I have learned that close to ninety percent of the dragon reagents that were once available on the market a few years ago have since disappeared, most of which have been reclaimed by these agents working for the dragons. The few dragon materials that have survived this purge have either gone to secret organizations that could potentially use them in rituals against the dragons at a future point in time, such as the Black Lodge, have been picked up by the megacorporations and their magic groups for their use and continued research, or have been marked up in price on the black market anywhere from two to three thousand percent, if not by more. Although violence against the talismongers does seem to be abating, it also seems likely that it is because the dragons are close to accomplishing one of their objectives within this conflict: reclaiming the dragon materials stolen by metahumans and making these materials too scarce for metahuman magicians to use on any wide scale again. This theory does not suggest that that this war is drawing to a close, but rather suggests that it may be coming to a point where it could be changing in its scope and objectives.

- Frosty has hit in on the head about the changing nature of the violence. Many of the talismongers I know who had a hand in acquiring or dealing in dragon reagents are either now out of business, on the run, in hiding, or deceased. Having three thousand talismongers killed around the world by these fanatic dragon groups is enough for many talismongers to shut their shops down and flee. As for me, I’m on the run too. In the last two months, four of these rather zealous groups have come after me. I am pleased to report they haven’t yet caught up to me, and I plan to keep it that way. Now that many of the active talismongers have been dealt with or will be dealt with soon, I’m hearing that these dragon- and drake-led runner teams are targeting retired talismongers. These attacks are



targeting talismongers that have been retired for ten, twenty, and even thirty years. If retired talismongers are still alive and the dragons know they were involved in the sale of dragon-based ritual materials, you can bet they are considered a target. I have heard of five retired talismongers being hunted down and brutally murdered over the course of the last month. It only goes to show that dragons have a very long memory and will go to extreme lengths to obtain justice—or at least their definition of it. And unfortunately, these attacks are not limited to the talismongers themselves. If they profited from dragon reagents and allowed their families to benefit from those sales, these relatives are also being targeted.

- Lyran
- I don't get it. Violence is going down against active talismongers, but violence is picking up against retired ones? You would think the dragons would be more consistent in wiping out the current of generation of talismongers first before moving on to something else.
- Jimmy No
- The groups responsible for this violence aren't being hired or sent out by just one dragon. And each one has their own unique view on things like draconic justice. Some dragons' wrath is sated merely by getting metahumans to give up on the practice of harvesting dragon materials for enchanting purposes, while others won't ever stop hunting "tainted" talismongers until every single one of them is held accountable and are killed. Keep in mind that violence against active talismongers is still ongoing. It would seem the more pragmatic dragons are moving on from hunting talismongers, while the more extreme dragons are still passionately continuing the hunt for current and retired talismongers. I would not expect violence against the talismonger or magic group communities to subside completely for years, or perhaps even decades, thanks to two things: the extreme elements that exist in dragon culture and the dragons' long-term memories.
- Frosty
- Lyran, did you ever discover what happened to Peter Blacksnake? You mentioned he disappeared at one point in the past, and I don't think you've said whatever became of him.
- Ma'Fan
- He's dead. His remains were eventually uncovered inside the burned-out shell of his shop.
- Lyran
- I'm sorry to hear that. And I'm sorry for your loss. If you need to talk, feel free to give me a ring.
- Ma'Fan
- Thank you. And no, there is no need to try and search for the assholes that did that. I took care of them personally. They learned the hard way not to mess with this wolf shaman.
- Lyran
- From what I have seen personally and read from Snopes' *Conspiracy Theories* file, talismongers are not the only ones being killed. I had the misfortune of liberating a few ancient scrolls from a magic-based organization recently. When I was in their offices, I came across a fairly horrific sight. Four guards and a couple of wageslaves were piled in a corner, with five of them looking like they had been chewed on. The sixth was carefully dissected. That's the best word I can come up with for what I saw. Dissected. Her chest cavity was cut open in clean, straight lines, and her organs were removed and packaged neatly next to her body. Luckily, I didn't have to go any deeper into the office, so I didn't see any more corpses—or happen upon those who were doping the killing. I got out of there as quickly as possible with the item I'd come for, as I had no intention of becoming their next victim. And I would be personally relieved if I could hear some news to suggest that these types of killings might be ending soon.
- Mika
- Unfortunately, Mika, I can't give you such a reassurance. The chatter I am hearing is that certain dragons are trying to leave behind a very specific message for metahumanity but that message keeps getting intercepted. Law-enforcement agencies, corporate security organizations, and governmental intelligence agencies are gravely concerned that it would cause panic and outrage in the general metahuman population if information about the killings got out, which could make the situation even worse. These particular dragons have killed at least four hundred metahumans since this conflict has heated up to try to get their message out, and so far, most of the instances have not been broadcast or reported on in any way. Those few that have hit the media have been treated as isolated incidents, and the connections between the killings have not been made. To counter this ongoing cover up, organizations with links to suggest are beginning to record these deaths and are posting their footage on sites and datahavens such as ShadowSea. Some of these recordings show the aftermath of the killings—others record the killings as they happen. If you do a cursory search for recent dragon kills on one of these archives, I'm sure you'll find some of the relevant trideo footage. Though I don't advise that you watch them if you have a sensitive stomach or have just eaten. This effort will eventually have a result, and the mainstream media will have to take notice. It is only a matter of time. Once that happens, it is possible these deaths may subside if the dragons feel that their message has finally been made clear, and that metahumanity is beginning to heed it.
- Frosty
- And what is this specific message that these meaningless deaths are supposed to hold?
- Glitch
- Oh come on, now, Glitch. It's not complicated. They obviously want to tell us how superior they are, how they want the killing of their kind to end, and what dire consequences we might all face if we don't cut it the fuck out. Even I figured that one out.
- Slamm-0!





- Even in his less-than-elegant and simplistic style, Slamm-O! seems to have indeed captured their meaning. And unfortunately, from what I am hearing, if things aren't settled with the dragons soon, this violence with magic group members and staff may not remain isolated to them.
- Fianchetto
- Sadly, these trideo recordings are also showing up in the worst possible locations, including recruiting sites for anti-dragon groups—particularly ones that are more than just talk. These trideos are being used to recruit zealots, extremists, and loners who simply hate dragons and desire their extinction by any means necessary. This could move tensions from dragon against dragon to dragons against everyone else.
- Thorn
- Not only that, but from what I am hearing from my end, some of the dragons instigating these attacks want new rounds of violence that can't be covered up so easily. I've heard that they would like to attack schools, malls, amusement parks, simsense theatres—soft targets where you can do heavy damage and ensure you get widespread media coverage. It would also fit in with their agenda of saying “our kind was innocent when you killed and butchered their bodies to make into enchanting materials. These metahumans killed could also be considered innocent.” This could very well turn into an “innocence for innocence” policy with the dragons to prove their point and satisfy their need for vengeance.
- Stone
- These attacks are likely not to remain solely at the wageslave level either. Attacks at that level are reported on and then quickly forgotten by the media and the public. But if a Damien Knight, a Richard Villiers, or an Angela Colloton is assassinated by these dragon forces, you can bet that will remain on the news for weeks or possibly even months. If I were a dragon, that's exactly what I would want.
- Sunshine
- Talk about your “Cry havoc and let's slip the dogs of war” approach to things. Let's hope it doesn't reach that point.
- Picador
- This discussion is certainly becoming more and more depressing by the minute.
- Bull
- There's one final point I would like to make: talismongers aren't the only ones responsible for the sell and use of dragon reagents. There are a lot of runner teams out there that have been hired to collect those types of materials. Poachers who make livings off of collecting rare pelts and animal materials like teeth and scales are likely still out there, for example. There is a distinct possibility that some of these dragons, especially the more extreme dragons, will be coming after the lesser-known metahuman groups that have been involved in dragon-reagent trafficking. So if you've been involved in some of those areas in the past, you may wish to start building up a network of safe houses. If this violence against talismongers proves anything, it's that dragons can be meticulous

in their revenge, and that they seldom forget anything. It may just be a matter of time before they send their agents after you.

- Wyrn Watcher

As the violence against talismongers is declining, overt violence against drakes is also dropping. Between July 2073 and March 2074, nearly sixty drakes were killed by anti-dragon groups. From April 2074 to now, only three drake murders have been reported. While some claim this is another encouraging sign that the dragon conflict is cooling, others, including myself, see this reduction as reflecting a new reality for drakes. Drakes have gone to ground and are hiding from these fanatics. Should they choose to come out and reveal themselves any time in the near future, there is every reason to believe that violence will fall on them swiftly and painfully. Another reason that the violence is down is simple—with all the recent deaths, the drake population is only becoming smaller and harder to find.

My connections with the Draco Foundation inform me that in the past two years, nearly thirty drakes from around the world have fled to the Draco Foundation for asylum. Their prime motivation is protection, of course, but they're not just connecting with the Foundation and then disappearing. For thousands of years, drakes have been prized for their services by the great dragons, and who have gone to great lengths to claim drakes for themselves. Since these anti-dragon groups began killing off drakes, thus causing this limited supply of talent to dwindle even further, the great dragons have had to work harder than before to find the remaining unclaimed drakes and press them into service for themselves. Because this conflict appears to be eroding some long-held traditions among the dragons, drakes that have already been claimed by a great dragon are no longer safe from being extracted by another great dragon and forced into their service. I've learned that in the last month alone, it is believed Ghostwalker (or at least his people, since his whereabouts have not been precisely clear for the past year or so) has arranged the extraction of five drakes that previously belonged to Rhonabwy. Two weeks ago, it is believed Hestaby poached three drakes away from Lofwyr, which has only served to add even more tension to that particular relationship.

- Before anyone asks whether Scale or other high-level drakes associated with Golden Snout were extracted, let me assure you that they were not. Those three that were extracted by Hestaby's forces were acquired by Lofwyr in the last two years. They were considered low-level assets and are not believed to have had access to any of Lofwyr's sensitive secrets. It is also rumored that the three drakes wanted to go work for Hestaby since their indentured servitude began. The drakes are believed to have been former runners that were pushed into service for Lofwyr. This gesture, as I see it, was more of a “frag you” gesture by Hestaby than an attempt to learn any serious secrets or do serious damage to Lofwyr's operations. Only goes to show how vicious this conflict may end up becoming.
- Winterhawk
- All I can say is I hope that cheap shot aimed at Lofwyr was worth it to Hestaby in the long run, since it brings about the risk of more violence.
- Haze



- These groups that are spouting off with all this anti-dragon rhetoric, groups like Humanis and Alamos 20K, are finally seeing what their hatemongering against the dragons will cost them. In the last few weeks, forty of Humanis' and Alamos 20K's chapterhouses in Seattle, Los Angeles, London, DeeCee, Paris, Frankfurt, Moscow, and Miami have been attacked. These coordinated assaults have been brutal and merciless, costing these organizations hundreds of their members. Although law-enforcement agencies like Europol and Interpol have said these incidents are "random" and "isolated," commlink and cybereye recordings that I have obtained tell a very different story. The attackers clearly involved young dragons, drakes, dracoforms, and/or dracomorphs. The scenes were clearly laced with pro-dragon and anti-metahuman sentiments, such as "Dragons are the superior species," "Go back to the jungles where you belong, apes," and "Learn your place in the food chain." These groups have also been hiring runners to "out" suspected Human Nation members. Since this conflict has started heating up, nearly eighty alleged members of Human Nation have been identified, many of whom are in positions of power. The biggest names so far have been UCAS Secretary of the Treasury Brenda Ogawa, CAS Vice President Lowery Grimes, Mitsuhamas shareholder Shin Yuruyasu, and Wuxing shareholder James Harper-Smythe. And I'm certain more will be identified as Human Nation conspirators as time goes on and as these groups continue to dig.
- Plan 9
- If the dragons are starting to hit these anti-dragon groups this hard, it makes me wonder what's going down with the *real* dragonslaying groups, those that are so underground that even we Jackpointers don't know about them. And it also makes me wonder just how much bloodshed is happening that we know nothing about.
- Icarus

One sign of the possibly deepening conflict that the naysayers have yet to be able to dismiss has been the targeted assault on very specific metahumans from around the world. These metahumans, who have not had any connection to talismongers or magic groups, have not only disappeared, but all their fortunes, assets, and in some cases their entire family lines have vanished along with them. The metahumans that have disappeared have been government officials, corporate figures from all the megacorporations, and national citizens (particularly those in the elven nations). Circumstantial evidence—including the swift, clean nature of the operations and backgrounds of the individuals who have vanished—all point to the great dragons as being responsible for these disappearances.

These disappearances have occurred on a global scale, and many believe that we have only begun to see the start of these disappearances. Many believe these disappearances were a result of the great dragons seeking vengeance against families that may have been involved in crimes against the dragons. Theories abound that some of these families had members that could have been, at one point, part of the secretive dragon orders, while others suggest that their ancestors may have been directly responsible for down-cycle hunting of dragons and the eradication of dragon egg clutches. The dragons have passed judgment on these individuals, choosing

to wipe them and their families off the earth. Many believe that the dragons are actively taking these fortunes and adding them to their hoards as a way of balancing the scales.

According to leaked Horizon records, as well as information provided by the Draconic Information Virtual Exchange, at the end of December 2073, approximately one hundred metahumans from around the world disappeared in ways believed to be connected to the wrath of the great dragons. I've gathered data showing that by the midpoint of 2074, nearly five hundred additional metahumans disappeared, along with a combined total of nearly six billion nuyen in assets, property and cold hard cash.

Unfortunately, all efforts to trace what happened to these metahumans, their families, or their fortunes have all resulted in dead ends. Whoever is instigating this violence is expending a lot of resources to conceal their activities and their identities. Many believe these disappearances are related to the more overt violence that has taken place against talismongers, though others say that the increased subtlety of these crimes indicate the light touch and long-term planning of dragons.

- The individuals trying to dismiss the severity of the dragon civil war don't need a concrete explanation for these disappearances. If there's no solid proof of who is behind them, they could simply say individuals or groups such as serial killers, blood mages, bug spirits, or the shedim could just as well be the ones behind the disappearances as the dragons. Even though my group, the DIVE, has evidence to suggest Lofwyr met with Aden right before a series of metahumans disappeared from the Middle East, there's no concrete proof Lofwyr told Aden to make those individuals disappear, or what that meeting was about. So, really, there is no way to convince people who do not know what to believe just how serious this conflict is until they see dragons firebombing their cities.
- Wyrm Watcher
- I don't know if the dragons are responsible for this or not, but requests for my services have more than tripled in the last year. I have seen a lot of requests for Egyptian, Persian, Sumerian, and Chinese artifacts; most of the items people asked about are thousands of years old. Any of these trinkets would be an excellent addition to a dragon hoard. And many of these requests are not even museum pieces, but rather are in private collections from around the world. I don't know about you, Mika, but I'm swamped.
- Ma'Fan
- All I will say is that business is good for a thief right now. And with all these jobs, I hope we're able to stay out of each other's way.
- Mika

Along with the increase in violence against random, wealthy metahumans and their family lines is increased violence near major mana power sites, including Stonehenge, Easter Island, the Castlerigg stone circle, Devil's Tower, the Serpent Mound in the UCAS, the major ley lines in the United Kingdom, and the dragon lines of the Ring of Fire. These are but a few locations of great mystical power that are currently being fought over by those that work for these various dragon factions. At the moment,





these attacks still are rather sporadic. Dragons are starting to probe each others' interest in these sites, as well as their ability to defend the ones important to them. Rumors going around say that Lofwyr and Lung sent in a number of runner teams to feel out the Stonehenge power site in an effort to secure it for themselves. It is believed Rhonabwy quickly marshaled his own shadow assets and made a very strong statement about his claim to Stonehenge by driving them off quickly. Many experts, myself included, feel that attacks on these sites are going to be a bellwether of the severity of the conflict between the dragons. The more frequent the attacks, the more likely it is that a dragon will secure a site and then use it for a ritual spellcasting attack against one of their enemies, be they metahumans or dragons. Should something like that happen, not only will it push the conflict into a full-on hot war, but there will be a massive scramble for the unclaimed power sites around the world unlike anything we've ever seen, which would lead to violence on a horrible scale. In order to prevent that from happening, national governments, along with corporate forces, are beginning to take note of these conflicts and are actively placing military resources at these sites to forestall vicious fighting. From what I have heard, the Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee ("C5") is watching these activities very closely and is prepared in case of violence. So far, the attacks at these sites are being explained to the public as the result of extremist movements within groups such as the New Druidic Movement and the Black Lodge, who are convenient scapegoats for these types of attacks. To their credit, most metahumans who have denied the severity of the dragon conflict have not fallen for this weak cover story. Most agree that the individuals behind these attacks are indeed working for the dragons and that as this conflict wears on, the chances that even one of these major sites will be procured by a dragon willing to use it for destructive purposes will increase exponentially. The last known attempt to probe defenses and/or claim a mana site is believed to have happened in Machu Picchu nearly two weeks ago, in Peru. Talk in the shadows suggests that two more attempts at probing magic sites are going to happen soon. Word is that the hot springs of Termas de Rio Hondo as well as the southern islands of Tierra del Fuego might be the next targets.

- Frosty says that the dragons are making plays for these power sites, which is true. But I've also heard the anti-dragon groups would love nothing more than to use these sites to spur a war with the dragons that some of these groups have been wanting for centuries. Having just one anti-dragon group seize control of a power site and use it to harm any dragon with ritual magic will be enough to set off this powder keg and bring down the full wrath of dragons upon metahumanity. With the raw emotions running as high as ever, I would not expect to see any restraint should that particular hammer fall.
- Haze
- You know what truly astonishes me in all this? Yes, the C5 has been called to monitor this "dragon situation" for the Corporate Court. But you know which corporation has been assigned to chair that committee this time around? That's right, kiddies: S-K. Talk about the fragging fox watching the henhouse.
- Bull

- I'm sure Ares is just having a fit over that one.
- Sticks

In recent months, there have been a couple of troubling conflicts between the vassals belonging to the great dragons. Horizon documented an incident between an unknown dragon and Lung's vassal, Yat Gwan. It is believed that Yat Gwan won that encounter, but there's no indication of what happened to the attacking dragon or who he might have been workattacks. The only clear fact is that the attacker was a western dragon. More recently, there was an encounter between Masaru's vassal, Marcupo, and two dragons believed to be in the service of Hualpa. Although no remains have been recovered, it is believed that Marcupo did not survive the encounter with the feathered serpents, and Masaru is quite upset over the loss.

Just as the fighting over power sites can be an indicator of what is happening in this conflict, physical confrontations between vassals can also give us a clear indication of where this conflict is heading, and what we can expect. I personally would expect to see some sort of payback from Masaru against Hualpa and Amazonia interests soon. One positive sign we can take from these vassal encounters is that they have been few and far between. The rarity of these conflicts show that there is still restraint within the dragons; they are not yet ready to completely unleash their pent-up rage and aggression. Unfortunately, we have yet to see whether restraint in this civil war will prevail or if all hell will be released.

With so many potential fronts for a dragon conflict, it would be helpful to understand which dragons are at the forefront of these conflicts, and where their agendas may take us in the next five or ten years. I will begin by talking about perhaps the most important of the great dragons, Lofwyr.

A DRAGON'S FOCUS DIVIDED: LOFWYR

In this dragon conflict, there should be no doubt that Lofwyr is the great dragon that currently wields the most influence and power. Still believed to wield the title of Loremaster, Lofwyr has not publicly spoken about what his role as Loremaster is or what kind of influence he wields with the other great dragons. But it is clear that Lofwyr is currently acting in that capacity during this era of turmoil for the dragons. Not only has Lofwyr been absent from his offices at Saeder-Krupp headquarters more often than usual, he has also been observed meeting with other great dragons. In the past, Lofwyr has not been known in the past to foster any kind of relationship with the other dragons, so meeting with or having direct communication with the other dragons would be out of character for him. In the last year, members of DIVE as well as my own sources have confirmed that Lofwyr has indeed met with Aden, the Sea Dragon, Lung, Arleesh, Hualpa, and has had multiple correspondences with Ghostwalker (most of those have, of course, happened recently; more details about Ghostwalker a little later on). It is also speculated that Lofwyr has met with several younger dragons who have not yet reached great dragon status. No one knows for certain what these meetings have been about, but so far these meetings have yet to yield a peaceful



resolution to this conflict. The real question then becomes what are Lofwyr's goals in all of this, and what is his end game?

- Lofwyr is, of course, quite crafty. DIVE—and anyone else who has dealt with him—can attest to that. For the last several months, several of my group's research notes and discussions on the dragons and their current activities have somehow made their way to Lofwyr's hands. I'm trying to find who in our ranks might be working for Lofwyr—he has recently placed someone in my organization to gather as much intelligence on the other dragons as he possibly can get. You know he has to be up to something when he's actively supplementing his own intelligence network, which was already vast, with something like DIVE. It worries me, however, when we discover something that we don't understand that might be ending up in Lofwyr's hands. After all, he's likely got a much better grasp on many of the magical materials we come across than we do. So there's really no way of knowing just what he might be learning from us without us even knowing it.
- Wyrm Watcher
- Moles you say? I think I can probably help you with that. For a price, of course. Send me a message offline. We'll talk.
- Thorn

At the moment, Lofwyr has to be the most concerned about the North American great dragon known as Hestaby. Hestaby very publicly broke with the dragons' most widely held traditions about not speaking about internal dragon matters or feuds in front of the metahuman population. To add insult to injury, she then added her voice to the United Nations that would later indict one of their kind on war crimes against metahumanity. This very act could get a dragon killed and is seen by many of the pro-dragon faction as a unfathomable betrayal, despite the fact that Hestaby pleaded with metahumanity to capture and not kill Sirurg as a show of good faith. It is also believed that Hestaby's very public display of disobedience and defiance may have been a catalyst for other dragons to disregard certain customs. Chief among them might be Alamais and the rhetoric he has been preaching for years about dragon superiority over metahumanity. It is believed that lately he has failed to show respect and deference to Lofwyr as the dragons' Loremaster. Lofwyr must regain control of the situation before more schisms emerge that could threaten increased violence that would be directed at other dragons and the metahuman population at large.

Since Hestaby's speech, there has been increased activity in the Rhine-Ruhr megasprawl and Mount Shasta. There have been nearly two dozen instances of sabotage of Saeder-Krupp-owned factories and subsidiaries around the world that were believed to have been instigated by Hestaby. The key to determining who was behind the attacks lies with how many metahuman wageslaves were killed: none. This seems to mirror what Hestaby accomplished during her attack on the Saeder-Krupp Middle East headquarters, when she leveled the forty-seven-story building with no fatalities. Key metahuman personnel within Saeder-Krupp headquarters who could have known what Lofwyr might be planning have been taken, only to be returned hours later. It is believed that the abductors tried to use the Mind Probe spell to pull out relevant information regarding the conflict, but it's not

clear if they actually learned anything. In retaliation, Lofwyr is believed to have extracted nearly a dozen members of the Shasta Shamans, and he has not yet returned the people he took. It is likely they are imprisoned in one of Saeder-Krupp's maximum security prisons, taken out of play while this conflict is under way. Hestaby is currently offering a two-hundred-thousand-nuyen reward for the return of these shamans, with an additional five-hundred-thousand-nuyen reward for the safe return of Randall Dancing-Star, the leader of Hestaby's clutch of technomancers.

In addition to seizing the physical assets of Hestaby, Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp are also going after Hestaby's financial assets. Following July 2073, both Phoenix Biotechnologies and Starfield Botanical Engineering have reported losing millions of nuyen in new contracts as well as established clientele. Saeder-Krupp has made it very difficult for these two corporations to compete, going so far as to make offers to their clients to do the same work for less at a significant loss to S-K. While these two corporations continue to tussle, four other corporations in which Hestaby has invested have already collapsed due to the pressure Saeder-Krupp put on them. These companies include BioLogic Technologies, BCMU, Johns Hopkins Institute of Health, Inc., and Olgitechnologies. Hestaby has lost millions of nuyen, while allowing Saeder-Krupp to pick up a majority of the remaining assets from those companies.

The next great dragon Lofwyr needs to worry about in this conflict is Alamais. After the conflict started, Alamais established a base of operations in GeMiTo. This base of operations currently includes him and at least twelve younger dragons, with room for many more dragons. These dragons appear to be loyal followers of Alamais from across the world, buying into his rhetoric of dragon superiority. These followers are not all just western dragons as Alamais is, but rather are representatives from the full spectrum of dragons, including eastern dragons, feathered serpents, as well as a couple of Sirurg. It is clear that these dragons listen and obey only Alamais and what he is preaching, not Lofwyr and whatever authority he may have within dragon society. For the past six months, rumors abound that Alamais and his followers have turned GeMiTo into their own personal feeding grounds, acting with a complete lack of discretion. Underground reports from GeMiTo are saying that nearly three hundred metahumans a day are disappearing from the sprawl, allegedly to be used as food. If this number has remained consistent over the last six months, GeMiTo could actually have seen the loss of a staggering fifty-four thousand metahumans since Alamais arrived in the city. With so little corporate or government control in the region, it would seem that the metahumans that live in that part of Europe are left to fend for themselves.

In public, these deaths have not been reported in order to avoid an all-out panic. But in private, several AA corporations are sending representatives to Saeder-Krupp, pleading with, and in some cases demanding, that the widespread attacks on the sprawl be stopped. Lofwyr, for his part, is rumored to have attempted to meet with Alamais in an attempt to settle him and his followers down. No matter what agenda Lofwyr may have that could elevate dragon interests, he has invested himself deeply in metahumanity in the form of the world's largest megacorporation. What Alamais has been doing is threatening that relationship and is only adding fuel to the anti-dragon groups, making any work Saeder-Krupp does for its metahuman clients





INCOMING FEED.....

and consumers very difficult to carry out without distraction or threat of violence from anti-dragon groups. According to sources including Horizon intelligence files, these attempts to meet with Alamaï have been rebuffed. Ultimately, Lofwyr simply cannot tolerate another insurrection within the dragon culture, and he also cannot afford to appear weak to the other dragons. Many expect a direct and violent confrontation between the two soon, but in my opinion it's too early for that. Lofwyr appears to have chosen another more subtle route to go after Alamaï—attacking his hoard directly. In the last two months, several prized artifacts rumored to be in Alamaï's primary lair in Spitsbergen, Norway have shown up at S-K headquarters and have been put on public display. The rumored items have included two prized Celtic war hammers that are at least a few millennia old. Either one or both of these war hammers could be the inspiration for the myths about the legendary Norse hammer known Mjölfnir. Another object is believed to have been the inspiration for Andvarinaut, a magical ring in Norse mythology capable of producing gold. There is no telling how Alamaï is handling the news that his hoard may have been violated, but as a general rule dragons don't take that sort of thing lightly. As was the case with Hestaby, Lofwyr has been using Saeder-Krupp and its financial might to go after Alamaï's financial holdings. So far, Saeder-Krupp has sunk AET Ergonomic Systems, Alvis PLC, and Bowman Metal Works, all of which allegedly had connections to Alamaï.

- I say MET2000, 10,000 Daggers, Combat, Inc., and whatever other merc groups are in this part of the world should send in all their mercs to deal with the dragons. It would be great practice for them, and it would give them a chance to earn some very special bragging rights. Call it a new sport for Desert Wars—Extreme Dragon Killing. Problem solved.
- Am-Mut
- Ah, no. Companies are not going to send their mercenaries in there unless they can be sure there is profit to be had and there's a reasonable chance that a decent percentage of the units they send out will survive. Do you remember how much it took to bring down Feuerschwinge? There aren't a whole lot of mercenary commands that have that kind of firepower at their disposal. Now, they might be able to take on some smaller dragons, or maybe the larger groups might even have some success with a great if they were lucky, but multiple dragons? Good luck. Not even the mercs that generally sign up for suicide runs would be jumping to try to take that on.
- Black Mamba
- Well then, Thor Shot the area. I cannot think of a better use for a Thor Shot than taking out a bunch of rogue dragons.
- Am-Mut

- Can't. Ever since runners procured Aztechnology's satellite weapons platform and turned it against the corporation, the Corporate Court has shut down all satellite weapons systems, including Thor Shots, until such time that new security measures can be implemented and can prevent such an incident from happening again. To this date, the Thor Shots are still offline.
- Orbital DK
- At least that's what they tell us. Who knows what their actual status is. For all we know, they could Thor Shot that compound in ten minutes' time.
- Am-Mut
- I think this shutdown is legit. I think that "hostile takeover" of a satellite weapons platform scared the shit out of the Corporate Court justices (at least those that were actually "real," at any rate). If runners could obtain access to a satellite weapon and turn it against one of its member corporations, what is to stop someone from hijacking another weapons platform and turning it on Zurich-Orbital? Those Thor Shots wouldn't have the same kinetic or explosive force in space, but they wouldn't need to. They could do catastrophic damage to the infrastructure of Z-O by breaching compartments, shearing off modules and solar panels, and ultimately killing everyone on board.
- Orbital DK
- So who has the paydata on these artifacts? Are they magical as one might expect, or are they valuable simply because of their historical and cultural value?
- Ma'Fan
- One of the hammers is believed to be a unique enchantment, made from a metal that has not been found anywhere else. Rumors I've heard say this particular hammer responds only to the Awakened. If you're Awakened and can channel mana in any way, you can get it to cast lightning in the shape you want, ball or bolt. If you're a magician, you don't even need to know the spell to make the hammer work. Just infuse it with mana. There's a cost, of course—the mana for the spell is going to travel through the wielder, so they're going to suffer drain just like they cast it without the hammer.

The second hammer is believed to have a very powerful spirit that inhabits it. If you enter a spirit pact with it, you can wield the hammer and use it to summon lightning, as well as potentially be granted the spirit power of immunity to normal weapons. Unfortunately, it's likely that the spirit will request payment in return, likely in either karma or blood. So if you're okay with that type of arrangement, than by all means, use it.

The ring itself is a bit of a mystery to me. Whether or not it can create gold like the myth it spawned, or whether it is actually cursed is anyone's guess. But if Lofwyr took the time to strip it away from Alamaïs, you can bet it has some sort of value, and that value is tied to some kind of power.
- Lyran
- AET Ergonomic Systems? Alvis PLC? Bowman Metal Works? I never suspected any dragons of having interests in those companies, much less Alamaïs.
- Cosmo

- It's not surprising. Alamaïs' holdings are very rarely talked about, but like any modern dragon, he has diversified corporate investments that enhance his hoard. Along with his connections to various terrorist and extremist factions that most people are aware of.
- Frosty
- What has me worried is the fact that the dragon Calozerca may be in league with Alamaïs. I've heard that there have been numerous spirits going back and forth from GeMiTo to the Tatra Mountains, where Calozerca has established a base of operations. This pipeline is likely a method of communications to pass messages back and forth. I have no information on why Calozerca would be helping Alamaïs, but I suspect Calozerca might be motivated to get back at Lofwyr and the current dragon society for having imprisoned him. Though there are suggestions that perhaps Alamaïs was the one that arranged Calozerca to become free to begin with, and that he is now calling in a favor. Nonetheless, a dragon extremist working with a former prisoner is not something that I would think would be good for the rest of us—or for the world. But it is clear that Calozerca may be providing material support for Alamaïs and his cause.
- Elijah

With everything else on Lofwyr's chessboard, it is not at all surprising that the golden dragon has elaborate plans that include the mechanisms within the metahuman culture, starting with the Corporate Court. When this conflict was first exposed to the public, Lofwyr began using S-K's Corporate Court justice as a means to pressure the Court to re-examine Aztechnology's role in the death of Dzitbalché. The Court has, up to this point, resisted Lofwyr's demands. For them, Aztlan was the main instigator in that capture, trial, and execution of the dragon, and they have not been convinced of the need for further investigation. But despite the Court's unwillingness to re-examine the Dzitbalché matter from 2064, whenever a case has come up recently where Aztechnology was involved as the defendant, the Corporate Court's decisions have tended to go against Aztechnology, and it's believed that pressure from Saeder-Krupp is responsible for that. In the first half of 2073, six cases that Aztechnology was found culpable in were assessed the maximum penalties and damages, leading to the Big A having to pay out nearly four hundred million nuyen in fines and penalties. In similar cases in that same timeframe, other megacorporations charged with similar infractions saw less than a tenth of those penalties

- This is why Evo reached out to Aztechnology. They saw that the Big A needed a friend on the Court, and Evo insiders said they could reliably deliver Chief Justice Hino's vote for Aztechnology. That's helped ease the sting a bit. The question, of course, is what Evo is receiving in return.
- Kay St. Irregular
- The whole deal is going to fall apart once the news spreads that the real Chief Justice Hino is dead, and recent Court appearances have been made by a digital replica.
- Plan 9



- I'd dearly love to debunk that one, but I can't.
- Snopes

And Lofwyr is not stopping with the Corporate Court. My contacts are informing me that Saeder-Krupp representatives are working diligently to convince various ambassadors at the UN to re-evaluate their stance on Aztlan and its decision to execute Dzitbalchén. For months, Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp has been pressing the United Nations for harsh economic sanctions on Aztlan, just as they imposed on it when they were led to believe they had committed mass murders of Amazonian soldiers. Like the Corporate Court, the United Nations continues to fight these urgings, telling Saeder-Krupp that the execution was carried out under Aztlan's internal laws, and that everything that was done conformed with international regulations. As such, the United Nations have continued to vote to keep the matter closed.

- This could just be because Aztechnology is still not all that popular with the other corporations, and not because Saeder-Krupp has it out for them on the Dzitbalchén issue alone.
- Hard Exit
- You know, for a relatively minor dragon, Dzitbalchén's certainly making a lot of political waves, especially in death.
- Sunshine
- Whenever there is a new cause, there is always that one person or thing or event that embodies what a certain group is fighting for. Dzitbalchén represents a lot of things for the dragons right now. He represents the anger and rage felt by the dragons who think that metahumans have no right to execute one of their own. They see him as yet another in a series of crimes against their blood that stretches back millennia. They see the execution of Dzitbalchén as the peak of metahuman hubris. They see the death of Dzitbalchén as yet another instance of metahumanity inflicting a grievous injury against their kind and not being punished for it or put into their rightful place. It is also possible that the dragons see the execution occurred because another of their kind, Pobre, framed Dzitbalchén for an act that he engineered, and that what Aztlan and Aztechnology did was a miscarriage of justice. No matter the reasoning, Dzitbalchén has become a rallying cry for the dragons. And it's really only a matter of time before there is a much greater fallout from his death than what we are seeing now. If I had to guess, I'd say that well over ten thousand metahumans have likely died as a result of the dragons and their rage against metahumanity in the last year (perhaps even more than that if the disappearances of metahumans in GeMiTo are truly the works of Alamaï and his followers). It is quite possible that after all is said and done, hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of metahumans could perish because of just this one dead dragon.
- Dr. Spin

While pursuing legal avenues to get what he wants, Lofwyr has also been turning to the shadows, particularly in a quest to find the remains of Dzitbalchén. Since Hestaby went public with her request for the remains of Dzitbalchén to be returned to either her or the Draco Foundation, Lofwyr has been active in hiring runners to recover those remains for himself. Rescuing the

remains from Aztlan—the very nation that many dragons believe desecrated them—and returning them so that they could be properly mourned and interred would be seen as a major victory that could win significant support within the dragon culture. Lofwyr, naturally, wants to acquire that support for himself. In the last twelve months, I have learned that there has been at least a dozen unsuccessful runs to recover the remains in Aztlan. These runs were funded by Lofwyr, Hestaby, and the Draco Foundation (separately, of course). Because of the intense interest in recovering those remains, Aztlan and Aztechnology have taken extreme measures to move the remains around. They are no longer with the University of Azatlán-Quetzacoatl Institute, but rather have been divided and moved to at least three different, heavily guarded military installations, one of which is believed to be in the capital. Lofwyr and his agents have also been using runners to scour the Matrix for copies of the Dzitbalchén autopsy, attempting to erase all copies of the trideo recording. Unfortunately for Saeder-Krupp, this appears to be a losing battle. For every copy of the autopsy they take down, three more seem to appear, often posted by anti-dragon groups looking to spur on the conflict.

- It surprises me that since Aztlan and Aztechnology have dragons that work for them, these dragons haven't tried to assert their influence within these bodies to get the remains of Dzitbalchén released. If it's that big of a deal, why not press the matter and then be done with it?
- Bull
- Who knows? Maybe it's out of a sense of patriotism, a misguided loyalty, indoctrination, or perhaps they don't actually care. On the other hand, those dragons could have something planned, and we wouldn't know until they carry it out. And I actually hope they do. I would have more respect for them than I do now as they kowtowing to an evil corporation and an only slightly less evil nation.
- Hard Exit
- Here's an interesting story. I have no proof that Lofwyr is behind this, but it seems to match his tactics. I have heard through friends in the UCAS government that a runner team was delivered to the UCAS FBI, along with evidence that this team had raided a dragon lair outside of Philadelphia. During the raid, the runners killed six metahuman guards, disrupted a half-dozen guardian spirits, stole a couple hundred thousand nuyen in gold and silver coins along with three dragon eggs. They proceeded to deliver the eggs to their Johnson, who promptly destroyed them. This evidence was all but giftwrapped and tied in a neat bow for the FBI to charge and prosecute these runners. The trouble is, the FBI knows that it can charge the runners with murder. The bodies of the metahuman guards were conveniently dropped off along with the runners. But as far as the eggs are concerned, there is nothing on the books about the destruction of dragon eggs. They could be booked with poaching, grand theft, and destruction of property, but none of those charges would come close to comparing to the murder charges that the runners would face for the dead guards, or the lengths of their prison sentences. Charged with a hate crime? Those laws still only apply to metahumans and metahuman-like entities, and those that have already been born. Whoever set these runners up to take this fall knew that the



manner the FBI would be able to charge these runners would send a clear signal to the dragon world that metahuman law does not protect their interests. Something like this would go a long way to undermining what Hestaby was trying to do in her speech, and reducing any impulse dragons might have to submit themselves to metahuman laws.

- Kay St. Irregular
- Smart, especially since these runners were turned over the nation that once had a lawfully elected great dragon as its president. And if UCAS laws fail to protect dragon interests, then it stands to reason that most of the other nations' laws out there won't fare any better.
- Plan 9
- Sounds reasonable, except good ol' Dunkie didn't have much of a presidency to do anything to influence UCAS law for dragon interests. He had his inauguration, went to his ball, and then died. Not much time to craft a lasting legacy. The argument could be made that great dragons and metahumans weren't given a genuine opportunity to work together to make laws that would better serve both worlds and to come to a mutually acceptable understanding of what dragons are and aren't allowed to do in this world, as well as what was needed on metahumanity's part to make reparations for past injustices against dragon blood. And Lofwyr ... he's a businessman who is also like a politician amongst dragonkind. He doesn't think along the same lines as Dunkelzahn when it comes to metahumanity, and he has had other priorities than working with the UN and the Corporate Court to design proper legal precedent. He might be thinking along those lines now because circumstances have forced him to, but one has to wonder if it's a matter of being too little too late to stop the impending hostilities.
- Pistons
- So you're saying that Dunkelzahn's premature death and his inability to work on metahuman and dragon relations while as the UCAS president may ultimately prove to be a contributing factor in all this unrest? Interesting theory, Pistons.
- Kay St. Irregular
- You have to think that relations between the dragons and metahumans might be on a stronger footing now if Dunkelzahn was around today to try to calm the waters. I think this tension as it stands now could indeed be seen as an unforeseen consequence of the world losing its greatest bridge between our two worlds. And now, Lofwyr has to fill in. Lofwyr is not Dunkelzahn, never has been, and he simply is not going to act as a bridge between metahumans and dragons. And Hestaby ... well, we'll have to wait and see if she's up to the challenge and if her true agenda is really the one she has so adamantly proclaimed it to be in everything that she has said and done over the course of the last year.
- Pistons
- And what of the runners? Have they been charged yet?
- Fianchetto

- It doesn't seem like it. From what I am told, the FBI is holding them in "protective custody" for now to figure out just how to charge these individuals that will not incite passions either way. The FBI is smart enough to recognize when it's being used. But this delaying tactic will only work so long before the dragons realize that they have nothing to charge the individuals with in regards to the dragon matters that is any way equivalent to the sentences faced by the murder charges for the metahumans.
- Kay St. Irregular

HEIR APPARENT TO THE DUNKELZAHN LEGACY: HESTABY

Although Lofwyr is arguably the most important player in this dragon conflict, Hestaby is right up there with him. Through her own designs, Hestaby has also become the most visible and high-profile great dragon during this time, even as other dragons recede from the public spotlight to plan for their future and brace for potential violence from the other dragons and metahumans.

Hestaby first exploded into the international spotlight of this conflict when she addressed the United Nations last year on the current attitude of dragons toward metahumanity. In that speech, she addressed the vicious attacks made by Sirurg on several metahuman cities within Aztlan. Since delivering that speech and losing her seat as a Prince of Tír Tairngire, Hestaby has continued to be very visible on the world stage, giving dozens of speeches across the world, from Geneva, London and Paris, to Washington DeeCee, Atlanta, and Manhattan. In each of her speeches, Hestaby has emphasized establishing a dialogue between dragons and metahumans to properly deal with this crisis and diffuse the issues that are currently enraging passions and threatening escalation on a massive scale. In her speeches, Hestaby has claimed that she wants to see the matter of Dzitbalchén's remains settled soon, and that she desires the violence targeting specific metahuman populations to be stopped. She has asked that any anti-dragon countermeasures being developed be put to an immediate halt, and she has been imploring her fellow dragons to bring the rest of their grievances against metahumanity out in the open so that they can be better addressed in a non-violent way, particularly when it comes to metahumanity's poor track record on the environment. Hestaby has continued to call for the capture of Sirurg, stating that he should stand trial for his crimes against metahumanity. In her words, "unrestrained and unchecked sorties against innocent metahuman populations that lead to the deaths of innocent lives should be viewed as repugnant and unbecoming to the nobility and stature of the great dragons and their place in modern society."

Interestingly enough, when asked about her own violence against Saeder-Krupp and Lofwyr, Hestaby has deflected most of those questions, insisting that what she is doing is fighting against the established and outmoded customs of her kind and those that would enforce those customs to keep her silent. Although she admits that she has been using violence against certain dragons, Lofwyr in particular, she is adamant that she will continue to operate in a way that shows a respect for the lives of metahumans and is true to her core values. Her methods have and will continue to minimize casualties, and she promises to show restraint in her





efforts to get concessions and changes made within dragon culture. So far, her popularity, particularly in North America, is still high, and most metahumans seem willing to believe that she is operating with their best interests in mind, and that she is indeed being truthful about her objectives and her goals. For many, including myself, there are still doubts and reservations as to whether there is truth behind Hestaby's silver tongue, or whether this merely a smoke screen to position her as Dunkelzahn's true successor.

To support her position, Hestaby visited with Schwartzkopf in Prague last year to get his insight and wisdom into the feud. Sources say they discussed how they might be able to rebuild relationships with both metahumans and other dragons. Schwartzkopf released a statement following the meeting that said he supported Hestaby's work to strengthen dragon and metahuman ties. He also expressed appreciation for her work in calling for amnesty for past crimes and negotiating for reparations tied to past grievances. He added, though, that as a member of the academic community, his role in the "civil war" was to remain one of neutrality. His statement also offered up a glaring omission that many others, including other dragons, are likely to pick up on: he made no mention of Sirurg or his indictment on war crimes by the United Nations. Many are likely to read into this that Schwartzkopf does not approve of what Hestaby did to indict Sirurg indicted on war crimes. Some might even see it as a discreet rebuff for Hestaby and her activism. I am certain that Hestaby would have wanted Schwartzkopf, a respected academic scholar in dragon culture, to have shown her more support. For Hestaby's part, she had to see Schwartzkopf's release as being only moderate supportive of her activities, which must be very disappointing.

Hestaby has also been disappointed in her outreach to Celedyr. Soliciting support from Celedyr seemed like a logical choice, who referred favorably to him in her UN speech. Celedyr works with metahumans on a daily basis in NeoNET and its Matrix division, and some people think of him as a poster child of dragon-metahuman relations, it only seemed logical for Hestaby to try to get Celedyr to support her. When Hestaby approached Celedyr, however, her request for a meeting was declined. My sources could not find a specific reason for why the request was denied, though there are two leading theories. The first is that Celedyr does not want to jeopardize his work or standing in NeoNET by getting involved. Celedyr is not like other great dragons and is likely the least involved in internal draconic affairs. It is possible that he sees the current tensions as being petty and absurd. The second theory is much more ominous. For over a year, there have been signs of tension and discord between Celedyr and both Villiers. Although Celedyr is not a typical great dragon, (for one thing, he allows metahumans to hold positions of authority over him within the corporation), he nonetheless is still a great dragon with ambition. It has been reported that Celedyr has been doing things behind Richard Villiers' back, utilizing outside channels such as the Knights of Rage. According to this theory, Celedyr is plotting a hostile takeover of NeoNET while being quite aware that such an attempt would severely harm Hestaby's goals of strengthening metahuman and dragon relations. Celedyr has appeared to be much quieter as of late, so that may give credence to the fact that he may in fact be up to something within NeoNET. Only time will reveal if either or none of these theories proves accurate.

- That's a fucking scary thought. If Celedyr is looking to pull a coup and is successful, he and Lofwyr would control the two largest corporations in the world. The conspiracy nuts will be rabid! Not to mention the anti-dragon groups now popping up around the world, who will be screaming bloody murder. "The dragons are taking over!" "The world is ending!" Blah blah blah.
- Slamm-0!
- I'm still waiting to hear from Hestaby about what really happened with Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm. What does she know about that incident that we don't know? And why is she not saying anything about it, in light of this new "transparency?" Something still doesn't add up.
- Plan 9

Hestaby has also recently approached the other dragons believed to be the most metahuman-friendly, including Arleesh and Mujaji. Although Arleesh appears to have chosen neutrality toward all sides, including metahumanity, Hestaby may have found support from the Rain Queen. Through my contacts, resources, and my own research, it is believed that Hestaby has established a dialogue with Mujaji. Additionally, Hestaby had her pre-existing allies of Rhonabwy and Masaru. Many consider those two great dragons to be Hestaby's war council. Both have been seen visiting Mount Shasta within the last year. Although Hestaby also appeared to working with Aden to recover the Shroud of Shadows, this does not appear to have gelled into a more permanent alliance. This may have something to do with Lofwyr visiting with Aden at his (or her) lair in Mt. Ararat, Turkey. Since that time, no noticeable communications have been picked up between Mt. Ararat and Mount Shasta, indicating that relationship may have come to a rather abrupt end.

One place that Hestaby has seen resistance has been Dunkelzahn's former drake, Ryan Mercury. Over the last year, when drake killings became widespread, Mercury became an outspoken community leader and activist, advocating for the protection of drakes like him. Mercury has been active in gathering drakes from the streets and putting them into safe houses. Mercury has publicly lashed out at Hestaby for not doing more to protect drakes, and for engaging in the great dragon tradition of pressing drakes into her service. Mercury has called this practice indentured servitude at best, slavery at worst. Although Hestaby has offered to meet with Mercury to discuss the situation, the drake has politely declined the invitation.

- That's gotta sting—wanting to be perceived as the heir to Dunkelzahn's legacy, only to be criticized by his close friend and ally for not doing enough for his kind.
- Lyran
- You know, you would think more than one person could be worthy of the title of heir to Dunkelzahn's legacy. I would think Big D himself would be saddened to see this infighting.
- Mika
- It would, except we're talking about a great dragon and a drake here, both of whom are not known for their humility or ability to share the limelight.
- Frosty



While Hestaby has been promoting her vision for a stronger alliance between dragons and metahumans, the Northern Crescent region has begun to see more instability. A month ago, three well-known homesteaders that were previously involved in repelling the Tír's invasion of their territory were killed in their own homes. An investigation by the local authorities suggested that Tír Peace Force soldiers may have been involved in the killings. Witness statements seemed to confirm that Peace Force troops were seen breaking into their residences, and forensics tracked the bullets back to weapons belonging to Tír soldiers. Although the Tír denied their soldiers' involvement, the story quickly caused the locals to protest at the various Tír bases scattered throughout the Northern Crescent region. At least two of the protests spiraled out of control and turned into riots. Although the Tír Peace Force attempted to use non-lethal methods to quell the violence, things took a turn for the worse when three Tír troops were killed by protestors during the chaos of the riot. With tempers already flaring, the riot quickly turned into a bloodbath, with a final death toll of more than eighty residents of the Northern Crescent region and fifteen Tír troops killed. A string of reprisals followed the riots, including the bombing of barracks to homesteaders being taken from their homes and beaten. The people of the Northern Crescent region are calling upon their perceived patron for assistance in finally liberating their lands from the Tír occupation. From their point of view, now that Hestaby no longer has a conflict of interest by being a Tír Prince, she can work full time toward their independence. High Prince Larry Zincan has urged calm and restraint in the Northern Crescent, especially from his own troops, but with his image being so marred by the Horizon scandal, it is not clear whether Zincan still has the political power to quell the violence in the Northern Crescent region. For her part, Hestaby has been trying to use her metahuman allies within the Northern Crescent gypsies to tempt to negotiate a peace. Unfortunately, due to the spreading violence being instigated, the negotiations Hestaby appear doomed to failure. As the violence in the Northern Crescent worsens, Hestaby may have no choice but to spend more time there putting out this fire before all the hard work she has invested into stabilizing the region is lost. It is clear that the enemies of Hestaby intend to use the Northern Crescent as a distraction for the Orange Queen, forcing her to focus at least part of her energy away from the dragon conflict.

GHOST(WALKER) STORIES

- What's going on with Ghostwalker demands a little extra treatment. I'll assume you're all familiar with GW's rumored disappearance when the Watergate Rift closed last year, and event that made the secrecy and intrigue of Denver even thicker than normal. The city was bustling with activity as various powers fought to fill the void left by the White Wyrms' absence. There was a sense of urgency to their activities, as no one knew when (or if) Ghostwalker would return, and people wanted to make hay while the sun was shining.

It now appears that the sun has set.

We'll start the report with a note from Frosty giving an overview of the current situation, then we'll turn it over to Kay

St. Irregular talking about the re-emergence and issues tied to it. Finally, Mr. Bonds will then take a look at the broader issues.

- FastJack

A DRAGON OF DISCONTENT?

Posted by: Frosty

Ghostwalker has been surrounded by mystery lately, which is a challenge for anyone who is trying to assemble a collection of facts. At least Ghostwalker had the good graces to make his reappearance clear and dramatic (see below), but almost everything else about him has been surrounded by fog. He has been less than forthcoming about where he was and what his current agenda is, leaving many to speculate what might be happening with him. And while it seems his reappearance was engineered to let the people who needed to know that he was back, there are a few—because there always are—that doubt Ghostwalker returned at all, and believe that any evidence of his return has been faked. The doubters include many on the Council of Denver. Public sightings of Ghostwalker have been very few in number, and only one took place in front of a group of any size. Most of the other public sightings have occurred on the streets, from potentially questionable sources (including people who say that Dunkelzahn and Elvis were following close behind Ghostwalker). Despite their doubts, though, my sources and experience both tell me that Ghostwalker is indeed back. On top of that are the stories that say Ghostwalker has been seen accompanied by a human woman of extraordinary grace and beauty.

As one can imagine, the rumor mill is going full bore about the identity of this woman is. From catching a glimpse of her hand and noticing Ghostwalker's obviously strong feelings toward her, I am all but certain that the woman is the physical manifestation of Zebulon, the Spirit of Denver. It would appear that Ghostwalker was successful in his attempt to merge the various pieces of the Spirit of Denver and reintegrate them all into one being. For those that do not like Ghostwalker and those that would like to see Ghostwalker gone, this should be seen as a troubling sign that Ghostwalker is now even more powerful than before, and that his position within Denver is now all but secure with the powerful Zebulon at his side.

- The Draconic Information Virtual Exchange recently discovered very interesting information about Zebulon. You remember how two magicians, a Native American shaman (Robert Greene) and a United States hermetic mage (Ursula Mahr) both tried to summon Zebulon at the same time? At the time, people just assumed it was an extraordinary coincidence that both sides were conjuring the same spirit at the exact same moment using its true name. Our members have dug through and scoured old tribal and US records from that time period, and we were surprised to discover that both sides had an "advisor" to those magicians. These "advisors" seemed to counsel the magicians on how and where to look for the true name in their astral quests, and they also dropped subtle hints as to when it would be the most appropriate to try and summon Zebulon. These advisors appear to have had connections to another great dragon, perhaps even to Lofwyr himself. Unfortunately, too much time has passed and too much documentation has been lost, preventing us from confirming



that Lofwyr was indeed involved. But this is what DIVE knows: someone did not want Zebulon around, and someone took steps to make that happen. And if Ghostwalker believes that Lofwyr was indeed behind the shattering of Zebulon, it goes a long way to explain his seething anger toward the Loremaster.

- Wyrm Watcher

For the most part, Ghostwalker has been a nonissue for this conflict. Prior to his disappearance, it seemed as though Lofwyr was succeeding in mending fences and building a temporary alliance with Ghostwalker. Many believed the White Wyrm had weakened himself trying to obtain the four artifacts, and an alliance with Lofwyr would provide the protection he needed to regain his footing within his own territory and would prove mutually beneficial in the short term. Once Zebulon allegedly returned with Ghostwalker, though, it appears that all communication between Denver and the Rhine-Ruhr megasprawl has abruptly ceased. Some have even heard that the last Lofwyr envoy sent to Denver to speak to Ghostwalker about the alliance ended up being killed and sent back to Lofwyr as a message. It is very clear that since Ghostwalker's and Zebulon's return, any potential for an alliance has been destroyed.

- Don't think for a moment that Ghostwalker simply terminated the alliance with Lofwyr without getting something out of it first. From what I hear from various VPNs, Ghostwalker's ongoing talks with Lofwyr allowed him to get close to the golden dragon, and allowed Matrix assets in his intelligence network to get a closer look at Saeder-Krupp's nodes. From what I hear, Ghostwalker's Matrix assets managed to make off with a number of significant, classified files from some of Lofwyr's most secure nodes. Some of that paydata included information on the location of Dr. Antonio Vieri, the decker and technological phenom that provided so many wonderful innovations over at Renraku in the late fifties, and at Saeder-Krupp since then—and one of the most integral developers of the post-Crash 2.0 Wireless Matrix. Other information likely includes assets most people don't know Saeder-Krupp possesses, along with information on potential new enterprises that Saeder-Krupp may be considering for future investments. These files are believed significant enough that Ghostwalker could burn Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp pretty decently if those files were ever to be released. It would seem that Ghostwalker has put himself in a much better position to negotiate with Lofwyr, should the occasion ever arise.
- Glitch

Ghostwalker's not stopping at breaking off the potential alliance with Lofwyr—he seems prepared to go even further. Although Ghostwalker hasn't struck out directly against Saeder-Krupp interests in the Denver area, there is someone in the shadows of Denver that is most definitely targeting Saeder-Krupp holdings in the city. And according to my sources, it is not Hestaby. There have been multiple incidents of vandalism and sabotage at Saeder-Krupp's headquarters in downtown Denver. These incidents have been blamed on the growing anti-dragon movement, but most would tell you that Ghostwalker would never tolerate any significant anti-dragon groups in his city. There have been incidents of violence against S-K subsidiaries, though these incidents do not seem as if they are meant to make a profit off of Saeder-Krupp or its research, or even harm Saeder-Krupp

financially. The runs appear to be meant as a simple message: Get out. Many of the wageslaves for S-K have found themselves accosted by these shadow groups, and a half-dozen employees have been killed in the last month along.

There is another troubling sign that Ghostwalker may be changing his agenda due to his reunion with Zebulon. I have heard from trusted sources that Ghostwalker's watchers and his other intelligence assets are reaching out to others in the dragon community. Following his return, Ghostwalker reached out to both Surrurg and Ryumyo, in addition to other adult dragons. The message carried to these dragons is believed to test to see what reactions the dragons would have to a change of leadership, switching the Loremaster position from Lofwyr to Ghostwalker. Because this type of ambition seems to be somewhat out of character for Ghostwalker, one must wonder if it is Zebulon herself who is whispering into Ghostwalker's ear and urging him to obtain more than just Denver. There is a possibility that Zebulon wants Ghostwalker to take a larger and a more prominent role in dragon culture, one that is befitting him given his size and strength. And it is entirely possible that Zebulon feels that this is the ideal time to present such a change to the other members of the dragon community.

- It's also possible that Ghostwalker's main objective in holding Denver was restoring Zebulon, and now that she's back together, he's free to pursue other goals that might take him outside of Denver.
- Traveler Jones

Not enough is known about Zebulon or what her mind might be like following the ritual that pieced her back together to know what she wants or how she might be influencing Ghostwalker. If Zebulon is responsible for this change in Ghostwalker, it might indicate that she is having an impact on Ghostwalker's decision-making process. Zebulon has not spoken publicly or announced herself to the world as of yet, so everything about any possible agendas she might have is simple guesswork. For all we know, she could very well be suffering from multiple personality disorder from the various spirits that were born from her essence and existed for decades, only to be blended back together. But if Zebulon is influencing Ghostwalker's judgment, it is likely that things will be quite different in Denver from this point forward, quite possibly for other dragons as well as for magic users, particularly those capable of summoning spirits. As of yet, there is no telling how Ryumyo, Surrurg, or the other dragons have responded to Ghostwalker's overtures.

What is interesting in all of this is that I have observed that Ghostwalker has had very little, if any, communication with Nicholas Whitebird since returning. This may merely be because Ghostwalker's current plans require no contact with Whitebird. Or this could be a sign that things are indeed changing for the great dragon now that he is reunited with his paramour. Whitebird may very well be an indicator of how Zebulon plans on treating the magicians who are residents of Denver, and how she might treat metahumans in general. And Whitebird may be an indicator of how far Ghostwalker will allow Zebulon to implement any new changes in his domain. With Zebulon now in the mix, a new and more dangerous faction could be developing



within this brewing dragon conflict, one that is not predictable and can shift the balance of power in either way. There is no doubt that this new development will need to be watched closely, and to see how it impacts the tensions amongst the dragons, as well as to see how Lofwyr reacts to it.

THE DRAGON RETURNS

Posted by: Kay St. Irregular

It was supposed to be a moment no one would forget. The Powers That Be wanted to remind the world just who exactly was in charge.

They got their wish.

Heads of state or senior diplomatic envoys of all of the nations of North America were in attendance. Yes, all. I'll get to that in a moment. The representatives on the Sovereign Tribal Council were here. So were the global or North American heads of the Big Ten and local AAs, perhaps to remind their Euro-Mega-15 counterparts in the North Atlantic Economic Organization that they are not special. Other dignitaries were also in attendance, from Nadja Daviar to Johnny Spinrad and Akane Ishino. Noticeably absent was Nicholas Whitebird. We should have known better. The heads of states and corporations gathered for the official portrait in front of the Denver Council building. It was a brilliant day as they stood on the stage with a massive banner proclaiming the summit motto of "Peace. Security. Prosperity."

Out of nowhere, the sky darkened, and the air became eerily still. It was as if Denver was suddenly in the eye of a massive hurricane. Then he simply appeared out of the darkness, his shimmering pale scales contrasting against the blackened sky. All of the top-tier officials, and all of the dignitaries and security personnel surrounding us, reacted with awe and terror. The grounds between the Council and old capitol building were the most secure piece of property on Earth, but I suddenly regretted having a front row spot to what felt like the end of the fucking world.

- "Immediately I saw another horse appear, deathly pale, and its rider was called Death, and Hades followed at its heels. They were given authority over a quarter of the earth, to kill by the sword, by famine, by plague and through wild beasts" Revelation 6:8.
- Beaker
- A bit dramatic, but these are not normal times.
- Thorn
- Ryumyo really did plan ahead, did he not?
- Baka Dabora
- Come again?
- Black Mamba
- Akane is Ryumyo's "voice." She represents Ryumyo's interests. The question is whether she was present in anticipation of the dragon's return.
- Kia
- She was not the least bit surprised when Ghostwalker appeared.
- Kay St. Irregular

So I'm just going to vamp on what happened next from my seat in the audience. Ghostwalker hovered motionless above the crowd—us—and it looked below like he was mentally communicating with many if not all of the heads of state present—except for the Azzies. President Loreto of the PCC seemed to grow a sly Cheshire grin. President Colloton, on the other hand, was visibly furious. High Prince Zincan seemed incredibly uneasy. President McMulkin once again proved that he is out of his element, trying madly to keep a stoic face and sell the CAS on the idea that their carpetbagger president was standing for the South in the face of near-death. It'll take some creative simsense editing, since he insists on recording his experiences during these public events, but if anyone can pull it off in their public communications it's the ex-movie star. President Silva of Aztlan and Aztechnology CEO de la Rosa stood side by side with the strangest looks on their faces. I don't know if Ghostwalker was communicating with them or not, but they certainly looked like they were smiling in the face of death incarnate, even after the obvious magic around them seemed to crackle and disperse. But then something weird happened.

Perianwyr emerged from the crowd, taking his rarely seen draconic form and interjecting himself between Ghostwalker and the others. And then Pobre also took a stand, which was disturbing for any number of reasons. People have called him crazed, and toxic, and his assumption of full size from among the other heads of state made everyone else there seem so small and impotent. Then in a snap the entire Azzie delegation—both the corporate and national sides, along with their security details—were gone, followed by a sonic boom. We later learned that they reappeared in Las Cruces about a minute later. My guess is that Perianwyr levitated them out of Denver.

- That's quite a levitate spell that can move that many people at Mach 6+, unharmed.
- /dev/grrl
- I once saw an elf doing Mach 5 over the South Pacific.
- Kane
- You gotta lay off the rum in the morning.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- This could not have been a simple levitation spell. An associate from the Draco Foundation, not the DIMR, was on-site and indicated that it was some sort of strange magic that he had not witnessed any other dragon perform before. The DIMR sent Ebran the Scribe to do a forensic analysis. After he met with my associate, he and all of the DF data were shipped up to Boston.
- Winterhawk

And then he was gone. Everyone just bolted for their security details and made a hasty retreat back to some sort of home base, and eventually everyone left Denver. Just like that, the summit and the treaty were toast. Rumors have been swirling ever since, especially about Larry Zincan. Some say that he suffered a heart attack or stroke before he could be whisked back to Cara'Sir. Charisma Associates spin docs are furiously denying that anything happened, but it is definitely not helping him or his allies in the Tír for the old and frail Zincan to be



exhibiting any more signs of weaknesses or inability to do the job. The conservative, pro-Peace Force faction—Princes Parris, Gant, and Taylor—have actually rallied to his defense, which is surprising considering their strongest constituencies are the old-guard elves and conservative dwarves like Gant. With the High Prince's election less than a year away, however, they are insistent on securing a proper, democratic transition.

- The period when the first post-authoritarian democratic head of state must relinquish power is always the most dangerous times in politics, especially in a country that is not as stable as the image Charisma Associates is trying to project to the outside world. The three Princes Kat St. mentions are the most physically dangerous Princes, and the most connected and well regarded in the Tir security apparatus. They benefit from taking this stand and keeping the Peace Force's hawks in line because it plays well with the rest of voters. No member of the Council of Princes has confirmed or denied if they will seek the High Princeship, but it's expected a third to half of them will, so it's worth taking every advantage possible.
- FastJack
- zzzzzzzz *snort* Huh? What? I must have been hit by Blackout and ended up in Wonderland. When did FastJack turn into a PoliSci professor?
- Slamm-0!
- I'm sure your parents have mentioned the stories about Parris being involved in the death or disappearance of a western dragon two decades ago, and he was allied with Aithne Oakforest. Remember Oakforest's conflict with Lofwyr in Europe and the Reankas, including Ludmilla, who runs S-K North America from Cara'Sir, because it helps to know who their friends and enemies are because they hire from our ranks.
- Frosty

REGIONAL FALLOUT

The Second Treaty of Denver expired on July 1, 2074. So now everything is in a state of uncertainty, with everyone running on inertia. The borders stay the same; the STC remains; the reservations remain; Seattle stands. However, there is no legal consequence to engaging in any number of actions that, before July, could have served as *casus belli*.

- Casus what? Kay, I'm not good with this political nonsense. So does this mean the Salish could try and claim Seattle? What happens then?
- Nephrine
- *Disaster.*
- Cosmo
- I'd be more concerned with Brackhaven making a play to secede. He's been paving that road since he was elected. I've made it my business to learn about politics because of Project Freedom, and I'm sure he's marshaling allies within the UCC and secessionist policlubs as we speak. As insufferable as he is now, at least the UCAS government keeps him in check.
- Bull

- I've been making several trips back home to Goodsprings. They're gearing up for total war, and I'm afraid the SecForce is going to give them one.
- Turbo Bunny
- The PSF will run over Goodsprings like the speed bump it is.
- Mika
- Just because it doesn't have skyscrapers doesn't mean it's not an actual community. Then again, I'm not surprised someone whose family came from Pine Ridge would resent anything that wasn't glass, ferrocrete, and neon-dazzled.
- Turbo Bunny

This is the most dangerous time in North America I've seen in my lifetime. When Ghostwalker returned to Denver, he made his presence known beyond all doubt. He just *reappeared* as if out of thin air. While it was not the most complicated magic—he was most likely just dropping a powerful invisibility spell—it was still a sight to behold. The Azzies had played this game masterfully, and would have gotten away with their plan to re-enter Denver if it wasn't for a furious great dragon. Now they have made a full-court press of showing that Ghostwalker and the other great dragons are a Threat To Metahumanity (capitals intentional). Horizon may have been the flavor of the month, but the Azzies have been masters of the media for decades and have pounded on the anti-dragon resentment hard and unrelentingly. They've already used the Horizon actions in Bogotá to their benefit, and now with Ghostwalker's actions they've got three legs on which to make their appeal as being the bulwark on behalf of metahumanity: Fighting the dragon-ruled aggressors of Amazonia, the draco-terrorist Sirurg in the north, and now Ghostwalker threatening their leaders and destabilizing the peace across the entire continent.

With the summit collapsing and the treaty expiring, politics across North America have become increasingly agitated from Athabaska to Aztlan. There are dozens if not hundreds of tribes that still have members dotting the NAN, and a few that have tried to maintain a presence back east. Many of them, or their more aggressive elements, were involved to some degree in the combined insurrections a decade ago, but since then the Sovereign Tribal Council and individual nations have been trying to appease them or at least maintain a veneer of interest in the "lesser" tribes, generally meaning those that don't have nations named for them.

- One thing that has been in negotiations for years still seems to be going ahead as planned, and that is CAS granting extraterritorial diplomatic status to the city of New Echota in Georgia. It was originally a Cherokee city, and for decades there have been subtle moves by the Cherokee and other tribes to buy up the area and take full control of it. It was even one of the provisions excised from the original Treaty of Denver that would have made it a NAN version of Seattle. The idea remains the same, but now it looks like it will actually happen in spite of this conflict.
- Hard Exit
- That would make things interesting in the Sioux Nation. The Tsalagi are discriminated against in Cheyenne, but there are Anglos who still hold them in high regard and some who expatriated back to the



CAS to further those reclamation efforts. The Pueblo-dominated STC seem content to appease them, especially in light of the Tsalagi involvement with the New Revolution movement. Not that it will matter if the STC ceases to exist.

- Mika
- You've got to be kidding me.
- Turbo Bunny
- I've been "recovering" some interesting data and material from NAN capitals that suggests that the Congress of American Indians, which is dominated by "minority" tribes who would like nothing more than to fundamentally alter or eliminate the STC, have the support of people who could make their wish come true.
- Mika

The PCC Board of Directors apparently gave in under Ghostwalker's insistence and has scheduled a nationwide vote of confidence, specifically regarding their decisions involving Aztechnology. It didn't hurt to have the Hispano Circle endorse the board's decision, which is currently polling in the board's favor by a wide margin. The vote's scheduled for late October's annual shareholder meeting. The Pueblos have bent over backwards to appease Ghostwalker, hoping he can help resolve several issues now that he is back and clearly disposed to direct action over all he surveys from the Rockies. After the Blood Rain and constant chaos in the Mojave, the time for action is at hand. If Santa Fe can get Ghostwalker to calm the spirits and broker some sort of peace, they will do almost anything in return. Word is already circulating of an autonomous zone around Ubehebe Crater. They also continue to share a mutual enemy in Aztlan, and Sirurg's actions in Albuquerque have pushed them into having to make a pact with someone to prevent those attacks. Unlike the CAS, which is willing to make a deal with the lesser evil to stop Sirurg, Pueblo is cozying up to Ghostwalker so much that Aztlan and Aztechnology are off the table.

- The spirits around Albuquerque were not pleased with Sirurg's attacks, but word is that Celedyr and Ghostwalker are concerned enough to send "special assistance" to the Corporate Council. More on that as I check with my contacts.
- Axis Mundi
- Give Firebird a kiss for me.
- Fianchetto
- Old perv.
- /dev/grrl

Something that has also become an issue is that while everyone was focused on the small but vocal Azzie-backed Ute agitators, no one has noticed what is happening with the Navajos. The old Navajo Nation is located in the heart of the PCC, but it ended up almost entirely inside the Ute Nation when the NAN states were carved up. The Utes were not eager to include the Navajos or anyone in the running of the nation, or even repatriating from the Sioux lands where they were resettled and still remain. PCC has no problem, in theory. Over the last several

years the Navajos have seen the chance to get their land back, and it's been a long series of clandestine negotiations between the Navajo and Sioux Nations and the Pueblo board to establish a recognized sub-state. It was also going to have to be considered and approved by the STC, and the majority of that group had been ranging from ambivalent to hostile to such action, along with w sense of antagonism to the cohesion of the NAN. With the future of the STC at stake, their doubts now carry virtually no weight with the Navajos.

There are definitely some interesting happenings in the UCAS Sector beyond all the UCAS military personnel being withdrawn from the Zone Defense Force while staying in Denver. President Colloton has found herself having to rely on Iain Lesker because the public and Capitol Hill are rife with people uttering, "Iain Was Right." At this point, it's become clear that Lesker played her like a piano. That's the problem with career officers like Colloton—they're predictable. He made himself first implacable, then indispensable. Her attempts to marginalize him and keep him out of the negotiations gave him political cover with Ghostwalker and the public. Now that the treaty is dead he gets to say, "I told you so."

More importantly to the affairs in Denver was the news that Commissioner Mecina has been removed as Sector Administrator, leaving Iain Lesker in charge until a replacement can be found—assuming there is a Council to receive a successor by the time the appointment weaves through the Senate. There is so much nonsense in DecCee that has come of this that Pistons and I have decided to cover it in another section.

- The discussion President Colloton and Commissioner Mecina had in the motorcade as Colloton left Denver boils down to, "You want to be a governor, but I need a general." Then she fired her. It was brutal.
- Clockwork
- How'd you get that info?
- Pistons
- Some of us are still concerned about doing our job, and not playing games with children and fools.
- Clockwork

LIFE IN THE NEW, NEW DENVER

Things are unpleasant. Ghostwalker has demanded the ZDF step up their activity, and no one is safe—including those who thought they had the support of Ghostwalker. The atmosphere in the Front Range has changed—it feels like the spirit of the sprawl itself is no longer on our side, but at least we're in this together. Yes, things have gotten that weird.

Perianwyr seems to have committed a major infraction during Ghostwalker's appearance and is keeping a low profile—some say he's greatly reducing the time he is spending in Denver, and most of his time away is spent on the properties of his apparent new patron, Rhonabwy. This is even more interesting since Rhonabwy and Hestaby are reported to be allies with numerous overlapping interests. Given Ghostwalker's penchant for acts of ultraviolence, however, I don't think even Rhonabwy is going to keep him from pursuing vengeance against Peri. As it stands now, Weekday Eclipse and Peri's other assets and activities in Denver are



under the protection of the ZDF. No action is to be taken against Perianwyr, and transgressions are met with Ghostwalker's direct response. My guess is that from how everyone has been reacting around Denver when Perianwyr is even mentioned, Ghostwalker is so furious he cannot even think straight enough to form a coherent response yet.

- Aden destroyed Tehran to deliver a fury-filled "message." I shudder to think of what Ghostwalker has in mind for this transgression.
- Goat Foot

Most importantly for folks like us, whatever leeway the shadows may have gained during the White Wyrms' absence has been lost. People are getting eaten, and Ghostwalker and his closest agents and allies in Denver are cracking down on spies, smugglers, organized crime, and anyone else that they don't like. People are running scared, and the shadows are getting even busier because it's the only way to accomplish a lot of the things that need to get done. There had been some interesting activity in The Hub as some "unwanted" spirits or their agents were slipping through and causing trouble, and that's now become a great deal harder. One other interesting side effect is that ZDF units have been operating beyond the FRFZ borders into Pueblo and Sioux. Neither seems inclined to oppose these violations, which I expect from the Pueblos. I don't understand the Sioux response. To fill the hole left by the absentee Americans, the ZDF (and PCC on Ghostwalker's behalf) has been contracting services with Eagle Security, Centurion, SIS, and a number of smaller private military and security/intelligence corporations.

- There is an arm's-length relationship between Ryumyo and SIS through MCT, and it's worth noting that many field officers have Pacific Rim accents, and not the southern drawl one expects of SIS contractors. I know for a fact that four of them are actually from MCT Internal Security, and six more come from MCT Intelligence. All are former JIA or Imperial Marines.
- Thorn
- I was approached by one of the dragon's agents with a lucrative one-year contract for my unit. I seriously considered it, but there are too many unknown variables.
- Picador

Ghostwalker has decreed that spontaneous summoning of any spirits is forbidden and punishable by expulsion or imprisonment, and that anyone who wants to summon or banish a spirit must seek and be granted approval from one of Ghostwalker's agents in the Liaison Office. This isn't happening in a vacuum, or because the spirits are acting up. There is a growing sense that metahumans have become second-class citizens right now, a step behind spirits, which is odd even for Ghostwalker. He has long held the reputation of being quite comfortable with spirits, but it seems his time in the metaplanes has led him to favor them over all other beings. At the moment, his people aren't rebelling against the new strictures. Instead, they are increasingly developing a bunker mentality, acting as if it's Denver against the world. And Ghostwalker is their leader in this fight, so they're not resisting his new orders.

Spirits, for their part, are very much enjoying the climate Ghostwalker is creating, and free spirits have been flocking to the area. Some of them are mischievous enough in their ways that the authorities are considering approaching Ghostwalker's people for strategies in handling them. One particular being, a spirit of man who takes on a hobo-esque appearance and calls himself Digger, has taken great enjoyment in messing with astral security across the city, contributing to at least two successful datasteals from members of the Big Ten. As you can guess, the corporations are working on ways to either neutralize this spirit or find ways to use his tendencies and abilities to their own benefit.

- This should be fun. The first approach to crimes like datasteals is to respond with conventional law enforcement, and police officers will be entirely ill equipped to deal with someone like Digger. I'd like to have a front-row seat when some grunts try to arrest him.
- Haze

That also brings up the rumors Frosty mentioned that Zebulon, the famed Spirit of Denver, is back. I want everyone to take her words with a grain of salt. No one knows the real truth about Zebulon, except maybe for Ghostwalker. I know how confident she is that it's Zebulon, but I'm not convinced. The spirits that were suspected of comprising Zebulon have been scattered to the winds for years, and it's not as if their identities were ever known with full confidence. The influx of free spirits since 2062 didn't make anything easier. But there does seem to be a new swagger and sense of collaboration in the spirits, and that atmosphere of unity feels magical. The strange woman's sudden appearance just adds fuel to the fire, but for all anyone knows she is another great dragon that Ghostwalker brought back with him. There is a sense that paracritters are becoming increasingly hostile or indifferent to metahumans around the Front Range, and there has been an increase in attacks and direct action against magicians and anti-magical/metahuman groups throughout western North America.

- Many of those sub-spirits were believed to be aspected to the rather unpleasant aspects of metahumanity and spirits. It's like Zebulon was split into different components and allowed to roam free and unchecked—pure id with the powers of a god. Given the perverse nature of how spiritual growth favors the most extreme, and often harmful, spirits one might assume that Zebulon came back mentally imbalanced. I for one cannot wait to work in a city controlled by a great dragon and a free spirit with borderline personality disorder.
- Ethernaut
- Even if that's true, perhaps it is only temporary. Like how dragons have often been "crazed" upon their emergence. There's no reason to throw in the towel on a spirit based on rumors and conjecture.
- Jimmy No
- Better safe than sorry, though in Denver's case the populace might not live to regret it.
- Ethernaut





INCOMING FEED.....



GHOSTWALKING ACROSS THE GLOBE

Posted by: Mr. Bonds

While Ghostwalker has been asserting his domination over the Front Range, he also has plenty of influence beyond Denver. There have been rumors of machinations and corporate intrigue tying back to Denver for a while, but it seems as if Ghostwalker's return has led him to tighten the reins.

Case study number one is Steve Ridgemont, who is doubling down on his dream of a NAN megacorp. He's been seen with known Ghostwalker Watchers such as Anton Gage and Ceri Gilbredes, and he has also developed a new source of capital to invest in tech startups across the NAN, poaching a number of Horizon specialists who are dismayed by the recent turn of events caused by the corporation's actions. These aren't just Singularity programmers and technomancers, but Pueblo nationalists from shops that were pulled into Horizon when it became a PCC corporation legally allowed to buy other corps (before it later became extraterritorial and lost that competitive advantage). Ridgemont has also been reaching out to technomancers and technologists around the world, taking special advantage of those visiting the Santa Fe Institute. He's even made trips to Geneva and Hong Kong to seek out unique technomancer communities.

- Poaching technomancers from Horizon became a lot easier since the massacre in Las Vegas. A lot of TMs are reaching into the shadows to arrange their own extractions, and Ridgemont is happy to provide funding for them if they don't have enough saved up.
- Netcat

Sherri Thomas, the CEO of SpiriTech, has also come to owe Ghostwalker. After the attack on their headquarters last year, the corporation began hemorrhaging money and personnel as they worked to recover and rebuild. An influx of capital from Abraxas Industries and a major contract from Manadyne have settled their accounts, and Thomas has been on a global charm campaign, meeting with Schwarzkopf to appeal to his top students and personally recruiting talent from Georgia Tech and lesser-known schools and magical businesses in DeeCee, Madrid, Kiev, and Buenos Aires.

- T99 just lost two of its best researchers to SpiriTech. They didn't leave Washington because there's plenty of weirdness going on here, but they did move into a shiny new office in Friendship Heights. Oh, and it's across the street from the Draco Foundation.
- Pistons

But those are still in the NAN. Ghostwalker's reach has extended to the San Francisco Bay Area, trying to intervene in splitting and capitalizing on the grey areas where Ares, MCT, and Renraku don't have an iron grip. His agents have a special interest

in reaching into Silicon Valley and breaking Ares' monopoly from the inside, and they have been enjoying some measure of success.

- Ares is suspected of having an inside man from Gavilan inside their Silicon Valley operations who has been directing resources to the Draco Foundation's interests. Only now those leaks are being diverted elsewhere, which seems to suit Damien Knight just fine so long as Daviar or the Aureliuses don't benefit.
- Sticks
- I knew it. Some of the Denver Matrix "tastes" like Mitsuhamas' output. I would be surprised that the technomancers at the Nexus haven't acted, but that would require independence.
- Puck
- That's a bold statement you're making. The Denver Data Haven is still committed to the free exchange of information. It is one of the last bastions of data independence, and the claims that it is beholden to any master are scurrilous lies.
- FastJack
- I wouldn't make that statement rashly, but you know I'm right. At least, a part of you does.
- Puck

Beyond that, Ghostwalker seems to have developed a taste for similar businesses as Hestaby: envirotech, biotech, agriculture, and media. He is keeping his claws well concealed, though, especially those that are invested in certain engineering projects. He has placed considerable resources in water management, engineering, and hydrological sciences. Many of these businesses are operating in hostile environments with depleted aquifers, contaminated groundwater, or those in need of massive irrigation projects. Interestingly, one of them—Martinez Water Resources—is deeply involved in an irrigation pipeline that will cross Aztlan from the Sea of Cortez to the Rio Grande, or what's left of it.

- Phoenix Biotechnologies reached out to him to help bail them out, but instead he seems content to let them flounder on their own. Meanwhile, he has had no problem investing in Yakashima or Genesis.
- Nephrine
- I should add something here. There has been plenty of discussion about his agents and activities, but with the two previously named exceptions, his agents are relatively unknown or unaffiliated with Ghostwalker. Gage and Gilbreds are known because they were original Dunkelzahn's Watchers. When the network was exposed fifteen years ago, and then divided upon Ghostwalker's return into thirds—Draco Foundation, Ghostwalker, Independent—the players became known quantities among themselves and the spy community.

These agents are totally unknowns, and reflect a reality that many, including myself, overlooked. Ghostwalker took that third of the Watchers as a concession of what he believed was due him of Dunkelzahn's hoard. However, why wouldn't he have his own network?

I discovered some apparent secrets to this group, which I have coined "Talons," while I was investigating some business in Chicago following the public assassination of Friday. There was an inordinately large to-do made of the data she had on her, which also coincided with the fragments of data that was left from the attack on SpiriTech. There were ties to Anton Gage, but those grew deeper into the business dealings of a Santa Fe consultant named Wallace Thomas. Thomas is the brother of SpiriTech's CEO, but he is also the first Talon I discovered. Buried in his files was data on his cell, an all-sources network that can and does act independently. And one striking difference from the Watchers is that they have no apparent restriction or hesitation in performing network and other direct action.

I also learned one other thing about Thomas and two of his fellow cell leaders—they are drakes.

- Fianchetto
- We need to take this offline, mate. Trust me.
- Thorn
- Do you think this has anything to do with that brutish dwarf that has been more visible since Ghosty returned?
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- Later.
- Thorn

A DRAGON'S WRAITH: SIRRURG

Posted by: Frosty

Just as the remains of Dzitbalché have served as a rallying point in this dragon conflict, so has SIRRURG's wanton aggression against Aztlan both divided and mobilized the dragons. Some dragons see the Destroyer's attacks as being warranted. For decades, Aztlan and Aztechnology have abused the environment, contributing to lasting problems that threaten their habitat. From this perspective, what SIRRURG is doing is past due; in fact, if SIRRURG had been more aggressive early on, then perhaps the ecosystem would not have become so scarred and blighted by things like toxic domains, Sangre Del Diablo trees, and blood magic. Some great dragons believe their status gives them the right to do whatever they think is best to accomplish their goals, even if that means inflicting immense harm on metahuman populations. In their minds, being a dragon or great dragon includes a divine right to rule. As such, they see what SIRRURG is doing is exercising the very power and strength that nature had granted him, and is carrying out a fight that metahumans should have taken up a long time ago against Aztlan and Aztechnology. For them, SIRRURG is a hero, merely doing what dragons should be doing in this modern age. For many, SIRRURG is showing them that there is no shame in being the world's great predator, and that they owe metahumans no gestures of appeasement.

On the other end of the spectrum are dragons who see in their position a responsibility to protect metahumanity and guide it to reach its full potential. For these dragons, SIRRURG's violence is counterproductive. Many dragons appreciate the talents and skills that metahumanity has to offer, and they enjoy the fruits of





INCOMING FEED.....

its creation. These dragons are more likely to treat metahumans as individuals and not hold all of metahumanity accountable for what some may have done against dragons in the past. These are the dragons that oppose Sirurg's actions and would rather work with metahumans than against them. As such, Hestaby gave voice to those dragons when she went before the United Nations and condemned Sirurg, adding her voice to those demanding that he be indicted on war crimes and be given a trial. For dragons like Hestaby, Sirurg crossed a line when he killed so many innocent civilians in his attacks, and now has to be punished for it.

Ironically, many believe Hestaby may have inadvertently made the situation worse by revealing the next target of Sirurg's wrath: Teotihuacan. Before Hestaby's speech, Sirurg seemed content to wage his war within the confines of Aztlan borders. When Hestaby added her voice to those indicting Sirurg on war crimes, Sirurg pledged to truly earn that title of "war criminal." Sirurg has since moved up to Roswell in North America, positioning himself strategically between two nations that have historically been hostile to Aztlan: the Pueblo Corporate Council and the Confederation of American States.

Since moving up to Roswell, Sirurg has been largely preoccupied by special forces that Aztlan has sent up north to deal with him and prevent him from potentially expanding the Aztlan and Amazonian conflict into a two front war with either the PCC, CAS, or both. In the fighting that has resulted, Aztlan has lost nearly twenty special forces teams comprised of Jaguar and Leopard guards and teams made up of the Guerreros, the Aztlan and Aztechnology elite warrior classes. None of the two hundred and twenty soldiers that Aztlan and Aztechnology have

sent against Sirurg have survived. Sirurg, on the other hand, continues to look as driven as ever to destroy the Aztlan nation.

- Here's an interesting piece of intelligence I learned from an Azzie military officer. Apparently, the number of dragons that are currently following Sirurg have increased from the half dozen dragons that were seen following him at the Battle of Cali to approximately ten adult dragons. The four new dragons appear to be defections from Aztlan or Aztechnology ranks. This could signal that not all is right or happy with the dragons that are currently taking marching orders from Tenochtitlán.
- Hard Exit
- More dragons. Great. That'll make getting at Sirurg even harder.
- Black Mamba
- From what I have heard, the line that Aztlan and Aztechnology crossed that led to the defections was the work that they started on with their anti-dragon countermeasures. I would not be surprised if we don't see more defections in the future from the dragons that are currently working with this nation and this megacorporation, if not a full out insurrection, because of such an explosive revelation. For the dragons, this has to be a betrayal of their trust.
- Glasswalker
- That insurrection may be happening already on a much smaller scale. From what I've seen, there has been an increase in the number of leaks of military intelligence for the past six weeks to



Amazonia spies. This information is likely material the dragons working for Aztlan or Aztechnology had access to. Because of the leaks of Aztlan and Aztechnology military intelligence from the front lines, Amazonia has not only been able to stabilize their lines, but they also have begun a counter-offensive to try to retake Valencia from the Azzies. In other areas, these leaks have resulted in Aztlan and Amazonia having at least two of their supply lines cut, which led to the capture of at least four hundred Azzie soldiers. This has somewhat mitigated the losses Amazonia suffered following Horizon's unprecedented release of classified materials and has given those on the front lines hope that Amazonia can turn this war around.

- Picador
- Hopefully before the entire rainforest ends up destroyed from the fighting.
- Marcos

Sirrurg has also been hampered by mercenaries and other groups looking to take the great dragon down. For the most part, the groups that have led sorties against Sirrurg and his kind have been looking to kill the great dragon for a variety of reasons, including nuyen, glory, and/or vengeance. There have also been a few groups that have attempted to capture Sirrurg alive. At least one of those groups was likely hired by Hestaby to bolster the appearance that efforts were being made by metahumans to honor her wishes. The other groups were sporting new technology, as if hired by megacorporations to try out new weapons as anti-dragon countermeasures. Since Sirrurg survived the encounter and was not captured, it is obvious that the technology meant to impair or capture a great dragon is still not there yet.

Even as he and his group of extremists have been encountering resistance from Aztlan, Aztechnology, and mercenary groups, Sirrurg has found time to go on the offensive. He or his dragon followers have hit the Aztlan cities of Tucson, Roswell, El Paso, Las Cruces, and Corpus Christi in the last three months. Each time, Sirrurg or his followers have caused at least a hundred metahuman casualties, along with the destruction of small farms, businesses, teocallis, oil refineries and factories. Sirrurg has also razed the CAS cities of Odessa, Lubbock, Midland, and Seminole. Each of the attacks left similar amounts of casualties and destruction in their wake. Sirrurg has also hit the PCC, choosing to hit the Albuquerque sprawl. Nearly a thousand were killed in Sirrurg's attack on Albuquerque. The violence appears to have provoked a strong response from the CAS, who are continuing to deploy troops along its border. CAS President McMulkin is jumping on the bandwagon for war. He has publicly made an address to the CAS nation seeking a declaration of war. The rhetoric McMulkin has been using has only ratcheted up the pressure for the CAS to invade Aztlan. Despite Pueblo not being as willing to go to war over Sirrurg's actions—they see it as something that Aztlan has no control over—the CAS is not backing back down on its threats. Although the declaration of war has not yet passed in the CAS Congress, it will take something significant to derail the course that these two very adversarial countries appear to be on.

- Funny you should say that, Frosty. Both McMulkin and Enrico Silva from Aztlan have been in high-level talks since this all began. From my contacts in the CAS, it would seem as though McMulkin is trying to make the best of this situation by demanding certain concessions from Aztlan, such as the return of the lands that once belonged to Texas and that should now be CAS territory. McMulkin is also asking for Aztlan to renounce any and all claims that it may have on the territory it gained in Denver when Ghostwalker kicked Aztlan out. From what I am told, Silva is seriously considering at least some of these concessions to prevent a second front from opening up and dividing Aztlan's military forces.
- Kay St. Irregular
- In recent weeks, the activities in the north from Sirrurg seem to be lining up with what's been going on in Amazonia. If Sirrurg attacks an Aztlan city in the north, there is an offensive made by Amazonian forces in the south. I have learned that codes and encryptions that were broken in the south are being given to GreenWar, to pass it along to Sirrurg and his forces in the north. There appears to be some coordination going on between Sirrurg and Hualpa. It is possible with everything that is going on, from the Aztlan-Amazonian war to this dragon conflict, that Hualpa and Sirrurg could be resolving their differences that were believed to have caused a rift between them. So far, this cooperation seems to be fairly effective, so we'll have to wait and see whether there will be more overtures for cooperation between Sirrurg and Hualpa, and what this might mean for the rest of the dragon conflict.
- Picador
- Let me break in for a minute and say this: If you're going to take a job in a border town right now, you have to be prepared for the possibility of a dragon attack. But you can't be, because a dragon attack is like nothing you have ever seen.

I was in El Paso when it was hit. Las Cruces and Tucson had been nailed not long before, so I knew there was a chance Sirrurg and/or his lackeys could show up while I was there. I'd loosely considered what it might be like. I thought about things I'd seen, like artillery bombardments or air strikes, and figured it might be like those, only amped up.

It wasn't.

The first attack came before we saw anything. It was a wave of emotion, of sheer dread, the kind of feeling you get when you are in a dark tunnel, moving ahead because death is chasing you from behind, and you have been smelling rotting meat for a while now, and the smell is getting closer, and you've reached the point where the smell is right in front of you, around a corner, and you know you are going to take five steps and you will see whatever horrible sites as been waiting for you, making that smell, and then you will have death behind you and death in front. That kind of dread. I had been walking, enjoying a rare moment of downtime, when it hit me, and I stood on the streets like a lost little kid, eyes darting around, looking in vain for anything that looked the least bit safe. But every door, every window was a mouth that looked like it would swallow me whole.

Then the fire came. What I didn't expect was its speed. I've seen bombs, and I've seen flamethrowers, but this was the worst of both, jets of white-hot flame shooting through space with



bullet speed, turning wood to ashes and plascrete to goo, and popping up here and there so quickly your eyes couldn't keep up, couldn't find the flight pattern of whatever was doing this. And behind it, a guttural roar and the nonstop rhythmic thump-thump of giant wings, a sound like a large piece of plywood falling on sand, but louder, and over and over and over again.

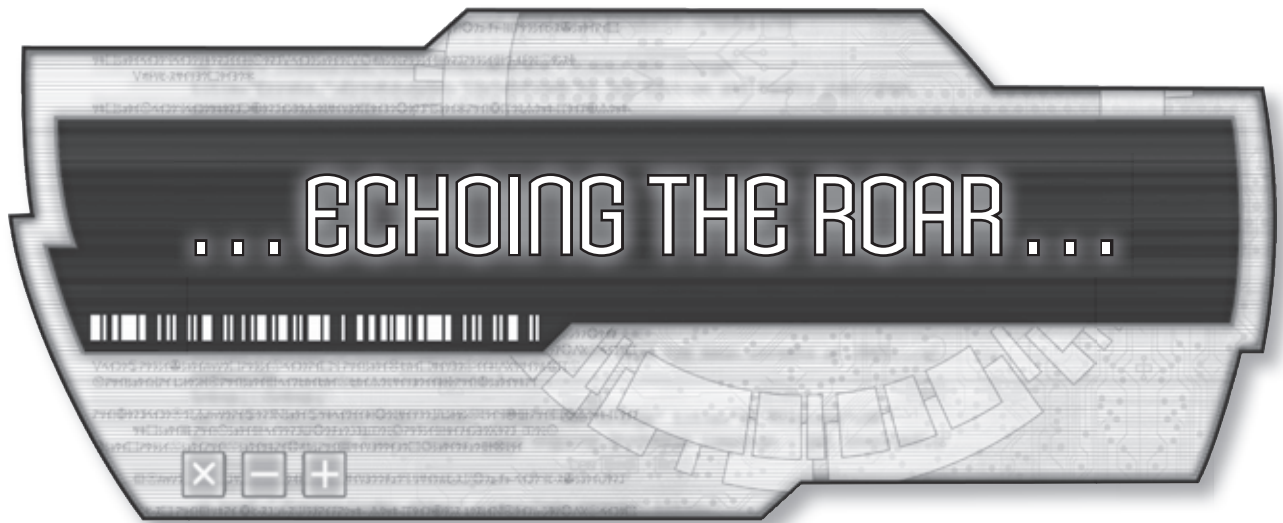
The flame was dangerous, but also terribly precise. The dragons seemed to have their targets, to know exactly what they wanted to burn. But then, before I could relax and think I would be safe because I hadn't been dumb enough to embroil myself in their schemes, another attack came. An invisible one. Someone in their twenties clutched his left arm and keeled over with the classic signs of a heart attack, dying on the spot. A similarly young woman grabbed her head as if she had just been stabbed in the temple with an ice pick, convulsed, fell, shuddered, and died. People just dropped to the ground, no wound on them, no sign of attack. They just up and died.

I managed to keep some mental coherency until I turned a corner and saw what looked like an unending fountain of giant maggots pouring out of a car wrecked in the middle of the road. In hindsight I realized that it was an illusion, but at the time it was enough to break my mind. I have no idea what happened for the next two hours. When my mind regrouped, I was sitting on a curb on that same block, knees clutched to my chest, rocking slowly back and forth. I would have been embarrassed, but every living soul around me was doing pretty much the same thing. I managed to get up and stumble to a bolthole I'd set up, where I slept for twenty hours.

Fair warning.

- Stone
- On the plus side, if you can keep your shit together during one of these attacks, imagine the looting possibilities! All you need is a spellslinger who can counter a dragon!
- Kane





- The following material is all about some of the more involved members of the metahuman community who have taken a special interest in the current affairs of dragons. These next several entries also happen to be intertwined with the dragons and each other. It may be worth mentioning that at least we know the endgame in dealing with dragons. It involves ketchup. These individuals are more flawed and unpredictable, and that makes them much more dangerous to deal with.
- FastJack

THE MAN WHO LAUGHS

Posted by: Frosty

I know Bull doesn't like it when Harlequin comes up, but there have been some interesting events that have his fingerprints all over them. We haven't really been in touch, but that's actually one aspect that merits discussion. We had our differences, which aren't of your concern, but I've come to learn how difficult it is to separate students from masters. For as morose and dismissive of the world as he was, or has been throughout the years, something sparked a fire in him around Christmas time. Perhaps it was because that's when he took possession of his new estate, and title. The news has been kept under the radar, but the mysterious new Earl of Arran in Scotland? It's Harlequin.

- As if he wasn't insufferable already.
- Bull

He was one of two beneficiaries of Aina Dupree's estate, which I only acknowledge because I am certain that some on JackPoint have already deduced this as a matter of personal or professional interest. I fear my hand has been forced in admitting this and other facts, as I know more than one of you has already been circling intently. I appreciate that you allow me to speak on the matter first.

- If you are referring to me as I suspect, it was never my intention to go prying into matters of such a personal nature to Aina or anyone

else. It was simply a matter of intellectual and personal curiosity when I learned of the bequests she left to Thais. He has always been an interesting competitor as a fellow arcanoarchaeologist. I assure you, after our last encounter in Nicosia, Thais and I have come to an understanding.

- Elijah
- Too little, too late.
- Frosty

Aina and Harlequin were great friends long before I ever came to his attention. They developed a bit of a bond over the centuries, and it was at her urging that he and I were in DecCee on the night of her death. We parted ways after that night for a number of reasons, but what is important is that there has been a dynamic change in how we see each other and what we now know we have in common.

- The reports from the night of the Watergate Incident were perhaps the most closely guarded secret since the Manhattan Project, at least for a brief period. To ensure that the UCAS remained in possession of those secrets, they placed them in orbit—away from prying eyes of mages, dragons, or the Deep Resonance. Bits and pieces have been shared with many parties as far as anyone knows, but it's been hard to find who or what. The involvement of the Corporate Court in the incident made its removal to space both possible and inevitable. No one knows exactly where the files are stored, but they are somewhere in this great man-made constellation.
- Orbital DK
- It is worth noting as a comparison that the Manhattan Project was infiltrated almost as soon as it began.
- Fianchetto
- Then I will grant Frosty fair warning that this was also true of Operation: Golden Navigator.
- Puck





There are powerful elves in the world that have always been whispered about in the shadows. Men like Ehran the Scribe and Aithne Oakforest. Even among ourselves we have discussed the evolving dispute between Lugh Surehand and Jonathon Reed. There are others, of course, in the Seelie Court or the Zulu Nation. Perhaps the one common trait that they all share is an intense loathing of dragons, especially greats. The ire of certain members to Lofwyr and later Hestaby's appointments onto Tír Tairngire's Council of Princes was famous on Shadowland. Harlequin, however, did not have that trait, in spite of what I can only say is a strong impression that he had more reason than most to begrudge dragonkind. Some may even remember his witty exchanges with Hestaby on Shadowland about who-knows-what (and I say that having known him for two decades). He was also on amicable terms with Dunkelzahn, but there was always something else. For all their familiarity or shared history, it was clear that history was not going to change. He seemed to hope that the future would, however, even when he knew better.

- I need to ask straight out: What was the offhand comment you mentioned the last time he came up? It seems appropriate to the current discussion.
- Bull
- I think the context is pretty clear when combined with his decision to "choose a side."
- Frosty
- He's been a frequent visitor to Ryan Mercury's lair at Lake Louise, even in the last few months. I suppose they have been practicing magical studies since Quicksilver definitely uses a distinct form of magic. It incorporates the draconic magic that comes with being a drake, but there are elements seemingly ancient and yet far beyond anything I have studied. They are based on metahuman concepts that, as far as I know, are not shared by dragon magic, and a few times I have caught Quicksilver studying texts written in what could be an unknown dialect of Sperethiel.
- Winterhawk

While Aithne Oakforest pursues his conflict with Lofwyr in Pomorya, and former Tír Princes and the other elven nations wage their conflicts with dragons, Harlequin has been studying them. He seems intent on intervening, but for what purpose I don't know. I do know that he's been watching, and some of these figures have been reacting in kind. I wish I could say that my knowledge came as the result of exhaustive groundwork, but it's not. I know because sometimes I just "know" what they are doing, or what he is doing. Perhaps I am simply suffering delusions or after-effects from DeeCee, which would explain how conversations in certain men's voices just happen to interject themselves in moments of quiet.

Arete and I have been conferring about some dreams and visions that I have been experience since DeeCee. The strangest of them is a disembodied voice in the distance or a sense of emotional intensity. Both are accompanied by visions of the past, present, and future. The one common motif in all of these occurrences is war, something he is not unfamiliar with, and I was moved to take action and determine exactly what his game is. I am afraid that as it pertains to the dragon conflict, he is going to take

actions that could be of even greater importance than the schemes of overgrown lizards.

- Frosty is apprehensive to go into detail about what some of these portend, but I feel it is necessary to do it for her. The visions tell of an errant knight, a lost crusader, weaving a new banner of a master that has not been seen on this Earth since time immemorial. What was of the past will return, but the path and the journey are not the same, and what has been an unyielding march to war has now taken on the means of pilgrimage into the unknown future, a land the none have seen before. Knots are bound in hope where there was none, and the threads of Fate will cast off their old patterns and reweave themselves.
- Arete

That is perhaps one reason why he accepted the legacy and has become a man driven. I always suspected that he took the name and visage of the harlequin because it was a means to acknowledge his world-weariness and sense of isolation. In rare moments I gathered that he felt like Cassandra, delivering warnings that were never heeded. The identity served as a reflection of a truism that only the jesters can ever speak truth to power. They can cut to the quick, but the wound never lasts. The king simply moves on to the next joke as their schemes and squabbles lay waste to men and empires. The clown is able to speak the truth because they remain ignorable while the king remains king. So perhaps after all of these decades and centuries, Harlequin has begun to play their game. What I find most amusing about this is that his clownish antics have left strong impressions among those with whom he consorts, so one has to imagine what he could do with an army under his banner.

If the visions and whispers are true, we will see just that soon enough.

- Okay, I guess it's time for me to interject. This fragger has been bouncing around the globe for two months now, meeting and greeting with different people. He sometimes seems to be accompanied by Draco Foundation operatives, but other times he works through some other network. I recently heard of a bloodletting within the Alexa Group's Songbirds after he exploited some of their assets in order to recruit twin elves for a job that seemed to consist of simply running interference against Ghostwalker's agents while kidnapping an orkish drake.

I've also been tracking him through intermediaries. It's hard to find him, so it's not by the direct method that I've learned to hunt down this damnable elf. You have to calculate his effect on the area around his non-presence. I guess it's like looking for black holes or something; trying to see how his void warps the social space around him. What I've noticed is a definite change in tactics and a willingness to sacrifice pawns—his or someone else's. I told the story about Johnny, and I know that he did the same drek to others who were foolish enough to play his metaplanar games, but those at least seemed to have purpose. He had this intensity like it was a matter of life or death of the universe, but that doesn't seem to be the case anymore.

This whole Jester's Army or whatever he's doing has definitely rubbed me the wrong way even more than I thought was possible. The errant knight persona carried that romantic idealism of Don Quixote and others, which I guess explains some of how

my team ended up dealing with him time and again. But now, he's just another Johnson with extra magical juice.

- Bull
- I was recently hired to liberate S-K Prime analysis of dragon-hunter groups operating in Europe and Asia. In the course of performing my due diligence on my employer, all roads petered out at front companies owned by the Draco Foundation. I then started doing some research along the same lines as Bull as it applied to my client when she requested information on Winternight. I am certain that the DF is not seeking this information, because it already recovered that data through other runners. Someone with intimate knowledge of the foundation's covert operations is exploiting that to facilitate their own activities. Given his relationship to Aina Dupree, I now suspect Harlequin of reaching out through knowledge she may have left behind. I'm fascinated, though, by the connection he believes he sees between groups like the Sons of Siegfried and an apocalyptic cult on the ropes.
- Icarus
- Perhaps he's taking lessons on their successes. Three metahumans managed in a few decades to nearly bring about the end of the world. With enough time, patience, and dedication, one man could shake the world. Dragons have and are doing this. Who better to actually follow through like that than someone who is, by our best expert's account, at least three centuries old?
- Ecotope
- Bull's accounts and street gossip indicate his deep concern about Aztlaner blood magic. Winternight also used blood magic. It would not be a stretch to expect some of these dragon hunters to consider it an equalizing force when facing down dracoforms. Perhaps between expanding his resources and agents, he's pursuing a deeper strategic policy of attacking the lesser uses before they turn into the kind of problem that requires runners being sacrificed in the metaplanes.
- Glasswalker
- This has been an enjoyable read. Your lot is far more dour and selfish than the good Captain's anarchist vessel, or the pale imitation that sits in its place today. However, I must admit that Ms. Foster has taken it upon herself to share quite a bit, and others have made some interesting, but not necessarily factual observations. While some of you have liege lords, I would recommend the rest consider embarking on an endeavor into the unknown.

—H

P.S. To quote your estimable Smiling Bandit, "Strikes again! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

- Frosty
- Damn it! Not again.
- Frosty
- I like this guy's style. FastJack, send him an invitation.
- Slamm-0!
- Over my dead body. Or his.
- Bull



RISING MERCURY

Posted by: Winterhawk

Given the current interest in everything draconic, I think the drake scene bears discussing. For a decade now, drakes have been appearing and disappearing in the shadows. Some have become active players while others are in hiding, given that the great dragons consider drakes to be their chattel and vassals by right of some ancient decree. There are a few dozen truly “free” drakes that are known to the Draco Foundation, which has welcomed many of those drakes not already snatched up by the great dragons. In truth, though, no one is truly free. Being taken in and protected by the foundation comes with strings. As it happens, the puppet master lordling over the two dozen or so drakes in Lake Louise and elsewhere is an old friend of mine named Ryan Mercury, also known by his runner handle Quicksilver.

- What’s the deal with Lake Louise, anyway? Holly Brighton was given full control of the lair and Dunkelzahn Enterprises, and she still hates Daviar. So what is Daviar’s former flame doing there? Why didn’t they just stay at the Assets, Inc. compound in Devil’s Canyon?
- Turbo Bunny
- First, the key word is *former*. Daviar has not been to Lake Louise in over a decade. Second, whether they have buried the hatchet or not, word is that when Mercury laid claim to “his” area of the lair it was after a chat with Brighton that ended with them keeping out of each other’s sight and mind. Mercury has much of the underground lair that remains closed to the public, and Brighton controls the public areas and much of the above-ground lair: the amusement park, VisionQuest, the Mountain Dragons practice arena, etc.
- Glitch
- The drakes use the lair because it’s still considered the most secure of Dunkelzahn’s known properties. However, shortly after Daviar returned some of drakes were forcefully extracted, presumably back to Denver.
- Mika
- Another reason is that they also have the benefit of Dunkelzahn’s extensive electronics and signals- intelligence network. Dunk worked on a distributed model so that it’s no Ft. Meade or the Sanctus Isidorus, but it’s still impressive. Jane-in-the-Box and her “kids” have themselves a sweet setup.
- The Smiling Bandit

The drakes are being trained for war. It is that simple. No matter what the background when they were “rescued” by the Draco Foundation, that’s what they’ve been doing; secretly being slipped into Desert Wars skirmishes, tagging along in the shadows, practicing Simsense-based training within VisionQuest’s UV node, studying magic with some of the top talents of the world, and rescuing their fellow brethren.

They now have a new purpose, though: Peacekeeping.

Let me begin with the lifestyle of Quicksilver’s Drakes. There are approximately thirty of them who now reside within the lair, mostly “common” drakes with a dozen comprising the

rest (feathered, eastern, and one sea drake). The foundation, and Quicksilver specifically, have rescued or recruited Awakened drakes for more than a decade now from the clutches of many of the great dragons. Some old-timers may remember Drake’s revelation and the events from that posting that first brought the issue to the attention of those of us. Having met with them, taught them, and worked alongside them, I am comfortable discussing their matters only because there are long-term implications I believe are worth anyone’s consideration before they become involved in machinations surrounding drakes. Not that imprudence has complicated some of our lives already in that regard.

- Is that directed my way?
- Sticks
- Take it however you wish.
- Winterhawk

Quicksilver and the foundation have been spending years training these drakes. Asylum is not free, and no matter what the background of those who have come to their aid, they have had to face a reality that their existence for many years to come will include fighting, killing, and probably dying. The standard recruitment pitch is not an easy one to hear, but at least they are given a choice. Those taken by Lofwyr, Ghostwalker, Ryumyo, and Alamaï do not have that luxury. So they sign on to learn how to fight, how to live as a type of dracoform, and what the world has in store for them. I am not privy to the details of their lessons, as Ryan may be a friend but he certainly has his secrets that I respect too much to pry from him or others.

- Harlequin took Mercury on as a student shortly after his Awakening as a drake. He continues to serve as a teacher and has taught the man lessons about the realities of drakes that I suspect make their recruiting pitch much easier for someone to swallow, especially when compared to the alternative of centuries of servitude to a creature that would strip them of most of their metahumanity.
- Frosty

There are plenty of opportunities to work in this field because there are more drakes being discovered or created every day. Yes, I said created. Virtually all drakes that are known by the foundation and the collected shadow community were latent beings whose nature was carried down genetically until ambient mana levels have reached the point where they can express and survive. There are other drakes, however—“true” drakes, beings created by tremendous feats of draconic magic that are difficult and strenuous for even the great dragons to perform. Accordingly, the only true drakes of which foundation is aware serve Lofwyr, Alamaï, Ghostwalker, or Lung. Unlike the people who have Awakened as drakes, these are dracoforms first and metahumans a distant second. Interacting with those who have come under the Draco Foundation’s protection was often like trying to have a conversation with /dev/grrl.

- It’s no fun trying to talk to a walking parchment, either.
- /dev/grrl



- There are rumors that an escaped Azzie drake of considerable power is running around Central America. I suspect it may be one of those true drakes, but there aren't any Azzie great dragons.
- Glasswalker
- That you know.
- Man-of-Many-Names

In addition to supporting foundation efforts to recruit or rescue drakes, Quicksilver has been exploiting his background as a shadowrunner to put drakes into simulated and actual combat and other offensive actions that would benefit the foundation's (and his own) long-term agendas. However, given the rarity of drakes they hire runners and other freelance contractors to perform close protection, intelligence gathering, battlefield preparation, overwatch, or other support.

- That reminds me of a merc I came across in Tripoli last season. "So you're former specops?" "No." "Conventional military?" "No." "Corpsec?" "No." I looked at him blankly, and then I just walked away. Two days later I was watching Joie Alshafee's squad take on his squad, and that merc took apart Joie's whole crew almost single-handedly. Fuck cost me three thousand nuyen, but I was sold. When I tried to find out more so that I could bring him on once his current contract ended, I couldn't find a damn thing. It was like he never existed, but I know he does and I'd love to have him in my unit.
- Black Mamba

That is all just a sideshow, however, now that the dragons are in conflict. Ryan wasn't only a high-class shadowrunner—he was Dunkelzahn's most valuable expediter and the first drake. After returning from his failed search for Daviar, he assumed an identity as Dunkelzahn's heir. He was the closest person alive to Dunkelzahn as far as anyone knew, and so he took it as a matter of upholding the legacy to become involved in draconic affairs outside of the realm of the Draco Foundation's activities. I began to hear stories upon my visits that he and Azadeh would meet with Harlequin and/or Aina Dupree for hours, sometimes devolving into shouting matches. After Dupree passed and Daviar returned, those conflicts continued. I am still not quite sure what Daviar wants, but Mercury seems to desire a role as an intermediary, since drakes straddle both dragonkind and metahumanity. That means they are a potential force to intervene in conflicts between dragons and metahumans. This could be potentially lucrative for the shadows if not for the fact that it means directly interfering in the dragons' most intimate actions and decisions.

Mercury is concerned about Lofwyr's decisions as Loremaster, a role Dunkelzahn bequeathed to him that was subsequently reiterated after the last dragon conflict. He believed this conflict is something Lofwyr should be working to prevent rather than taking any side. His biggest concern is Ghostwalker, with whom Mercury met shortly after the great white dragon returned to Denver. The meeting is rumored to have been mediated by an adult dragon named Cloudbreaker, who is almost as mature as Masaru, but not a great dragon ... yet. The reason it was brokered is something that I doubt he will ever admit, but I think is simply a matter of fear. Mercury knows that whatever he thinks of his role in

Dunkelzahn's legacy and Ghostwalker's respect (or lack of respect) for it, Ghostwalker can destroy or enslave him with a thought.

This has come on the heels of recent events, as far as dragons go, when five dragons reappeared in the Caucasus or Ural Mountains over the course of a year, from 2068-69. This is supposedly what brought Mercury back to Lake Louise because those dragons wanted to know what happened to Dunkelzahn. Following the meeting, their allegiances were divided. Two apparently have sworn fealty to Ghostwalker, one to Mercury himself, and two refused to ally with any man, dragon, or other being. Cloudbreaker was one of the independents, but he seems at best aloof towards metahumanity, and would be firmly in Lofwyr's or even Alamais' camp otherwise.

- There is a dragon serving Quicksilver? Well, at least we know who or what is dictating strategy for those drakes because it sure as Hell wasn't going to be him. He's a great asset, a razor-edged tip of the spear. However, I have never witnessed a capacity in him for wielding the spear.
- Hard Exit
- The dragon is Rainwalker, a female western dragon who was the last to visit Lake Louise. She had some stops to make at Tehran, Mt. Ararat, and Baku after Awakening in Armenia. It should also come as no surprise that she favors Azadeh.
- Goat Foot
- Ah. That's why Aden never claimed Azadeh. Quid pro quo.
- Frosty
- Here's something interesting. Remember when I was eavesdropping on Azadeh in DeeCee? It piqued my curiosity that she was so insistent on tracking down something that Dr. al-Masri had apparently lost. I uncovered information about how the Kharijites were smuggling a drake out of the Iraq from under Lofwyr's snout when the drake and the crew disappeared in the Atlas Mountains. I arranged to have our crew brought on for the recovery job because it piqued our collective interests. It turned out, though, that the whole thing was a test. She was trying to recruit me.
- /dev/grrl
- What did you tell her?
- Beaker
- I don't want to be tied down, and I've already made plans for this summer.
- /dev/grrl
- So that's that.
- Icarus
- You a snitch bitch?
- FastJack
- Where did that come from?
- Icarus
- I don't even remember writing that.
- FastJack



THE DRAGONSLAYER

Posted by: Kay St. Irregular and Pistons

In case it wasn't obvious, the UCAS has taken its own side in this "dragon divide," acting as if all the dragons are opposition forces. Interestingly, Angela Colloton's anti-dragon stance has put her in the same boat as several neighbors, including (interestingly enough) Aztlan and some of the NAN. Her opposition to Ghostwalker in particular may be the only thing that is keeping them from each other's throats.

- To paraphrase an old Afghan warlord, "First we kill the dragons. Then we kill each other."
- Thorn

In DeeCee, Angela Colloton has quickly become one of the most visible opponents of all dragonkind alongside the Azzie leaders. She despises dragons, Ghostwalker above all, and sees them as a threat to the safety of the UCAS and its people. She resents Ghostwalker's actions (along with the peripheral help proffered by Hestaby and Aden) that almost destroyed Washington last year. His return could bring dire results for her politically, and with tensions still high within the NAN and along the UCAS's borders in spite of their mutual mistrust of Ghostwalker, she could be the Commander in Chief who steers the UCAS into another Great Ghost Dance War with some or all of the NAN.

That's where things in DeeCee stand as Colloton has turned to Secretary of Defense Despain and her magical security advisor, General Miller, to put the UCAS military on the offensive. Having spent decades on a defensive posture focused increasingly on internal crises, Colloton may be forced to act if this conflict continues to grow out of control, even though she spent most of her two terms playing down the GOP's expansionist "Reunification" platform. The Army has already re-tasked units and is accelerating the integration of Thaumaturgical Corps magicians into frontline and combat support units, and they are pushing readiness in state National and Metroplex Guard units and even state defense forces. Special emphasis is being put on those units in states around DeeCee and Chicagoland, and Seattle—those with experience in dealing with unconventional threats.

- This is a prime opportunity for any and all business, from espionage to simple smuggling and hijacking. This buildup attracts profiteers within the corps and the underworld as well as those parties already trying to study or manipulate the defense establishment for their own ends.
- Kane
- He makes a good point. I don't see any Luciano-style patriots throwing their support behind the UCAS anytime soon. The Cutters could go either way, depending on how this plays out. Of course, the Ancients aren't exactly known for their support of anything draconic, but they have no dog in this fight.
- Riser
- Their masters do.
- Arete

- The Vory may support the government in the end if it suits their needs. In the eastern UCAS many *vor* have direct or indirect connections to American military veterans, mainly Euro Wars refugees and expatriates. It would be useful to replicate the depth of their connections and influence in the Red Army. Of course, the Yakuza will probably side with whomever the Japanacops back.
- Red Anya
- None of that sounds very "offensive" to me. Where are the increased spaceflights to restore the orbital arsenal? Who is doing the clandestine and covert collection of atmospheric and making other battlefield preparations? Not in the UCAS, but in Denver and northern California and Aztlan, and even Essen or Caerleon? If the UCAS is serious, they'd be recruiting or drafting recruits or at least hiring contractors for those missions if there is still reticence at drawing the ire of the Sioux and rest of the NAN. I've seen offensives, and this isn't one. This is bureaucratic masturbation.
- Black Mamba
- Keep reading.
- Pistons

One of the largest beneficiaries of the Military Recover Act has been Esprit, which is owned by Dassault, and ultimately Aztechnology. Despite their past conflicts, Ghostwalker's actions have pushed the UCAS to the verge of becoming the Azzies' next closest ally in North America after the Algonkian-Manitou Council. Perhaps even stranger though is that Ghostwalker's decisions since his return have frustrated the Sioux, especially as the Zone Defense Force continues to make incursions deeper into the territory bordering the Front Range. If the UCAS ever took direct action against the dragon, the shortest route to Denver goes right through the Sioux, so diplomats and spies are now engaged in a flurry of activity to plan for all sorts of contingencies. Meanwhile, Atlanta is stuck in the middle between its historical allies and enemies and the desire to simply be rid of Sirurg by any means necessary, even if those include cooperating with Aztlan. It would also be wise to note that the megacorp that Angela Colloton is closest to is Renraku, which already had one incident last year where one of their missiles "accidentally" veered off course towards the suspected dragon clutch in Madagascar.

- That's the beauty of dealing with a political foe who spent most of her adult life as a professional soldier. She's predictable.
- Picador

There is plenty of military activity to focus on, but most of you aren't crazy enough to fight armies (*right, Kane?*). What is of note, especially as it relates to the dragons, is the Dragonslayer himself. Secretary Despain has a symbolic association to his nickname that is almost certain to come into play if this escalates. The cover story that the sobriquet is a reference to the ubiquitous Ares cargo helicopter is slowly eroding under the truth that he killed a real feathered serpent, as Thorn acknowledged in *Conspiracy Theories*. He is the other half of the military's National Command Authority, but killing the feathered serpent makes him a target by those dragons who would respond to any violence against dragons with a violence response from their own. Despain is the most powerful and visible metahuman with a dragon kill





to his name. Killing him seems like a priority for certain great dragons such as SIRRURG and ALAMAIS.

- Killing Azzie-loving Yankees sounds like a good time to me. Depends on whether DeeCee really is in bed with those godforsaken fucks. Maybe I can get the Free Marines on my side, or if Colloton is siding with the Azzies, the whole damn Corps.
- Kane
- What's that supposed to mean, the whole Corps? Hard Exit, you were a Marine. What does he mean?
- Netcat
- I see.
- Netcat

That shouldn't be a big deal. DeeCee has only been the destination for public and clandestine visits by a half dozen great dragons in the last year. If SIRRURG wants to burn down the Pentagon, no one can realistically see even the thousands private and government soldiers and security personnel surrounding DeeCee stopping him, especially after the attacks on Albuquerque and Odessa. But that is part of a bigger problem: There are tons of guns and thousands of defense personnel, but no one is actually in charge, and the pushback and conflicts are gumming up the works. DeeCee is not only a city of political intrigue, but it also hosts a convergence of mystical and historical conspiracies that are directly tied to recent events.

The Pentagon has always been a vipers' nest, and there are now runs within the building on the pro-Despain side, on the dragons' side, and on the side of third-party opportunists just trying to make some money or increase their own power. Yes, there are dragons and pseudo-draconic entities, e.g. the Draco Foundation, that are inside the Pentagon and the rest of the government, including the White House. Returned officers who served in the ZDF are under suspicion and conflicted because some of them did indeed swear magical oaths to Ghostwalker. No one knows what that means—are they potential sleepers? Will briefing the Defense Intelligence Agency cause one of them to burst into flames for breaking that Oath, meaning potential sources will need to go up and spend the rest of their lives in orbit with Orbital DK and her new friend? While the Black Lodge and New Revolution play their own games, and Aegis recruits any runner with half a brain to satisfy the increased demand for their services, shadowrunners are poised to take on especially sensitive political jobs. For example, the Church of the Dragon Reborn is a perfectly legitimate religious organization in DeeCee. It is also a known front for Ghostwalker's espionage and political machinations. The FBI has historically supported investigations of religious groups thanks to the Universal Brotherhood, but what they are lacking is raw manpower. They also still encounter interference on especially secret programs such as the Shades, who are shedim operatives who are working for the Defense Security Agency and have political cover from on high.

- That reminds me. One of my sources saw General Miller, who among other things seems to know about the Shades, meet with Johnny Spinrad as he was passing through Seattle. Unfortunately, the source didn't speak Portuguese or record it to run through



a translation. Miller's old-school black ops, so they were undoubtedly speaking in code anyway. I am not surprised that Spinrad and Miller, and thus Colloton, are collaborating given their enmity for dragons. I wish I knew more.

- Fianchetto

The FBI needs all the cover they can get, because they are quietly investigating the White House staff. It's a dicey proposition and has put them in conflict with the Secret Service and the DSA, which also handles these matters as it relates to the uniformed personnel who do everything from flying Air Force One to operating the White House mess. It is believed that Ghostwalker has placed a person somewhere on the White House staff, and no one beyond the individual themselves, a handler, and the white wyrm himself knows who it is. It could be anyone, and the FBI's greatest fear is that it is an agent on the Presidential Protection Detail or a senior official. The task force has been engaged in misdirection and has hired especially discreet runners for black-bag investigations and long-term surveillance. This has created a significant distraction for President Colloton, because she is afraid that she can't trust anyone, and to be honest, she can't. The more dependent she has to be on them at this time, the tighter this invisible noose seems to be getting around her neck. So she has reached out to the one person she can trust—her husband Timothy Colloton—to arrange extremely clandestine meetings with people whom they feel they can trust. In a few cases, that has included arranging shadowruns to courier data or gather information.

- I'm calling bullshit on this. In two hundred years there has never been a traitor inside the Secret Service.
- Hard Exit
- They've never had an enemy like Ghostwalker before.
- Frosty
- I know who it is. You'll see soon enough.
- Riser

WAR OF THE QUEENS

Posted by: Thorn

I know a shadow war when I see one, and while everyone has been watching Hestaby and Lofwyr go at it for the last year, a whole other drama has followed as people wonder what Nadja Daviar is doing. There have been plenty of people digging for info, some people who have reacted to the current times by striking out blindly at her, and a few of the dragons have been playing their games with her as if no time had passed and nothing changed. One of those has been Hestaby, who has been engaged in a bit of media gamesmanship, trying to augment her own image and indirectly trying to shape the media image of Ms. Daviar. There was the surprise appearance at the Draco Foundation with the entire Washington press corps in tow, the ascension of Hestaby as the voice of draconic-metahuman relations and cooperation, and Hestaby taking a leadership role in the Astral Space Preservation Society. Despite Ryan Mercury's public criticisms of her, Hestaby has been very interested in the foundation's drake sanctum and has

been on a charm offensive to exploit the fact that he and Daviar are no longer together.

- It's not for a lack of trying on the dragons' part to infiltrate the group, but they've never been successful.
- Winterhawk
- Confirmation bias. When you have a prime suspect, you start to look only at evidence that supports that suspicion. Everyone was quick to jump on the idea that Ghostwalker or his agents extracted those drakes after his return because that explanation fit the assumption. Do the actual facts back that up?
- Hard Exit

The flip side of this conflict has been even more indirect and subtle. There has been a growing barrage of criticism of Hestaby because of her actions in Dubai, support for her political opposition in the Tír has increased since she resigned her seat on the Council of Princes, and key assets and investments are being attacked by Saeder-Krupp. The most significant blow Daviar has delivered to Hestaby, however, is a sin of omission when the Draco Foundation's trustee selection committee did not offer the Orange Queen an invitation to serve on the board of trustees, but instead offered it to Masaru, who immediately accepted; Alexis Glimmerscale, representing the Children of the Dragon; and Dr. Kristine Martin (also known as KAM), the Genesis Consortium Chief Bioethics Officer. As I've learned from my sources, Hestaby took this as a personal insult given her public statements of esteem for Dunkelzahn and desire to continue his legacy.

- The committee was able to keep the decision secret until the invitations were publicly announced. The real-time chatter inside the Shasta lair was manic, especially at how calmly Hestaby took the news given her concerted but covert persuasion campaign to become a trustee.
- Fastjack
- KSAF at its peak didn't have your sense of timing on that one. Of course that's what makes you Fastjack.
- Sunshine

Things are now heating up. As a follow-up to the recent announcement of the new trustees and the new Board of Visitors, the Draco Foundation is gearing up for a massive media push that will include trid appearances and MeFeed broadcasts of the selection committee, Visitors, and all of the trustees, include the woman herself, Nadja Daviar. We'll all see who is the better public persona, the mystery elf or the great dragon, when she does her first real sit-down interview with Holly Brighton on a special edition of *Wyrms Talk* slated for August 9. After that will come an onslaught of press and other media appearances from *The Macmillan Group* and *NewsNET* to the Atlantean Foundation's Ancient Wisdom Channel broadcasting a two-part special of *The Awakened World* on the Draco Foundation. As much as I try to avoid trideo, I am looking forward to Daviar's appearance on *Beyond the Wire*. Samantha Roth has been railing on Ghostwalker as sabotaging the Treaty of Denver and putting the security of North America in jeopardy, and her personal relationship to





Daviar should make both fidget if they are even a shade honest. Interestingly, Roth immediately dialed back her regular attacks on the Tír as soon as Hestaby's resignation was made official, but she made no secret of her opinion that the Council of Princes was better for no longer having a dragon on it.

- NBS is going to full coverage, of course. If it suits Ares and the foundation, there will be trustees on *Kitchen Witchery* and *Chase: Errant Knight*.
- Dr. Spin
- I wouldn't mind seeing Chase bend a couple of trustees over the hood of an Americar as he slaps the cuffs on 'em.
- Slamm-0!
- FRED!
- Netcat
- I share that sentiment. However, I suspect our reasons are quite different.
- Aufheben

The last years haven't made it easy for Daviar to do whatever she seems intent on doing. Between the attacks on the foundation and Dunkelzahn's beneficiaries, the assassination of at least three Nadjas due to Soren Johannson's actions, and the general increased confusion and unease within the foundation due to this dragon conflict and Daviar's shakeup of the entire organization, there is room for Hestaby to counter this influence or even tilt these attacks against her in her favor. Senator Cardino's criticism and attacks on the foundation after the January explosion found a powerful supporter in Senator Melissa Washington after Ghostwalker returned. Already the Senate's leading proponent of magical regulation, his reappearance emboldened her to side with Cardino in making the Draco Foundation the prime target of the Senate Select Committee on Paranormal Affairs. The foundation is not extraterritorial, and this is not the only increased scrutiny it is facing from a government.

- In some cases, the governments are simply harassing the foundation for abandoning them.
- Kay St. Irregular

There is also the matter of unclaimed or unlisted pieces of Dunkelzahn's horde finding their way into the shadows. There is some suspicion that recent thefts from private vaults are related to the foundation even more than the incident in January. With the changes in personnel and Daviar's intention of closing all but the largest or most strategic offices, this is the most opportune moment to start raiding the foundation for information or material. Some suspicion is that the thefts are inside jobs coming from Daviar herself to take items that aren't being reverted quickly enough. The foundation is seeking to close out the probate process on all but a few permanent programs like the educational endowments, innovation competitions, and oversight of the Timmons Memorial Foundation and Ancient Wisdom Fund boards, and Daviar wants some of this dead wood out of the way as soon as possible. Since she can't just walk down into the vaults

and grab whatever she likes that could help shadowrunners going up against Hestaby, it's likely that she or some agents are setting up runs to sneak these items out from under the foundation. With her personal hoard, it's mainly a matter of engaging in asset reorganization as she consolidates assets under Gavilan or Reality. With the foundation, it's a bit trickier than the previous thefts of items like the so-called Spirit Flute or Wand of Ages, and there have been several failed attempts over the years by known entities to steal the First Key of Power or the Arrow or Red Dragon Slaying. As far as anyone knows, the security measures that stopped all who've tried—at great cost—have scared away further attempts. I know for a fact, though, that the security measures have failed. Both items have fallen into the shadows.

- It was hoped by many that the Spirit Flute was a myth. Thorn's assertion makes me greatly uncomfortable because the flute's properties are believed to include the ability for spirits to reach out to virtually any plane to summon and control the spirits there. The most obvious threat is that it could allow shedim to reopen a portal to their plane.
- Ethernaut
- I hate to agree with Ethernaut on this, but the flute is perhaps one of the few artifacts that even I wish didn't exist. I would suspect that if its powers were to be believed, acquiring it has become number one with a bullet on Arleesh's to-do list.
- Elijah
- I had also hoped it was merely a legend. I hope whoever has it realizes that if Ghostwalker learns of this, he will rain destruction on anything that stands between him and eliminating that piece from the Earth.
- Frosty

What Daviar also may not have suspected in attempting to barrage Hestaby with this onslaught is that the Orange Queen is suited to respond in kind and is quite comfortable in reacting quickly and immediately to such short-term threats. Her experience in the corporate and media arenas have taught her the lessons of how to gauge and quickly act or react to events in order to bring about a favorable return without losing track of the long term. Her relationship with the Clutch, her band of technomancers (formerly otaku), also taught her the value of being able to act and adapt rapidly in ways that only a few other great dragons seem to have learned, and fewer still appear to have put those lessons in practice. Hestaby's greatest teachers with regards to dealing with Daviar are her former master, Dunkelzahn, and Daviar herself.

Hestaby has made an odd combination, taking the lessons she has learned from Dunkelzahn and applying the age-old wisdom of Machiavelli. That seems like two schools of thought that don't go together, but you'd be surprised, as Dunkelzahn certainly knew his way around to corridors of power, and Hestaby is still learning from his example. Her public and private actions seem to imitate the Big D's with regards to the way she deals with the public, corporations, the Matrix, and other dragons. His final interaction with her was to provide her with a knowledge store residing on the Zurich-Orbital host. In the two decades since his

death, many have sought the information stored up there. None, to my knowledge, have been successful; even if they were able to pull off that dataheist, one suspects that what they recover would not be written in any known tongue. Perhaps Hestaby's greatest asset is that if one is to believe even a fraction of what might be possible with draconic telepathy, that means she has had numerous instances over the years to clandestinely probe Daviar's mind. Nadja Daviar has been known to adopt different characteristics during her tenure as Dunkelzahn's translator, presumably reflecting lessons learned from him and the direct and indirect influence on her by his mind. It is not known exactly how much she has changed during the years she was AWOL, but even the study of personal and public activities since her return could be readily interpreted by Hestaby and compared to what she learned from her own suspected mental probes. If I was Nadja Daviar, I'd have to assume that Hestaby knew everything I knew since our last face-to-face meeting: the relationship with Dunkelzahn and everyone in his sphere, life before the Paris meeting, activities of the Draco Foundation, and even her control of Reality Inc.

- That would be a wise bet on the contents of the Z-0 datastore.
- Orbital DK

Carla Brooks and even other known shadow assets like Ryan Mercury and Jane-in-the-Box are not considered sufficiently "aggressive," or are possibly compromised simply by being known elements. Dunkelzahn's Watchers were believed to have limited direct action to very limited degrees of violence except on rare occasions. Nadja Daviar herself is known to eschew violence a great deal, and to that end one would suspect that if she needs to develop an entirely new strategy that it would flip that assumption on its head. In my recent visits to the UCAS, I've picked up stories that Daviar has developed a clandestine relationship with one or more individuals who serve as, to use an American colloquialism, her "wartime consigliere." The list of likely suspects has Jonathon Reed first above all given his service as a ruthless Tír spymaster and one of her oldest living acquaintances. Other candidates include Monsignor Karol Szarek, a Providence Corporation/Roman Catholic Church spymaster with no qualms about violence, and Natalia Davydovskaya, the new star in the National Supreme Soviet who has a bloody past in the Polish campaigns. That doesn't even touch on her allies inside corporations she owns or influences (Knight Errant, Lone Star, Eagle Security) or perennial Draco Foundation ally Wuxing. Even men like Roger Soaring Owl and Miles Lanier have been mentioned, though it is hard to believe that she has found an ally in Lanier. The odds on it being Soaring Owl, however, are 50/50. My personal suspicion leans towards someone who doesn't have a favorable relationship with her—Jonathan Blake.

- Cavalier Arms' new CEO, Derrick Robert Kane, owes Daviar *everything* after she convinced the Corporate Court to resolve the matter of Patrick Goodman's estate and shares in Cavalier Arms in Kane's favor. He and that whole corporation are swimming in darker intrigues than what the Draco Foundation and Daviar might have been used to before the Crash. He's almost too perfect a choice.
- Cosmo





INCOMING FEED.....

- Monsignor Szarek reminds me of an interesting aside. I keep running into bits and pieces of agent briefings and signal intercepts that keep cropping up that tie Daviar, always at arm's length, to the Vatican. The only thing that keeps me from disregarding them is that my intuition says that the inconsistencies are almost too perfect, a sign of intentional disinformation or deception.
- Fianchetto

The Draco Foundation's Watchers should be considered an asset, but the network hasn't quite been the same since its existence became known within the shadows and the spy community. Its greatest asset was being a clandestine, covert operation run by Daviar and Jane-in-the-Box for Dunkelzahn. Before she disappeared, the original network had been dramatically reduced as the great dragons, most notably Ghostwalker, poached at least a third of the Watchers while another third left the group, either going independent or finding new allies. The Watchers and other shadow assets were trying to stem the losses while facing counterintelligence efforts that could target specific individuals and suspected operatives. The Watchers never had a chance to recruit new operatives, as anyone on their recruitment list was quickly poached by defectors. Since returning, the Watchers have engaged in a reinvigorated effort to expand their numbers and intelligence capabilities. Jonathon Reed is one reason for this effort as he and his paladins scour the shadows on Daviar's behalf when not trying to undermine Lugh Surehand and other enemies. There are also a handful of former UCAS government "specialists" who retired to West Virginia around the time she disappeared and

have recently been contacting those same people and reinforcing my suspicion that they are being recruited.

- You know who'd make a great Watcher because of his background and current state of retirement? The Chromed Accountant.
- Hard Exit
- The Chromed Accountant is 100 percent retired.
- FastJack
- He's got a lovely island. Puts mine to shame. But he was a combat decker who ran toward the Sentry guns and monowire. If that ol' boy's really retired, he should have lost his fucking mind by now without the juice from running.
- Kane

Hestaby is also in a position to exploit Nadja Daviar's many enemies. She was able to outmaneuver most of them in the time following her sudden return, but they've managed to adapt after the better part of a year. Just to recount some of them:

- **Holly Brighton:** Relations between the Queen of Lake Louise and the Ice Queen have never been amiable. Brighton controls the lair and influences a number of Draco Foundation and Dunkelzahn-related assets such as the drake sanctum and the activities of Jane-in-the-Box and other Watcher assets.
- **Azadeh:** Ryan Mercury's lieutenant and significant other. Their relationship is icy at best, and there have been instances where Hestaby might have reached out directly to her. While

Azadeh is even fiercer than Mercury in her belief that drakes should be free, that type of passion and pride has led more than one person to succumb to their own hubris if they see the Draco Foundation as just another puppeteer.

- **The Nadjas:** I'm not about to divulge details, but I know for a fact that Daviar and Yelena, the mysterious leader of the fixer network, had a sit-down after the recent assassinations of three members. At that meeting, Yelena made it clear that they already fought and won their own war, and she is not about to see any more of her "sisters" die because of Nadja Daviar's battles. They may do business, but it is strained and getting worse as there is a faction that simply will not work with Daviar or her camp.
- **Soren Johansson:** The fact that he still draws breath at least speaks to the ostensible loyalty of many of Daviar's people and the Nadjas themselves, as Yelena acquiesced to the demand that no reprisal be taken against him. That isn't to say that he's doing well, as indications from the most recent Grand Tour suggest that he is "haunted." He is a wild card as he remains close to Damien Knight, who likely knows of Johansson's actions by now. Any move he makes against Daviar must be calculated and devastating. The consensus is that Johansson has one shot, and if he doesn't hurt Daviar enough, he'll be targeted for a most unpleasant end by men who would take pleasure in his death.
- **Ghostwalker:** Since his return, he has not been acting in ways that would put him in Hestaby's camp vis-à-vis dragons' relations with metahumanity. He and Daviar, however, seem to have unfinished business that would ally the two with Lofwyr serving as their mutual foe.
- **Richard Villiers:** Nadja Daviar is responsible for several blows Villiers seems to have taken personally with regards to Cavalier Arms and Reality Inc. It isn't known whether he has learned of Daviar's ownership and influence on the corp, but his actions against it are hurting her. He definitely knows how vital she was to Kane's success before the Corporate Court, and that makes her a prima facie enemy. If Hestaby does know of her true relation to Reality, it is something she can use to either hold over her or give to Villiers in order to open up a new front on her.
- **Midori Kanematsu:** Along with Manuel Torres, Ms. Kanematsu was forced off the board upon Daviar's return. Unlike Torres, her personal business empire and assets were successfully attacked around the same time as her departure. This was a personal and professional blow as she had previously held a reputation for never losing a business interest to a competitor. The mystique evaporated along with a dozen businesses. Hestaby has a similar approach to business, which almost certainly overlaps with Kanematsu's interests.

There is also a group within the Draco Foundation that is hard to classify because they have multiple reasons to dislike Daviar. It could be that they have ideological differences with the changes being made to the foundation, because while she insists that she is continuing to carry on Dunkelzahn's legacy, her actions appear to them to be curtailing the power and influence of the foundation in favor of her own interests. Some are angry at being fired or realigned in the transition as offices and programs are

shut down or realigned. As the *Street Legends* dossier indicated, her appointment of Rex Coll as the executive director reinforced this idea, given his complete lack of ties to Dunkelzahn and any shared philosophy with the dragon. He is clearly in favor of running the foundation like a megacorporation. As this and other programs like a formalized Undernet Alliance are being developed, appointments to these programs are being sought which creates a competitive nature not seen before in the Draco Foundation.

- I think I have some interesting paydata that you might be interested in, Thorn. There's some odd info I discovered relating to the late Chief Consultant Kanagawa and Midori Kanematsu. PM me.
- Slamm-0!
- Someone may want to inform Jane that someone is attempting to intercept signals data emanating from and entering Lake Louise. Don't just look in the Athabaskan RTC, but the physical nodes that are trying desperately to stay hidden or kept isolated from the grid.
- Glitch

Finally, this little shadow conflict has a number of other pieces that can, will, and are being used. Masaru and the Huk are now stuck in the middle because of the Filipino dragon's own conservation and metahuman outreach actions. Likewise, factions and cabals within political institutions such as the United Nations and its Corporation on Megacorporate Affairs, supported by both Hestaby and the Draco Foundation for their own ends, are being used to battle each other and manipulate public and governmental action. The official body is faced with the political machinations of Lofwyr and Hestaby trying to affect metahuman action (or inaction) with regards to the divide, and COMA is being used to counter Lofwyr's more dominant corporate influence on the General Assembly, NEEC, and the Corporate Court. There is also the matter of Pulsar, the Undernet Alliance, and the technomancer and AI communities. Their allegiances are being tested by expanded outreach and influence peddling by Hestaby's Clutch. Pulsar's relationship with Horizon has tested its loyalty to the Draco Foundation as it helps establish and maintain the Undernet Alliance. This is also quite pronounced within the ranks of the Children of the Dragon, which Daviar has clearly sought to appease with Ms. Glimmerscale's appointment as a trustee. Hestaby has made it known that she seeks to carry on Dunkelzahn's legacy in a way that appeals to many Children, especially those on the ground who see the appointment as a cynical power play between David Dragonson and Nadja Daviar. It may not result in a schism such as the one that led to the Church of the Dragon Reborn, but the leadership has not changed much in nearly twenty years, and that cannot continue.

- I'm intrigued that you only lightly touched on how this could play inside Ares. Damien Knight is no ally of Daviar's, and Arthur Vogel is suspected of being in bed with Hestaby through their mutual conservation interests. Nick Aurelius has become quite partial to Daviar's agenda now that she sits on the second board seat afforded to Gavilan Ventures, and Leonard Aurelius has also been quite supportive of her in his "independent" life. Given the Ares-Proteus conflict of the early sixties, one outside force that now has a strong positive relationship with Ares is the Frankfurt





INCOMING FEED.....

Bank Association and its CEO, Monika Stüeler-Waffenschmidt. Ms. Stüeler-Waffenschmidt could likely be in Daviar's camp. They have had several meetings regarding the Draco Foundation's interest during Daviar's visits to the Hanover office, and given the strong suspicions that she is a drake whose life has been spent on the wrong side of Lofwyr (who has a clearly defined opinion that drakes are the great dragons' property), one can assume that those discussions have involved the drake sanctum and actions that go against both Lofwyr's and Hestaby's goals.

- Sticks
- I haven't discussed Ares much for reasons that may become clear later.
- Thorn
- When the new members of the Draco Foundation Board of Trustees were announced, it was quite a surprise to see a very familiar face among them: Dr. Kristine Martin. I reached out to KAM in order to give us her appraisal of the business within and surrounding the Draco Foundation from her newfound position of influence, especially in light of the preceding analysis by Thorn.
- FastJack

MEET THE NEW BOSS

Posted by: KAM

I appreciate FastJack providing me with an opportunity to discuss the new changes that the Draco Foundation has experienced in the last six months. As I have seen from other

documents, our recently returned chairperson may be playing a very different game in public and with the board than she is in private. When we discussed the business of the foundation and my service on the board, she used that photographic memory of hers to remind of a statement I made before the UCAS Senate decades ago about the field of bionetics and engineering. "Try not to focus on the purely physical potentials," she quoted of my comments on our genetics research, "Think of the benefits to disease control, the aging problem, and to mankind in general." Dunkelzahn was intrigued by the possibilities of myriad research and innovation if only more people took a holistic approach to them. Of course, he had the benefit of being a great dragon with his talons in megacorps that were stifling the expansion of global knowledge to maintain competitive advantages. I believe that is true, even in light of discussions on JackPoint. But let me step back a bit.

There have been some interesting additions beside myself. Rumor was that the search committee considered some interesting figures such as Hestaby, Perianwyr, and the AI Pulsar. They ultimately determined, however, that it would be prudent to be a bit more *grounded*. Joining me on the board of trustees are Masaru and Alexis Glimmerscale, a changeling who sits on the board of directors of the Children of the Dragon.

- It would have been interesting to see the foundation publicize its relationship with Pulsar and the Undernet Alliance, but it seems that they still prefer to rely on Gracie Friel to be the public face and ambassador on all things Matrix.
- Netcat



- Isn't the appointment of the changeling a rather transparent ploy on Daviar's part to manipulate the Children of the Dragon, especially since FastJack's source on that Daviar briefing outright stated that was her plan?
- Traveler Jones
- You play the game, even if you start at a disadvantage, or you sit on the sidelines. David Dragonson has always been a nuisance. However, he and his church are now committed.
- KAM
- One could say the same thing about Masaru. Every time he is discussed, there is speculation that he wants to punch above his weight class. Now that this conflict is becoming more public, he is the draconic face within the largest, best-known entity on Earth dedicated specifically to improving relations between dragons and metahumans. If the collected or representative bodies of metahumanity turn on dragons, then his hubris will be his undoing.
- Lei Kung

In addition to the three of us, there is now a Board of Visitors that includes a diverse collection of Draco Foundation allies and associates. Some of the more familiar names are Carla Brooks, Pulsar, Anne Penchyk, Ramon Dizon, Sharon Chiang-Wu, Jean-Marie Cross, and Presidents Pritchard and McCabe. Some lesser-known figures include Jaume Pujol i Serra, a Barcelona-based banker from the dominant political dynasty of Catalonia who is also a major art collector; Nada Marquez, a northern California vintner and the president of the Small Farmers' Union; Vitaly Mischenko, a Chairman Emeritus of Bioenergetica Ukraine, and the senior Ukrainian representative to the *Philike Hetairia*; and Maura Edmonds, the chair of the Ancient Wisdom Fund and a prominent Houston philanthropist.

- BU doesn't have quite the positive reputation one would associate with the Draco Foundation, and Mischenko's reign was not known for his ... ah ... benevolence. He was a good customer of my mentor, however.
- Red Anya
- Chairman Mischenko does have his baggage, but he is quite charming and very results-oriented.
- KAM
- That is a rather polite way of describing the unparalleled level of destructive avarice BU showed when he was in charge.
- Ecotope
- I have reason to believe that Thais is secretly a member of the advisory board, either in disguise or simply off the books.
- Elijah
- There are no off-the-books members of either board to my knowledge. However, every person on either board has their own circle of advisors. As I have been told, Thais leaves a distinct impression even in disguise that I haven't encountered.
- KAM

The mood altogether among the combined boards is one of progress and innovation, and in pursuing a greater good in new that have not been explored by the Draco Foundation in the past. Reading the preceding analysis, I am still struck by how this supposed antipathy between Daviar and Hestaby has no clear foundation. I will admit that there are conflicts and unease among some personnel, but it's no worse than I've seen elsewhere. Rex Coll is a rather unpleasant man, however, and I don't think he's the best person to be running the foundation's daily activities. I am in the minority, however.

- I think your perspective may have been warped a bit given your marital history.
- Ecotope
- I strongly disagree. Her experience makes her uniquely positioned to judge the mood of businesses in conflict, and the best and worst of metahumanity.
- The Smiling Bandit

As for the specific accusations of artifact and item theft, I do not know enough to speak on it ... yet. This seems, however, to be a rather grave breach of duty if this proves to be true. While I do agree that it makes sense to close out probate on items related to the Renraku Arcology or Chicago Containment Zone, the offer made for the First Key of Power continues to be renewed. While the membership of the Council of Princes has changed over time from what was outlined in Dunkelzahn's instructions, the Seelie Court remains unchanged to anyone's knowledge. Therefore the criterion still applies if they ever put forward a claim, as is their right to do so.

In closing, I believe that some of these claims as well as the implications from other material regarding Chairwoman Daviar merit investigation and discussion among the entire Board of Trustees because they may affect the operations, if not the very nature, of the Draco Foundation.

- I admire your resolve and commitment to the truth and the honest pursuit of your duty as a trustee in fulfilling Dunkelzahn's legacy and stated wishes. I expect you to pursue your duty using your best judgment given the players involved.
- Thorn

SPINNING WEBS

Posted by: Fianchetto

It wouldn't be a party without Johnny Spinrad dropping by, and this dragon situation is no exception. A lot of people have focused on his conflicts with Lofwyr over the years, but the ascension of Spinrad Industries back up to a major AA and his increased visibility on both sides of the Atlantic have created more opportunities and more problems for the eternal playboy. SpIn's expansion in its primary market of cybernetic and other augmentations has edged him into competition with Transys-Neuronet and Celedyr. Partnering with HKB to rebuild the inroads he'd made before the Romanov paternity scandal has only served to exacerbate conflict with the Welsh dragon.





The idea that there are over a billion people in mainland Asia who've almost never heard of Johnny Spinrad was no longer tolerable to the man, and SpIn has used its increased size and financial support from Wuxing banks to expand into China and Southeast Asia. He's collaborated with the Brazilian expat community in Portugal to reach out to other communities, strengthening inroads into Japan that came with the success of the Sorayama Line, and also building connections into parts of North America (DeeCee, Florida) and Southeast Asia/Australasia through the often-overlooked Macao office and the European Javanese Development Cooperative ("EJDC").

- Spinrad has been spending an increasingly significant amount of time in Hong Kong, building up his *guanxi* network and grasping the concept of face remarkably quickly for a *gwailo* ("foreigner"). He is particularly interested in building his relationship with Wuxing. Rumors persist that he is one of the few who has met for any length of time with the increasingly reclusive Wu Lung-Wei. He's also made visits to areas of heavy spirit activity such as Wanchai Causeway.
- Lei Kung
- The man's flamboyant excesses of wealth, vigor, and taste (being a global tastemaker) are immense positives in Hong Kong, and he uses them to bestow honors on his "lessers"—virtually everyone outside, and most within, the Central District and Aberdeen—in his rapidly expanding *guanxi* network. His recent dalliances with the occult and superstitions in England carry over into the Hong Kong culture even stronger than in the British Isles, along with his interest in geomancy.
- Jimmy No
- Spirits. Geomancy. Manatech and manaware. Goodness, you would think he was up to something. Perhaps that would explain SpIn-affiliated Matrix investigations into the Bureau of Heaven and Earth. Or his visit to Wong Tai Sin temple.
- Puck
- You've certainly wasted little time returning to the games of your namesake.
- The Smiling Bandit
- His corporate dealings with the Amazonian Yakuza in Japan, Amazonia, and Europe have also served to place the corporation into the affairs of the Watada-rengo, and Ryumyo, along with other business partnerships with MCT and some of their puppets. One in particular is SIS, the private intelligence corporation.
- Mihoshi Oni

This isn't to say that Johnny has ignored Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp. It just speaks to his comfort that two recent alliances have emboldened him to make these ventures that place his corporation into the affairs of another dozen great dragons. The first is the immediate synergy that came with Dassault (Aztechnology) purchasing Esprit and its seat on the NEEC Corporate Policy Commission. Aztechnology's and S-K's conflicts are significant, but along with Regulus, Zeta-ImpChem, NeoNET, and others,

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HONG KONG SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

There are two major components to social interactions in Hong Kong. The first is *guanxi*, which is a social network mixing Confucian ideals and Chinese social strata with the common exchange between personal and professional contacts. The system maintains a relationship of "lessers" and "betters" that define the relationships. Lessers are expected to pay honors to their betters in the form of favors or gifts. In return the "betters" are expected to hold a patrician view of the "lesser," bestowing favors and gifts upon them in return almost as if there is a family relationship. Poor management of the *guanxi* network, either failing to pay honors or treat "lessers" with appropriate respect is a mark on one's face—the second component.

Face is the social standing and image one holds. It is reflected in the presentation of wealth (financial success), taste, and other indicators of proper standing, e.g. an orderly and well-maintained family or business. The concept of face is also seen in how one exhibits their personal honor and respect for positions of power and responsibility. One can gain or lose face in how they present themselves and their success, but also in their respect for the duty of one's position and for others' time and face.

there is more than enough political and economic heft to throw against Lofwyr's ambitions in the Old World. In return, there have been some stark and immediate benefits to both sides, from Bodyline apparel now being available in Stuffer Shack and Carrefour locations to the publicity campaign by a SpIn subsidiary to emphasize the human rights abuses inflicted upon Aztlan and Aztechnology forces in the Az-Am War, especially those perpetrated by dracoforms. Aztechnology's global push as the Defender of Metahumanity is getting plenty of third-party support from partners and allies. They've been lagging behind in Europe, and so the damage-control operation that saved Spinrad's ass in the fifties is now working for the Azzies to build up their image and tear down any positive perception of dragons, including Lofwyr (and Saeder-Krupp by association).

- A cartel brat like Ding would see a kindred spirit in Johnny's "The World Is Mine" attitude to life and business.
- Glasswalker
- Speaking of SIS, they've made some moves seemingly on Spinrad's behalf to do what they do well: eliminate media figures. The catch is that these operations are less lethal, working to stop critics through bribery, intimidation, and destroying careers. This is a far cry from the usual weapons of monowire and suppressed pistols.
- Kay St. Irregular



- I think I can shed some light on this. While Johnny's been scheming behind the scenes to outmaneuver or outplay Lofwyr, he has also been cozying up to dragons and their allies. Spinrad's PR people may be slamming Sirurg (rightly, I should add) and Ghostwalker for the Azzies, but while in Asia he's made numerous public appearances with Masaru and Ramon Dizon celebrating philanthropic and business ventures. I might also remind you that both are also now prominently linked to the Draco Foundation. As the dragons seem to become more reclusive in direct media appearances, someone has to fill the vacuum. There is no man on Earth who can fill the empty space in front of a trid camera faster than Johnny Spinrad. So while the PR campaign goes off in Europe, FC Arsenal has been making goodwill visits to Manila, Beijing, Beirut, Buenos Aires, Atlanta, and even fucking Mogadishu showing Johnny kicking soccer ball around with the local youths during the day and then entertaining dignitaries at night who can help him partner up—Proteus in the Atlantic, PPG/EDJC Pelawangan Spaceport (after ten years), MCT and Hourani Construction in Mogadishu, and Genesis Consortium in Bolivia.

- Dr. Spin

- It's worth noting that though his sexual promiscuity is the stuff of legend, when he last appeared on Japanese trid he went out of his way to be utterly respectful about Akane Ishino and her image as Ryumyo's "little virgin princess." Then he ran through a cyberninja obstacle course at full speed, perfectly willing to make an ass of himself just to show off his new Sorayama mods.

- Mihoshi Oni

- Lusiada, the Portuguese national corporation, and SpIn each own approximately twenty percent of EJDC. As he works with them, I would presume that Johnny remembers that Saeder-Krupp owns shares in Lusiada and knows what it's up to.

- Cosmo

The second major component is a person: Rolf Bremen. The former head of S-K Prime and Lofwyr's right-claw man is now Johnny Spinrad's spymaster and the straight man to Spinrad's antics. Bremen has been active in facilitating and organizing all of the myriad joint ventures and partnerships SpIn has engaged in. Working for Lofwyr for decades as the corporation's chief spymaster and fixer has given Spinrad's network a much-needed boost in covert-action capabilities since the death of Wilhelmina Graff-Beloit and the chilling of relations between himself and Monika Stüeler-Waffenschmidt of the Frankfurt Bank Association, who assumed Nachtmeister's corporate activities upon his death at Lofwyr's claws over the skies of Frankfurt. That isn't to say the FBA hasn't been working alongside SpIn, but their ventures with Ares have taken precedence now that Spinrad is in bed with the Azzies. This is why so many of the new ventures have been with Wuxing or other banks instead of the FBA. They still share an animus towards Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp, though. Rolf Bremen is at the center of the network that was first brought to light on Shadowland a decade ago, and he has made contact with every private intelligence corporation and numerous fixers who can provide them with shadow assets for short or long-term deniable

activities, doing everything from courier duty to assassinations. All of this begs the question: How can he trust Rolf Bremen? Bremen has been away from Saeder-Krupp for a while, but he served a great dragon that has lived for centuries if not longer. This could easily be a long game for the wyrm.

The simple answer is that Johnny has thoroughly investigated Bremen and tested him, but in classic Spinrad fashion the man who bought Monaco and led his corporation from a near Omega Order back to being a major AA is taking yet another massive gamble, with everything he has (or ever will have) on the line. I figure if he succeeds, then Lofwyr gets knocked down a peg before Johnny dies. If he loses, he'll be dead and won't care.

- So Johnny Spinrad is allying with and then pitting a number of great dragons against each other to get at Lofwyr. When all of their schemes collide, he'll be safe at the center of his web flicking the wyrms the ol' V. That's either genius or idiotic, but either way it's definitely crazy. Where do I sign up?

- Thorn

CORPORATE COMA

Posted by: Puck

Every lie is founded upon a truth.

The Corporate Court and United Nations have both insisted that the ongoing dragon conflicts are under control, or under at least under observation. That's mostly a lie, of course, but here's the one true part—they at least have control over *something*. They've been able to keep the public in the dark through direct or indirect control over the media and Matrix feeds. It's not easy, since keeping track of dragons is immensely difficult if not impossible. That task is made even more difficult when the dragons control or strongly influence large institutions, from Lofwyr at Saeder-Krupp and Celedyr at NeoNET to Hestaby and the Amazonian dragons in the UN.

Life gets even more complicated when we consider the UN Security Council and Armed Forces, as well as the Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee ("C5") — the Big Ten's equivalent of a global war department that has been permanently operating since they sought to destroy Winternight ten years ago. The official story has C5 coordinating with corporate and government security services and multinational efforts, from Interpol and EuroForce to the pan-corporate council in Europort.

Private Message

To: Frosty
From: Puck
Subject: Warning

I normally wouldn't do this, but as I mentioned, the biometrics and other information the Army took from you and the others at the Watergate has been compromised. I have not been able to identify how, but there are traces of the information that have leaked into a private, seemingly isolated node in Guam. I'd keep digging, but I have other matters to attend. You might be a special target to whoever sought that data because according to the Army DNA analysis, Ebran the Scribe is your biological father.



- Weren't they also hunting you?
- Bull
- Just Pax. And lest this go any further, there is no one on JackPoint who wants her dead more than I.
- Puck
- Are you two sub-zero now?
- Turbo Bunny
- Null sheen, chica. Null sheen.
- Bull

But again, most of what you hear about these groups, especially when it comes to their activities involving dragons, is lies. They say they're operating to keep the peace, but they have too much contact with dragon claws to be serious about controlling them. Sometimes what they mean by "keep the peace" is "advance the interests of a particular dragon so they can come out ahead in the conflict and defeat their rivals." Then you've got the metahumans in these organizations, some of whom want to get along with dragons, others who want to eradicate them. They're also pulling these organizations this way and that, staging black ops to advance their goals. So beneath the peaceful surface portrayed by their media muzzle is the turmoil of organizations clawing at each other, and sometimes doing battle with themselves.

- There's definitely plenty of Court and UN intrigue being pursued. They're still using Resolution 3031 spot-inspection teams against each other as well as the dragons. It's not a secret that Saeder-Krupp, for example, has what could be described as a toxic business profile, so they're an easy target. Aztechnology and Aztlan are also popular targets. The same can be said for government resources in CAS, PCC, France, and Japan (especially when targeting non-Japanacorps).
- Ecotope
- Aztlan/Aztechnology is still pushing hard to get the UN to investigate Horizon over claims that the POW massacre was L.A.'s doing. There is also the matter of the Azzies' propaganda gaining traction in the public mind with the notion that the Azzies are the truest bulwark in defense of metahumanity. They've earned no shortage of enemies, but they may be gaining enough leverage to strike back in a concerted fashion.
- Dr. Spin

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RESOLUTION 3031

Passed in 2060, the United Nation's General Assembly Resolution 3031 on Local Rights allows independent monitors composed of UN staff and contracted expert monitors to enter and inspect certain areas and facilities within the territory of national or corporate members in order to ensure that metahuman rights, corporate ethics, and global security are being respected and supported within those areas and not to the detriment of local civilian and/or non-corporate communities. While teams are allowed to inspect, questions of how to utilize or enforce their findings remain ongoing concerns.

There is at least one justice sitting on C5 who is certain that the body can no longer effectively contain and prevent crises such as this current dragon conflict. This should be pleasant news to many of us, except that the lie exposes a deeper truth. The truth is that for those who are committed to securing established power structures are doing so by exploiting their enemies, which they influence or control. It's the ultimate fail-safe to keep those in power secure in their seats, and I fear that it will disturb some of you to realize how deep the corps are into groups like the Committee on Megacorporate Affairs ("COMA"), Unity, and the Anarchist Black Star. But truth is important, no matter how uncomfortable it is. Read on.

//upload encrypted unformat email :: User Puck//
//running decrypt set Velvet Hammer//

ALPHA/VALIANT/XN/SNOWBIRD/

To: Samantha Villiers
From: Lynn Osborne
Subject: Recommend OO-F424 Activation

The conflict we have been concerned about erupting is in fact doing just that. The fact that Lofwyr is at the center of this conflict while his servant chairs the Corporate Court Crisis Coordination Committee ("Committee") has effectively neutered the ability for us to carry out our duty in controlling these events and preventing them from destabilizing the global state of affairs. While Lofwyr is clearly the dominant figure and the one most clearly preventing the Committee from taking a firm hand in these matters, it bears repeating that other dracoforms [*viz.* Celedyr, Hestaby, Rhonabwy, Ryumyo], some in active conflict with Lofwyr, are also deeply integrated in the operations and ownership of active Court participants. Others are involved in the corporations and entities—state, non-state, and corporate—that have business with the Court and would be cooperating with the Committee.

As per our previous discussions, I am reaching out to you instead of the CEO or Chairman because of existing counterintelligence concerns. I also appreciate that you and Rouge are in a unique position to implement the Order of Operations, which you have already received, for the Furies to activate certain local covert assets as while also reaching out to foreign assets with which we have relations thanks to contingency plans made specifically in the event of something similar to the current crisis. I also realize that given my own position, OO-F424 will be compartmentalized so that any knowledge of their actions will be distributed at your discretion while following relevant security protocols. Obviously, the Furies have already proven themselves in numerous instances, and I would expect them to continue operating with the utmost discretion and skill.

We need this action to be done with the utmost deniability and independence of corporate or state interference. In fact, I am even recommending that you do not engage Aztechnology even at arm's length because it would draw too much exposure to Committee operations, and again, their interests are not necessarily equal to those of the rest of the Committee or the full Court.



To: Lynn Osborne
From: Cara Villiers
Subject: RE: Recommend OO-F424 Activation

Recommendation was taken under utmost advisement. Furies indisposed. Other assets are under consideration. Further discussion is unnecessary.

//end attachment//

In case it wasn't clear by the name, "Furies" refers to a trio of female shadowrunners. They aren't company women, but they have a history of working for NeoNET interests, if not the megacorp itself. In many ways they are like Saeder-Krupp's "Awrah." Given the reference, though, they are assumed to be a trio of runners, but at least three times that many have been linked to or referred to as Furies. Making matters more complicated is the fact that it's not an uncommon name or motif for female runner teams, especially those associated with motivated groups like Rote Zora, Las Lloronas, or The Faceless. My sources have identified the Furies specifically being discussed in the attachments, but I am obligated to keep them nameless and only indicate that they are associated with these groups.

- *Équipe Triade* is a trio of female shadowrunners operating out of Berne, and Nicole Vertogne—a former Seraph—now leads the team as the only original member still running the shadows. They've done high-end jobs in Europe, Russia, and North America, and if they aren't the Furies, then *Triade* probably worked for or with them. It would also make sense since *Triade* has been quite active of late working against Saeder-Krupp.
- Aufheben

I'll cut to the chase and let you know that there are people who have taken up these activities, and what's more, they're collaborating with or exploiting embedded runners or political agitators within anti-corporate or other organizations and movements. Take for example those UN personnel and allies sustaining the COMA agenda with the support of the Draco Foundation. There have long been suspicions that the megacorps have infiltrated COMA and other organizations with anti-corporate, anti-business agendas both for intelligence and subversion, but also for the corps to use such groups as deniable and expendable assets against each other. Given their already-existing intelligence and networks into the megacorps separate from those with corporate or government ties, groups like Unity and Anarchist Black Star are seen as valuable tools to undermine these draconic activities within the corporations and ensure that the status quo remains. It also means that groups with specific Awakened agendas could be seen to be in conflict with the dragons, organizations such as the Illuminates of the New Dawn, the more radical actors in DIVE, or hate groups like Alamos 20K.

- Puck is right, or at least on the right track. I was approached on the shadow boards by an old acquaintance who goes by the handle Ambassador, who is still active in COMA. She asked for my advice as a seer and as someone who has dealt with some of these groups, and I had to warn her that she's already in the middle of a swirl. When the hammer falls, there will be a reckoning.
- Arete

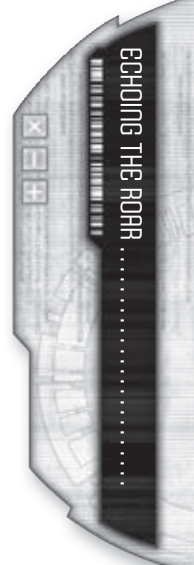
It is also important to note that the dragons, specifically Lofwyr, and their allies are also perpetrating these maneuvers against anyone who they perceive to be infringing upon their own ability to determine the fate of the world based on the whims and knowledge of fewer than a hundred metahumans and dracoforms that maintain control of these official channels and power structures, from the Corporate Court to the Vatican. Lofwyr has also struck specific resources that he believes could be used against Saeder-Krupp by its enemies either directly through some intra-corporate political action, or by shadow resources that could manipulate or co-opt certain military or other resources. He still dominates the machinations of the NEEC through direct action and reactions, and Saeder-Krupp also is enmeshed in political intrigues across Eurasia, the Middle East, Africa, and parts of the Americas—Argentina, French Guiana, CAS, and Tír Tairngire—all of which have been tainted by other draconic influences, from Booryazmei in Russia and Aden in the Middle East to Seattle's two dragon residents and the Sea Dragon.

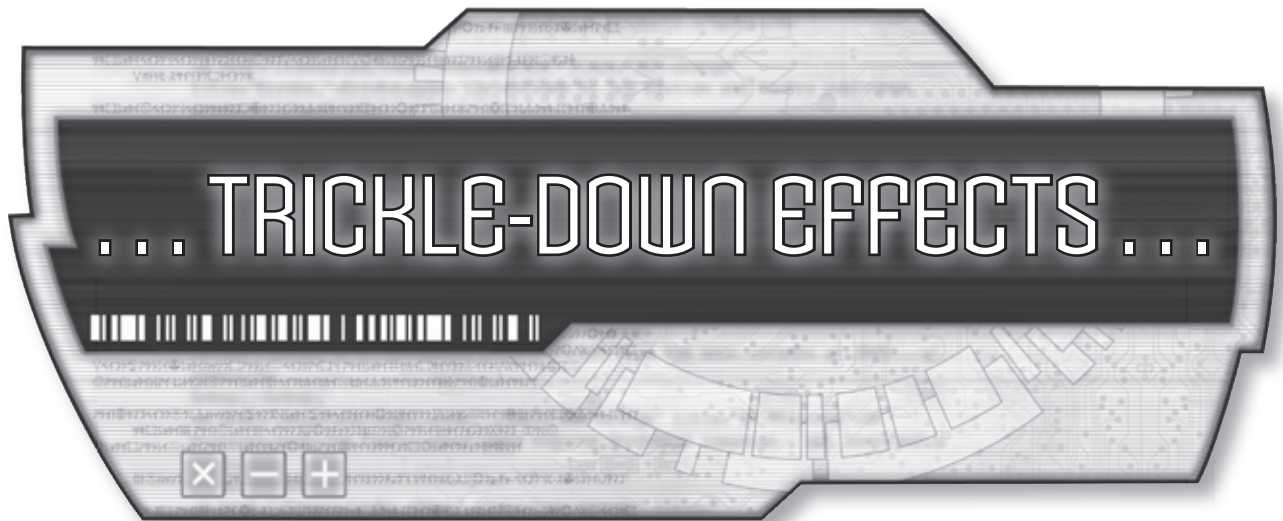
- It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye. Then it's just fun.
- Turbo Bunny

- Not cool.
- Sounder

- Get over yourself.
- Turbo Bunny

So what does this mean? Well, the coma won't last forever. Here's what I expect: First, that the corporations are often being put in the position of being the tail instead of the dog in this fight, and that's not something they're used to. It's also not something they're going to live with for long. Expect major push back from Ares and the Japanacorps, who have no desire to be used as pawns in a fight that isn't theirs. One way of fighting back is getting some of this buried information to the surface, so look for them to find ways to get stories out into the public, especially ones that reveal what Lofwyr and Saeder-Krupp have been up to in this affair. Second, look for some major aggression from Aztechnology. They've had a couple years of war, a rivalry with Horizon, and ongoing troubles in Denver to frustrate them. If they're gaining strength—and with Horizon reeling in light of the techno anger massacre in Vegas—they're going to take advantage of the opportunity to land some blows. If you've made your way onto their shit list, get ready to duck.





- I know that most of you won't end up meeting dragons. Some of that's because you're too careful or too smart to get into something like that. But part of it because that's simply out of our circles (generally speaking—this is not an invitation for everyone to pop up with stories of who met what dragon when). But whether you're going to be directly involved in dragon politics or not, you need to know about this, because the machinations of the rich and powerful have a way of trickling down to us here on the streets. I've compiled a few ways that the war at the top of the food chain might affect those of us a little lower down.
- FastJack

AVENGING ANGELS

Posted by: Thorn

THE CATAclysm

On my last few visits to DeeCee, I began to notice an overlap of conspiracies that were covered in recent discussions. The anti-Ares politics and espionage actions happening in a city where the Catholic Church has a presence big enough to hide conspiracies within it reminded me of a group long forgotten by most, the Seraphim.

The Seraphim was the name of a covert intelligence, security, and special operations unit that reported directly to Lucien Cross and did his bidding for decades. It also operated with distinct Catholic motifs, names, and other influences. Common lore goes that when Cross died, Ares made its move and his Seraphim were wiped out through a combination of skilled espionage, treason, and incompetence (Jean-Marie Cross simply did not have the tools needed to combat Ares). In this effort, Ares was able to maneuver with relative freedom, as Damien Knight's internal foes were either outmaneuvered (Vogel) or missing (Daviar). Many Seraphim field ops were exposed and killed. Some were turned and fell into one of Ares' service arms. Others disappeared, either into the shadows or deeper within the remains of CATCo. Then there are the support personnel, analysts, and security-related personnel who functioned in positions where Seraphim operatives wielded considerable influence, whose work changed once the Seraphim fell.

Looking at the whole of the CATCo security and intelligence apparatus, some personnel joined SIS, the CAS-based intelligence corp. Others from the Quebecois megacorporation joined their French cousins at Index-AXA's Infolio intelligence corporation or the *Service de Documentation d'Esprit International* (SDEI), Esprit's intelligence arm. Still a few others, I've learned, took refuge in the UCAS to support rebuilding its decimated security programs, or they sought the ultimate refuge by pledging their eternal service and fealty to the Holy See and its various clandestine and covert activities. There are Cross loyalists who either remained with the family, Gendarmerie, or other corporations in Quebec. Others aligned themselves with the Aurelius family in Detroit. As Marcos revealed last year, Jonathan Blake has assembled his own cadre of former Seraphim while some reportedly took refuge within either the Draco Foundation's or Ghostwalker's Watchers, and there is a group of self-styled Fallen Seraphim.

Ten years later, Ares' core business is in trouble with the Excalibur debacle, internal conflict between Nadja Daviar and Soren Johansson, Roger Soaring Owl's departure, Arthur Vogel's machinations, and continued hostility from President Colloton. Esprit has dug in and is expanding with the support of Aztechnology's logistics to supplement their global needs while Aztechnology Corporate Intelligence is preoccupied with the Az-Am War. Meanwhile, SIS has been increasing its use of direct action thanks to its relations with MCT, and the Roman Catholic Church is getting bolder in its shadow ops aimed at governments and the megacorps around the world.

I'm not going to say that it is all because of the Seraphim, but I see their hand in what seems to be an asymmetric engagement against Ares, its major shareholders, and their backers. They were loyal and faithful to Lucien Cross and CATCo because of the ideas he supported, including a zealous hatred of Ares, and especially Damien Knight. I would not put it against them to continue waging a long war against Knight. I am near certain Seraphim are plotting some righteous vengeance. Knight, however, is not stupid and their people can see the same thing I did. So there's bound to be action on both sides of the sprawl for a while.



THE FALLEN

Originally describing a group of former Seraphim released following an internal plot to remove Leonard Aurelius from CATCo in contradiction to Lucien Cross' orders, the Fallen Seraphim now comprise a much larger group of the most ideologically radical operatives. Fallen Seraphim are by far the most zealous operatives who survived the cataclysm. They are the most deeply ideological, and they hold no loyalty to Lucien's son, Jean-Marie Cross, because he was an imperfect, ineffectual heir who reigned while Heaven fell. In many cases the Fallen have taken a warped path in the decade since Ares destroyed CATCo and everything Lucien Cross built. They have taken it as their mission to strike out at their enemies and bring them down to the same level as them—expelled from paradise.

In the last decade, the Fallen Seraphim have taken to the shadows, but not to join any shadowrun crew or work as fixers. They have not even maintained the pretense of finding loyalty or refuge with other organizations or, Heaven forbid, Ares itself. The Fallen operate in cells as small as a single individual, but most often in groups of three to five. Fallen have collaborated with the usual suspects—First Canadians, the Detroit Mafia, Aztechnology, Lone Star, and bugs—but also with certain entities such as the elven supremacist Black Sun group, the Illuminates of the New Dawn, assorted eco-terrorists, and the Timmons Memorial Foundation. Anyone who wants to mess with Ares is a potential asset to the Fallen, but make no mistake—their motive, in the end, is to see everything burn. If they work in half measures, it is only as a step in the longer journey.

- You listed bugs twice.
- Sticks

RIGHTEOUS VENGEANCE

The one thing that unites almost all of these Seraphim is their hatred of Ares, and Damien Knight in particular. Many of these disparate groups have been observed, tested, and subjected to the whims of counterintelligence and security officers across the globe. In many ways they have proved themselves over and over again in the same roles they served with Cross, providing actionable intelligence and analysis, sacrificing themselves while performing executive protection, and rooting out moles and intelligence operations against their new clients/masters—including a few where the culprits were other former Seraphim.

So what's the big deal, and why discuss them in a compilation on draconic activity? Because, unsurprisingly, it is all a ruse. Many, though not all, have been playing a long con to strike back at Ares. Some of their collateral actions may have helped usher in the current state where Ares is being struck from all sides, but almost all of those conflicts and enemies predated the Cataclysm. There is also indications from my sources and research that they have waited until they could strike all of their enemies, and those enemies include at least two great dragons, along with Nadja Daviar and Nicholas Aurelius. While one of the latter was missing for nine of the last ten years, the former are threats that cannot be felled by mere mortals without sacrifice, flawless planning, and precision timing.

- Dragons are alpha predators like sharks. The common belief is that sharks, like dragons, have no natural predators. They are

feared because the common thinking is that to kill a shark you must be a shark. On the first day of law school, however, I that is not entirely true. There is a species that can and does kill sharks, besides man, of course, and that is dolphins. Pods of dolphins working together have killed sharks for centuries by teaming up and overwhelming a shark's capacity to destroy anything it encounters. The Seraphim have taken that lesson to heart.

- DangerSensei
- You were a lawyer?
- Baka Dabora
- I'm not proud of everything in my past.
- DangerSensei

The threats to Daviar are legion, as I indicated previously. Suffice to say, the gauntlet was clearly thrown down when several former Watchers and their operatives were recently murdered, all of whom had forsaken that network to ally themselves with the Seraphim. Back in the sixties, Jessica Surrateau, the chief Seraphim for Seattle, recruited several ex-Watchers and their operatives on behalf of the organization. One of those was a runner named Hawke, who happened to be the man responsible for inadvertently outing the existence of Dunkelzahn's Watcher network to Shadowland shortly after the dragon's demise. Several months ago, Hawke and a handful of others who had fallen out of the game and were presumed retired or dead, were discovered in a Mercury Express warehouse. All had been tortured and murdered by someone creating "bloody eagles," with three sets of "wings" made of their organs. Aurelius is a target for the same reason the rest of his family is: They caused divisions within Cross when the family switched sides away from Ares. In addition, Aurelius is now one of the two Ares board members appointed by Gavilan Ventures. The other, of course, is Daviar herself.

- Bloody eagles are a Norse torture form. FYI.
- Ecotope
- Quite true. However, it is hard to deny the symbolism as it applies to the Seraphim.
- Fianchetto

The great dragons that I strongly suspect of being targeted are Hestaby and Rhonabwy. Rhonabwy's an easy choice here because he owns at least four percent of Ares Macrotechnology. Hestaby is being targeted because she has long been suspected of being the financier behind Arthur Vogel's purchase of Leonard Aurelius' shares of Ares when he left for CATCo in the early sixties. It makes sense given their shared ecological interests and the pattern of travel and behavior he exhibited shortly before making his purchase. There have always been doubts that it was Hestaby because it seems too obvious. In addition, former servants of hers have indicated that she was not his backer, at least not entirely. Suspicion instead falls on only a handful of motivated greats with the financial resources to provide him with the billions of nuyen necessary, and of those the best estimates suggest it was either Rhonabwy or Lofwyr. It would seem the Seraphim have decided to focus on Rhonabwy, especially as some of the actions of the



Fallen have been to operate against Ares and the Frankfurt Bank Association on Saeder-Krupp's behalf.

- While Miles Lanier has been operating in the shadows, it is possible that he engaged Seraphim on occasion to share with them the identity of Vogel's backer, which Richard Villiers has known since at least 2060.
- Icarus
- Villiers has known for fourteen or fifteen years? I wonder why he hasn't acted on that information. He isn't exactly known for his patience or good will. That seems like the kind of thing he'd have used to break or coerce Vogel.
- Mika
- You mean the man who now controls AresSpace, the largest of the Ares subsidiaries that directly compete with NeoNET?
- Orbital DK
- Sonuvaslitch. I would tip my virtual hat to him if I owned such a thing.
- Bull
- We're getting off-topic here, folks.
- FastJack

So how do you strike two killing blows when the targets are great dragons? In Hestaby's case, the answer would surely involve the theft of her talon clippings. The clippings serve as material links to her, which could be used in ritual magic. In Rhonabwy's case, it would also require a means to strike with a material link. He also has no shortage of powerful enemies, especially elven enemies, who would love to strike him down for all of the grief he has caused the Tírs and other elven nations. I want to rewind the clock a year, back to when the dispute between Lugh Surehand and Jonathon Reed was heating up before the Watergate Incident. It was speculated on JackPoint that Reed sought the Sextant of Worlds because it would provide a means to bypass or defeat Surehand's magical defenses. A year later, rumors persist that the sextant is still out in the world waiting to be rediscovered again. Perhaps the same item would also be useful to the Surehand and other former Princes in alliance with the Seraphim. That is hardly the only artifact they have sought. Others include items from corporations, dragons' hoards, research institutions and museums, and the Vatican's own stores of artifacts, magical weaponry, and dangerous or forbidden items.

I know this is all a great deal of speculation, and by all indications this is based on a limited sample size and my own estimation. It is estimation and analysis borne of a half century of conflict. I won't say for certain that one night all of the former Seraphim will rise up as one to strike a deathblow against Ares, but I wouldn't be surprised if—when—that happens.

- Just don't expect the survivors to commit *seppuku* afterwards. Suicide is a mortal sin, after all, and cannot be justified as an act of faith like the other acts the Seraphim commit on a regular basis.
- Fianchetto

FOLLOW THE MONEY

Posted by: Mr. Bonds

There are seven billion metahumans on Earth, and approximately two thousand dragons. Only two dozen or so of those are Great Dragons. Fear can only motivate people so far before it turns to hatred and creates a willingness to sacrifice oneself to defeat a mortal enemy. Lofwyr may possess weapons of mass destruction, but so do most of the other AAAs and far too many other powers for me to want to think about for very long. Dragons great and adult have hoards and nests full of assets of their own, and as everyone gathered here will acknowledge, money moves the world.

- I one day hope that is not true. Capitalism has corrupted enough people that it is not entirely true, but it may as well be.
- Aufheben
- You want a WMD? I can make you a WMD by tomorrow afternoon.
- Beaker

This all began when a small outfit called Kandai Electronics was torched in Columbia, FDC with its legal owners inside. On its face, Kandai was a boutique electronics retailer providing components for NSA wonks who couldn't leave their work at work. In reality, it was a money-laundering front for the Yamaguchi-rengo operated by their subsidiary Mizugumorengo ("Water Spider League"), an organized crew of hackers specializing in industrial espionage. Given its owners and its customers, one could attribute the arson to almost anyone in DecCee. On the next night three other businesses in DecCee and North Virginia were also destroyed, along with their true owners. The next night saw attacks against Yakuza assets in Oslo, Nagasaki, and Manila—all gumis linked to the Watada-rengo.

As far as I can tell, this was a test run. The immediate and overall victims were the Yakuza, but I suspect that the ultimate victim was intended to be Ryumyo. Despite their tremendous strength and magic abilities, the primary tool that dragons, especially great dragons, use to wield power in the world is nuyen. From Rhonabwy's quiet hoard of corporate stock distributed around the world to Lofwyr's personal ownership of Saeder-Krupp, the amassed wealth of great dragons allows them to wield disproportionate influence in a world that would otherwise not give nearly as much thought, lest fear, to these creatures. Destroy their financial assets, and that 350,000:1 ratio of metahumans to dragons (28,000,000:1 for great dragons) might convince the mass of metahumanity that the power differential favors them over ancient reptiles.

Something else to consider is that there is a difference between liquid assets and the kind of legal assets that great dragons have used to influence the world. For as much as we have long discussed the fact that Lofwyr owns Saeder-Krupp and other greats own stock or other assets in megacorporations and other business organizations, the electronic datatrail is not always that simple because it is not necessarily true that dracoforms are legally allowed to own these assets. In some jurisdictions dragons have the exact same legal ownership rights as a house cat. After twenty years,

most people forget that the only reason the Draco Foundation exists is because Dunkelzahn was granted UCAS citizenship by an Act of Congress, which is the only way a non-metahuman can become a citizen in that country. Their financial assets are wrapped in legal fictions and complicated shells, obfuscating the truth that many of these dragons may have their claims recognized in private, but only because those claims have never really been challenged in courts of law. If someone or some group was to make a concerted effort to do just that, it could change the financial landscape of the world. That is what, I am certain, has stopped anyone from trying so far. As Art Dankwalther's vendetta against Richard Villiers proved, once actions begin to affect other megacorporations' finances or the global economy as a whole, The Powers That Be will kill you and take your stuff.

- Rumors persist that Dankwalther's assets were diversified and hidden away sufficiently that some of his empire remained beyond the reach of the Big Ten. Of course, there is also the matter of the people who he used to implement his campaign. Plenty of the work was compartmentalized and performed by one-off shadowrunner teams. There is also the matter of why there is an open Interpol warrant for Zvad Karpov and Armand Lopin for unspecified financial crimes.
- Fianchetto

In fact, Mr. Dankwalther's actions against Villiers and Novatech seem to have been at least an inspiration for these moves against Yakuza financial operations. Going after these gumis seems a test for this particular party, much as Art went after Tokugawa Technologies and later the Gunderson Corporation before waging total war against Novatech, a war that Novatech could have lost if not for the IPO that led to NeoNET's creation as well as the combined response from the Corporate Court that Art had become enough of a threat to the Big Ten for them to respond with overwhelming force. Runners have taken on the Yaks in sprawls like DeeCee to ruin physical assets and pursue the men and women who commit these financial crimes and protect them from being uncovered; bankers, lawyers, fixers, and so on. If they want to uncover and wrest financial influence from the dragons, then it would take a number of Matrix datathefts and electronic or physical sabotage in order to find and break those shells.

- I remember when Gunderson fell. It took Miami and most of South Florida with it, and nearly destabilized the Caribbean League. Little Jimmy Harvin sold Atlantic Security and the rest of Gunderson's assets to Aztechnology in return for a seat on their board. That made Aztechnology a much bigger and indelible presence in the League's affairs. I'm not against people making my life easier, but that didn't. It fucked up everything by strengthening Aztechnology where they are not wanted. So if someone wants to go down that route again of causing collateral damage that ends up giving the Azzies or shitheads like them more power, then I'll be the first one volunteering to put a bullet in them.
- Kane

- Such big words. I guess /dev/grrl has finally taught you to type instead of scrawling over everything with crayons or autocannon rounds.
- Bull

My suspicion is that if one were to pursue dragons' financial assets, then it would focus mostly on manipulating the digital ownership of assets. It could be as simple as destroying financial records or more complicated actions intended to transfer rights and ownership, or at least facilitate the purchase of an asset by a third party or the freezing of an asset by a government agency like the IRS or an inter-corporate regulatory body such as the Corporate Court Securities and Exchange Commission. Meanwhile, it would also be worth noting that it could be possible to track assets or attacks on them based on what is trending according to Brokerage X or other information brokerages.

ShadowSea Quicklink

BROKERAGE X

Brokerage X ("BX") is an Undernet information and stock exchange run by 0111011001, €spion, and a few other prime European hackers that emerged from the Oslo Black Stock Exchange over twenty-five years ago. Their business model focuses on engaging in highly illegal insider trading by exploiting the financial intelligence provided by shadowrunner clients about the results of jobs they commit. BX is then able to invest their financial stocks in a diverse portfolio hidden through a complex series of shells and cutouts across many global exchanges. Capital gains earned by BX's investments are then passed back along to their shadow client. BX is quite exclusive and requires significant retainers and deep background investigations on potential shadow clients before they are allowed to use the service. Since BX engages in insider trading using information gained through criminal activities, virtually every law enforcement agency and corporation seeks its closure. Its secrecy and exclusivity, however, has allowed BX to remain an elusive mark for financial cops worldwide.

- This article has been tagged by someone in your network.
- Accessing Tag ...
- Speaking of dragons and financial chicanery, the Frankfurt Bank Association is still attempting to isolate and takeover Brokerage X. BX is seen as a valuable source of financial intelligence on the FBA's competitors, but would also be a lucrative business in its own right for the drake-run corporation if it were able to take over the firm.
- Mr. Bonds

TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECTS.....

I want to reiterate that engaging in such a conspiracy requires a deft hand. The dragons are not remotely alone in wrapping their financial and corporate assets in these webs and shells. It is just the way business is done, and the easiest way to earn the ire of everyone from the Corporate Court to the shadow banker who handles your personal earnings from runs so that you can keep up payments on your home and purchase all those neat toys is to begin untangling and corrupting the fabric of these transactions and arrangements. It is dangerous, but it can be done. Just ask the Mizugumo-rengo, Kihara-rengo, Korogai-gumi, or Ichiwa-kai.

- Also remember that dragons were able to amass their hoards for a reason, and this reason goes right back to the tools Mr. Bonds glossed over. Their physical and magical strength allows them to intimidate and otherwise control people, which helps them get the nuyen and other assets they want. They also are tremendous long-term thinkers. All this is to say that when you deliver a blow to a dragon, expect them to be able to recover quickly and to hold a grudge.
- Winterhawk
- That's why test runs are necessary. The people behind them know that once their real effort commences, they're going to have to start throwing heavy punches, and they won't be able to let up for a second. That takes preparation.
- Cosmo

RUNNING DEAD

Posted by: Man-of-Many-Names

I have confronted numerous magical threats and dire evils in my life. It is not without a small amount of satisfaction that I state we may rid one of them from this Earth, if not completely then for at least a considerable amount of time. The shedim are a destructive force intent on the eradication of life. However, there is no dominant force combating them the way Ares took upon itself the role of battling insect spirits. In fact, there is a conspiracy afoot to sustain and abet their evil because it suits the political or other purposes of those in power. This is not simply limited to the Shades, as they are referred within the UCAS military, but similar alliances in South America, Australia, and the Middle East.

- I should also add that Professor Horatius von Neurath, Dean of Heidelberger University and a high-ranking member of the Dr. Faustus Society, still engages in his own dealings with them.
- Winterhawk
- That is a problem with a very obvious solution.
- Ethernaut

The good news is that after the Watergate Incident and the closing of the Rift, there have been no new shedim sightings, nor incidences of shedim being summoned from their home plane. One year on, it seems that the Rift was in fact the tether bridging their world and ours, and so all others matters aside Ghostwalker's actions benefitted metahumanity greatly by severing this connection. This fact has emboldened many a spirit



hunter, especially groups like the Dark Brotherhood and the more aggressive demon hunters in the Sylvestrine Order. There has also been a diminution in suicide bombings and other attacks by the New Islamic Jihad that were able to exploit the abilities of the shedim, and Islamic Renaissance Movement sorcerers have been seen teaming up with 10,000 Daggers, Kurdish, and some freelance Spanish-speaking mercenaries to hunt them down.

- I will confirm that this is indeed true. I should also mention that there are others in the shadows of Eurasia that have been taking the fight to these monsters, led at the vanguard by the N'drangheta Family.
- Goat Foot
- You would think they'd be more concerned with Alama's turning GeMiTo into a charnel pit.
- Stone
- You fight the fight you can win.
- Black Mamba
- So Ibn Eisa is still out there?
- Bull
- Yes. He and Sayid Mujtaba Musawi are still lurking in the shadows of Arabia or possibly Iran with their undead servants. The NIJ has lost many followers who resented being used as tools of Shaytan, but while there is no shortage of groups looking for them, finding a living source has proved immensely difficult.
- Goat Foot

While the shedim have plenty of enemies, they have a significant ally in the UCAS military. Likewise, the New Islamic Jihad has not disappeared. It has simply regrouped and is still attempting to destabilize the region from the Maghreb to the Lout. The shedim also wield influence within the Apep Consortium thanks to the machinations of Evan Corcoran. They have repeatedly cooperated with various toxic shamans, especially so-called Sterilists like Absolute Equilibrium. There are also many freelance bug hunters and other bounty hunters who have worked with these shedim in confronting insect spirits, blood mages, and certain other types of magical threats where the ideology of warping life conflicts with the desire to eradicate it.

- The only things in the Lout are Black Scorpion camps. *Oh ...*
- Thorn
- There is another Sterilist named Rasa who has probably collaborated with shedim. He was a Red Samurai mage who by all indications is even less relatable to people than the most alien synthetic intelligence.
- Puck
- Let me take a wild guess how you met him.
- Bull

As Kay has explained the politics to me, it seems that some of these alliances are not stable. Aztechnology has been leaning on

Colloton over a number of issues after their mutual opposition to Ghostwalker provided an opening, and word is that her alliance with the shedim is among them. Perhaps that was also why Johnny Spinrad, now one of Domingo Ramos' close allies, was meeting with General Ben Miller, the Director of Magical Security. Given their friendship with Aziz al-Shammar in Arabia, it would not be out of the question that the Azzies are advising Colloton on how to flip the alliance as al-Shammar did with Ibn Eisa a decade ago. However, the Shades are a component of their magical security strategy to confront Ghostwalker and other dragon operations because of their unique abilities and outlook.

- To expand on the discussion MoMN and I had, the other problem is that Evan Corcoran has President Colloton over a barrel because it is almost certain that she has personal knowledge of the Shades and this deal with the shedim. After the events in Denver led to a loss of most of her political capital and many allies' seats during primary season, the last thing she needs is to have this fact unveiled in public. It would be interesting to see how this plays out given her public enmity towards Ghostwalker. If it harms her and turns public opinion against her saber-rattling, then I could see his agents engaging in actions that would reveal this truth as well as making a preemptive attack before they become any sort of threat to the Great White Wyrms. On the other side of the fence is Lofwyr with his own immense hatred of Ghostwalker. I could easily see DeeCee becoming a proxy battlefield between the two dragons over shedim—a threat no one else in the sprawl wants there.
- Kay St. Irregular
- Now that Zebulon has returned, Lofwyr is not the only great dragon that would support these "Shades" to injure Ghostwalker.
- Frosty
- I know that I'm out of the loop on things, but as I understand it JackPoint has known for a year or so that a major pol in DeeCee is a master shedim, and hasn't done anything about it?
- Puck
- Don't look at me. I definitely see Corcoran as a problem with a 20mm HEAP solution.
- Ethernaut
- When did you become an expert in AMRs?
- Red Anya
- It became necessary after years spent hunting spirits like this one. Regardless, Puck, I think you should drop it.
- Ethernaut
- Indeed.
- FastJack

As it relates to dragons, it seems that many of them understand the kind of threat that shedim possess, but only a few have been willing to act upon it. After the revelation of Ibn Eisa's nature was revealed, it became clear why Aden was so hostile to some NIJ operatives. He was supporting the Jihad, but rooting out the



shedim as a greater threat that could not be as easily manipulated. Likewise, Lofwyr has a similar motivation in destroying them as a threat to his attempts to unite the Middle East under his control. Hestaby's sponsorship of the Astral Space Preservation Society also makes her a threat to the shedim. The stability of free spirit-metahuman relations is at stake, and there is also the matter of shedim seeking spirits and other ways to access their home plane through other metaplanes using spiritual knowledge. Likewise, Arleesh's global hunt for tainted artifacts and telesma would seem to bring her interests into conflict with the shedim. While they cannot make contact with their plane, there are numerous stories of magical items that could help re-establish the tether between this plane and their own. As has been mentioned before, there is the story of the Spirit Flute. Additionally, the celestial navigation devices that were sought and fought over last year are still out there somewhere. I have also been informed of a young mage who allegedly discovered an object he referred to as the Astral Star—yet another metaplanar navigation object.

These shedim are not passive, however. Dragons are as much of an enemy as insect spirits and others. Some of the objects being sought are in dragon hoards, but there are also reports that shedim have sought simply to raid and destroy materials in dragon lairs with special emphasis on memory crystals and stores of draconic knowledge and lore. It is not enough to merely destroy life, but to destroy all knowledge of life and our mutual histories. Such crystals certainly would match that criterion, but also special projects such as the Library at Alexandria, Masaru's pet project, or Schwarzkopf's Great Library in Prague.

- With the growing animosity between segments of the public against dragons, the idea of losing that knowledge would mean nothing to many people.
- Dr. Spin
- Let's be honest. Most people are too stupid to care anyway. Speaking of these crystals, though, has anyone considered that these objects seem to share a common similarity to technomancers' ability to upload their own memories into digital storage?
- Puck
- I don't know, but that would make for a Hell of a Resonance dive.
- Netcat

DAY-TO-DAY DRAMA

Posted by: Pistons

First the bad news: Some of us are going to be sucked up into this conflict without knowing it. There is simply too much money floating around in too many places for us to avoid it. The good news is that you could remain completely unaware of your role in the entirety of the run, from beginning to end. You'll be so far removed from the central conflict that you won't meet any dragons in the course of the run, and you won't risk any reprisals from a dragon afterward, as they are simply too distant from what you are doing to take your actions personally.

So why do you care? Here's a few reasons:

1) Did I mention that there's lots of money floating around? Saeder-Krupp has an angle here. Ghostwalker has an angle. Aztechnology and Aztlan have an angle. NeoNET has an angle. The UCAS and CAS have their own angles. Get the picture? Lots of people with lots of money have things they want to get out of this brewing conflict, and any runner worth their salt should know that part of our job is to figure out how to give it to them. There is money to be had, and you shouldn't be sitting around your dive waiting for your commlink to ring. Go out there and find it.

2) Paranoia is up. Yeah, it's unlikely that you're going to be the runner screwed over by a dragon, but *someone* is going to be that runner, and everyone is a little worried that it's going to be them. People are making an extra effort to ensure that whoever they're hiring or working with is on the up-and-up, so you may have to go the extra mile or submit to a higher level of scrutiny than normal. You should be willing to be accommodating, but you don't have to be stupid. I've heard tell of some operatives asking any teammates they don't know to hand over a material link as an assurance of security. I hope I don't have to persuade you that you shouldn't ever do that. Anyone asks for that, just walk away. And if you decide to ask for a link, get ready for the person across the table to punch you in the jaw.

Also, don't accept a cut in pay. Some Johnsons feel that's what you should do to make up for the risk of working in these times, but that's bullshit. Don't let them act like they're taking on all the risk. As always, the risk in shadowrunning lies squarely on your head. If anything, you should be asking for more in this climate.

- Look, we have to manage our risk somehow. I know it's not fun for runners, but those are the breaks. Professionals deal with it.
- Hannibelle

So what can you provide? Well, references are always good. Make sure your personal network is in good shape and willing to say nice things about you—rep is as important now as it's ever been. Also, while you shouldn't accept less money, you can be flexible about payment terms. Tell Mr. Johnson you'll do a piece of the mission for a small cut of the money. Show them you can be trusted, and the flow of money will start to build.

- If you don't have a good reputation now, it's too late to start building one. But if you have one, cash in. Call in your chips. Have your fixer introduce you to other fixers. Make some hay, because for you, the sun is out.
- Riser

3) Borders might change. Nations are going against each other and so are corporations, and some of those blows are going to land. Cultivate your sources on the ground of wherever you're going, and make sure you have the most up-to-date info about who owns what. Especially watch out around the CAS-Aztlan borders and anyplace that has anything to do with Denver.

4) Someone is going to try to grab power. When powerful people go at each other, often they lose pieces of their power. Even if they don't, there's at least the perception that such a loss might happen, and people are lining up to fill the vacuum. That means that wherever you are, some up-and-comer is gathering resources, building a network, and taking steps to make himself or herself



into a bigger player. Be on the lookout for people like this. They can be incredibly dangerous to be around in case the powers that be decide to smack them down, but if you can hitch your star to them while they're on the rise, the eventual benefits that come your way can be substantial. Just think about what Miles Lanier got for hitching himself to Richard Villiers early on.

- Yeah. And look what Lanier's got now. He knows things he wish he didn't know, and he's being hunted for it.
- Cosmo
- In Seattle, look out for ADA Dana Oaks. She's not your typical rising star, in that she's not entirely or even partially corrupt, but she has a nose for sniffing out opportunities and using them to make a name for herself. She did it with the Ork Underground situation, and I'd wager she's going to find a way to do it with the dragons. If this Urubia is really looking to build power through gangs, Oaks will soon be looking for a way to smash him.
- Kay St. Irregular

So, got enough reasons to keep yourself informed? Good. Now let's talk about the different kinds of jobs you might get, what special risks might be out there, and how you should adapt yourself in the current climate.

Burglary

What's different: For the most part, nothing. One in a million of these jobs will involve taking something from a dragon, or getting something a dragon wants. For the most part, the jobs will involve the same roster of clients as always—corporations looking to steal things from each other or to get things back from former employees, gangs looking to get that hot new cycle that their rival just picked up, that sort of thing. Dragons don't get involved with burglary too much, because it's too crude. In this case, the people you need to watch out for are the ones who are trying to strike at the dragons or impress them. For example, there's going to be an increase in the number of jobs looking to steal things from Ares and Aztechnology labs, if only to get information on how their anti-dragon weapons are progressing.

In some quarters you also might see an increase in security. Remember the paranoia I mentioned before? It's not limited to the runner world. Corporations with strong dragon ties have increased their security, which has led others to follow suit, since that's the way corporate minds work. Their security experts keep an ear to the ground, listening for threats, and often one of the first indications they have that an indeterminate threat is brewing is that other corps have increased their security. So reflexively they do the same. What this comes down to is that you have a sitrep more than six months old, assume security is likely to be ten to twenty percent heavier than is listed. Better safe than sorry.

- Also be on the lookout for increased magic security. Dragons and related organizations have pretty good pipeline of Awakened talent, which has made various corps especially aware of the need for magical defense. Which they have gone out and hired. So if you are a spellslinger, be especially on the lookout for counterspellers lurking out there, waiting to make your life difficult.
- Haze

The warning signs: The biggest warning sign is one that holds even in times without dragon conflict, and that is if you see a severe disconnect between the value of what you are hired to retrieve and what you are being paid. We all expect Mr. Johnson to withhold information, but when you're getting paid ten thousand nuyen to retrieve an old rocking chair or something, you know that Mr. Johnson has gone above and beyond the normal secrecy, and he is not telling you something that could get you in serious trouble.

As you may guess, a lot of the times the reason for this disconnect is that the item you're retrieving is imbued with some sort of magic. Given that the recent artifact rush was in part spurred by dragons, you should be very cautious about anything that might involve artifacts. It could be that a dragon's involved, or someone wishing to get a dragon's attention or piss them off, or someone wanting to keep an artifact out of dragons' claws, or one of those people I mentioned before looking to climb into power voids. I can come up with good reasons to avoid each and every one of those groups.

- Unfair. Some of us are engaged in honest study and seek artifacts for purposes of research and knowledge. Working with us would be a benefit to all, in my opinion.
- Elijah
- Right. Because researchers have never been used as pawns to unleash terrible things in the world.
- Haze

Datasteals

What's different: One word: quantity. When situations seem volatile, people from middle management on up know that the first time they are caught by surprise could cost them their job, with possibly more severe costs waiting in the wings. So everyone out there—and I mean everyone—is decidedly anxious to learn what their competition, or even their collaborators, are up to.

This is good news for all the infiltration specialists out there. If there is any research lab near you, or even some place that communicates with a research lab, someone wants the data inside, and prices are up for these data steals. You have zero excuses to be sitting around on your ass.

Keep in mind that I'm talking about all kind of datasteals here, both the Matrix-based kind and the runs where you go in and pick up something physical, like a file or a prototype. The way I figure it, all of these jobs are about getting in someplace you're not supposed to be to pick up something you're not supposed to have, so it all can be grouped together. And there's work in the full range of jobs.

Of course, it can't all be good, right? Corporations don't like losing their stuff, so they're looking at a variety of activities that can slow the interlopers down. There's basic increases in security, of course, but they're also running scams of their own to ferret out or at least frustrate the hordes of thief lurking outside their facilities. Corporations have been hiring runners to plant information about projects and prototypes that don't exist. Runners that come looking for this data often wander unsuspectingly into traps, and when runners show up the corporations look back at how they leaked the data and track it so they can identify who came after them.



- Ares in particular has been using this tactic repeatedly. Ever since the failure of the Excalibur, they've felt a lot of pressure to come up with something that works and turns into a profit center, and the last thing they want is for information on one of their promising prototypes to leak out. So they've been flooding the shadows with rumors about purported projects, the vast majority of which are total bullshit. As a result, if you're hired to pick up something that is in any way attached to Ares, do your homework to make sure you're not chasing phantoms.
- Ma'Fan

The warning signs: Be careful if you are sent after anything that sounds too good to be true. Does someone want you to retrieve the formula for a miraculous new drug that, by all indications, cures cancer? That drug probably doesn't exist. And neither does the handgun with sniper-rifle-like ranges. Those are traps, and you shouldn't be falling into them.

Also, don't worry too much about datasteals against Saeder-Krupp or NeoNET's research division. Lofwyr and Celedyr are pros, they know how the game is played, and for the most part they're not going to take these things personally. The ones you have to be worried about are the subtler plans, the ones that don't seem to have anything to do with dragons because you're not seeing every twist and turn of some convoluted plan. Like you steal information about a new desert vehicle, and you deliver it, only to find that the plans are promptly copied, a vehicle based on them is manufactured, filled with troops, sent into the desert, and used in a massacre of some of Aden's people in the Arabian Desert. Then Aden is unhappy and wants to hurt people involved in this, and you stand a chance of being caught in the crossfire.

So how do you defend against that? You don't. Unless you've got the best information network on the planet, you have no way of knowing just how something you steal is going to be used. This means you have to use the best weapon people like us have always had—cover your tracks, and make sure that when you're done, you disappear.

- I'm going to say what Pistons doesn't have the stones to say: Sometimes you have to cover your tracks completely and thoroughly. That means if you get suspicious that things are getting hinky, Mr. Johnson, and maybe your fixer, need to disappear for good. Yeah, it sucks to lose a good fixer and all, but it *really* sucks to have a dragon stalking you.
- Haze
- You're confusing a lack of balls with ethics again.
- Pistons

Espionage

What's different: This falls into the same category as datasteals. People are frantic to find out what's going on, who's doing what, and so forth. In this area, people with infiltration skills are golden, but people with charm and a con man's touch who can get into the highest circles of society are rare, glittering diamonds. A lot of the information people want right now is not recorded anywhere—it's in people's heads. It's their ideas, their future plans, their illicit liaisons, and the dark secrets they don't dare record anywhere, in any form. If you can figure out a way to pull this information out,

you will be in continuous demand. Just make sure you keep your various identities and stories straight.

The other change is tied to this—since many espionage efforts are settled on personal and private secrets, high-ranking people are taking a more direct role in the shadows. There are some things they simply cannot trust their subordinates with, so they're getting their hands dirty. Now, I can't say I have a list of what bigwigs have been out there. Instead, I have what we always have: lots of rumors and supposition. Hans Brackhaus sightings, which are never the most rare occurrence in the shadows (though most of those end up being either posers or lies) have increased, to the point where some runners are starting to flinch as soon as they hear a German accent. That's dumb, for two reasons: First, Brackhaus doesn't always have a German accent, so the lack of said accent guarantees you nothing; and second, there's nothing wrong with working for the real Brackhaus, as long as you're competent and not trying to screw him over. He pays well, and the jobs tend to be straightforward and short on shenanigans.

- That's because any run you do for Brackhaus is part of Lofwyr's long game, and few people indeed are capable of seeing that perspective. He tends to be quite confident that most people won't ever catch on to what he and his boss are really up to.
- Fianchetto
- The real problem is the posers. They're using the Brackhaus name in order to borrow some of his intimidating aura, and that right there should set off all sorts of alarm bells. They also use the name when they have no intention of setting up a multiple-run relationship with runners, which should set off any other alarm bells that weren't already ringing. These guys are giving the Brackhaus name an increasingly bad rep, to the point where I wouldn't be surprised if Saeder-Krupp sidelines the alias for a time.
- Stone

Some of the other powers you might see, like Nadja Daviar, have been covered already, but there's another name I want to throw out there: Miles Lanier. Lanier has been cut off from the corporate apparatus he used to rely on, which means if he wants to arrange runs, he has to do it himself. There's a lot of information he seems to be looking for, so espionage is a big interest of his. Most of his activities seem to be aimed at his old home corp, NeoNET, along with Evo.

- I've been getting some weird field reports about Lanier's behavior. One source I trust a lot says they were hired by a guy who was a dead ringer for Lanier, but the guy was a real laughing, chatty, slap-you-on-the-back type. At least most of the time. He'd be all friendly and talking for most of a meet, but then he'd stop on a dime, his eyes would grow empty and cold, and he'd say something threatening in a voice that sounded like it was coming from the back of his skull. Then it would pass, and he'd be congenial as all get out. If this really was Lanier, he was acting out of character, and he may have been on the verge—or in the middle—of a psychotic break of some sort. *Caveat hemerodromus.*
- Sunshine





INCOMING FEED.....



TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECTS.....

- Not bad, but *hemerdromus* is more for a runner in the sense of courier or messenger. I might go with *maleficum* instead. Or possibly the longer (and less judgmental) *caveat umbra operarius*.
- Fianchetto

The warning signs: Again, as is the case with datasteals, the dangers are what they always are—that you might be clumsy and get burned. Literally. So keep yourself unseen, and don't leave so much as a footprint wherever you go.

Keep an eye out for the fanatical anti-dragon groups. I generally have a problem with fanatics of any stripes, but these guys are going to be in the dragons' crosshairs sooner or later, so you don't want to be tied to them when that time comes. They're good at presenting a cover story for their espionage requests, which means you should do your legwork. If someone hires you dig up information on a secret dig being conducted in Shaanxi, telling you their primary interest is in "preserving Shaanxi's cultural heritage," and you later find out the dig is tied to evidence of a heretofore unknown dragon, run, don't walk, away. They're lying to you for a reason, and that reason is that if you knew what kind of dreck you were getting in, you wouldn't want to be involved. And they're right about that.

Extractions

What's different: This is where things get bad. We've all heard corporations say that their people are their most valuable resource, and we've all scoffed because we know how they treat their employees. But we're not talking about the run-of-the-mill people

here—we're talking about the brains, the idea people, the ones who have something special that make them coveted. Whether it's engineering expertise, leadership ability, creativity, or any other ability, corporations are very conscious about protecting the people that will be responsible for their next major profit streams.

There are certain people who have heightened profiles in this climate. Naturally, anyone who has any credibility in the study of dragons is currently a valuable commodity, to the point where both the Draco Foundation and the Atlantean Foundation have doubled their security budgets. Perhaps the organization most caught by surprise is MIT&T, who has seen both their faculty and their student body hit by extraction teams. While this is not entirely without precedent, the scale and frequency has caught the university completely off-guard, and they are scrambling to update their security protocols. If you can help them in that work, you can pick up some nice money. Or if you can take advantage of them before they get their security updated, now's the time.

- Just remember the danger of dealing with college students—they're at an age where they believe they know everything, and they also tend to think they're immortal. Combine that with the relatively high number of Awakened students at a place like MIT&T, and you have a recipe for random and reckless magic. That can be more dangerous than the crippling fireball you were expecting.
- Winterhawk

The warning signs: The big warning sign is that you've been asked to do an extraction. No one is letting go of anyone easily right



INCOMING FEED.....

now. When you do your legwork, make sure you're relying on up-to-date information. If you get a rundown of someone's security detail that's a year old, you just got yourself a pile of useless information.

On a more specific note, understand that if you have any run targeting a Horizon communications executive, Aztechnology is probably behind it. They smell blood in the water, and they want to keep Horizon reeling. The Big A is well aware of their reputation in the shadows, so they'll often try to cover their tracks and not let you know who's behind the mission. I know some people have no problem taking money, no matter who it's from, but consider this fair warning if you want to stay away from the Azzies.

- They pay well and have yet to sacrifice anyone I know. Their money's good with me.
- Sticks

Smash and Smash

What's different: I'm not going to talk about smash and grabs in this section, because most of what I'd say about it is covered in the datasteals (after all, what are smash and grabs but datasteals with blunt weapons instead of hacking programs or subtlety?). Smash and smash is a little bit different, and thus deserves attention of its own.

What's becoming clear in the ongoing skirmishes is that many of the combatants involved are interested in finding a wide range of ways to hurt people. Is it satisfying to stand over the body of a fallen enemy? Yeah, but it's also satisfying to walk down the street in your tailored outfit, sipping on your cup of real coffee,

and pass by your former rival as he or she sits on the side of the road, begging for a crumb of your bounty. Then you pour coffee on their head. Hell, if even a square like Nathaniel Hawthorne knows how devastating it can be to totally emotionally wreck a person, shouldn't we be aware of that alternative too?

- Oh, good. I was concerned that somehow our discussion wouldn't touch on 19th-century American literature.
- Fianchetto
- I'm allowed to be erudite if I want.
- Pistons
- So I guess that means we're not talking about Hawthorne the LA fixer, are we?
- Haze

All this is to say that the various sides in the ongoing conflict are using a variety of tools at their disposal to hurt their enemies, and nailing them in the pocketbook is a viable strategy. Sometimes this takes the form of financial shenanigans and complicated stock purchases, but other times it's as simple as taking something the other guy wants and burning it to the ground.

Now, for the most part, the type of damage groups of shadow-runners can do is not going to cause serious damage to someone's corporate or financial empire. There are a few exceptions, like oil pipelines (which is why Global Sandstorm watches its pipeline to Lagos so carefully), but for the most part when you're taking down a building, you're not bringing down a corporation. Even

Hestaby's destruction of the S-K building in Dubai didn't bring down S-K Middle East.

- That's because she was foolish enough to let everyone inside survive.
- Kane

Which brings us to the main purpose of smash-and-smash operations, which is sending a message. That's why Hestaby brought down the tower in Dubai, after all—to show she could. Destroying someone's holdings shows that you know what they own, and you know how to get to it. This is a message that lots of people want to send nowadays, so there are a number of good jobs for you bomb-throwers out there. Remember that on some of these jobs, your employers will want you to Hollywood it up a bit, making a big orange fireball that lots of people will see and talk about. They should also have a level of collateral with which they are comfortable. The point is, you should have an explosives expert who can help you get things done properly.

Now we get to the fun part. Enough of these messages have been sent that various corporations and other groups are beginning to anticipate them, or incorporate their existence into their plans. They know that someone might hit one of their facilities, in which case they will be expected, even required, to exact revenge. Some of them have gotten so tingly inside with the thoughts of getting to the revenge that they can't bring themselves to wait for the next message. So what they're doing is acquiring properties for certain subsidiaries (or, more likely, drawing up fake records making it look like they acquired these properties) and then arranging for those properties to be torched. That creates opportunities for a team with a range of talents—if you can find the appropriate structure, gin up the fake records, bring the thing down, frame the right party for the attack, and help plan steps for your employer's revenge, you'll be seen as quite valuable indeed.

- The losers here are people in Barrens and areas bordering Barrens. All of the sudden abandoned buildings are being seen as useful commodities, but only useful in the run-up to them being trashed. A good number of squatters have lost their homes.
- Aufheben
- I'm sure the ranks of angry squatters have the corps and dragons quaking in their supple leather footwear.
- Cosmo

The warning signs: The downside of delivering messages is that there is a longstanding tradition with regards to killing the messenger. There is a certain efficiency and even elegance to it. Don't like the message? Take it out immediately on them who brought it. In the case of shadowrunners, killing the messenger has the disadvantage that it doesn't directly hurt your opposition, as you're only eliminating some deniable (and replaceable) assets. Still, though, there's a certain law-and-order satisfaction to it. Your building got hit, you find the perps and string 'em up, and everyone in the corp or whatever organization gets a morale boost.

Long story short: If you go out on a smash-and-smash, be ready for the victims to put a little extra effort into tracking you down.

I understand that you'd like to know when a dragon is the owner of something you've been hired to hit, but unless it's clearly marked "Saeder-Krupp" or "property of Hestaby," you're not going to know. If a dragon wants to hide their ownership tracks from you, they will. I don't care how good your hacker and his financial informants are.

- There are those among us who would take that as a dare.
- Mr. Bonds

If I were you, I'd also be cautious about taking jobs knocking down a talismonger or anything similar. As has been discussed, the dragons have it in for these guys, so if you join this battle, you're very possibly putting yourself in opposition to dragons. In my mind, that's not a comfortable place to be.

- A contrary point of view—not necessarily *my* point of view, mind, but one that is in opposition—is that in a conflict like this, taking sides provides a bit of safety, because at least you have allies. By taking a job against a talismonger, you might be joining the side of a dragon, if that is the sort of thing you might find valuable.
- Winterhawk
- I'll take our side over theirs any day.
- Elijah

Wetwork

What's different: Simply put: It's harder. One of the biggest problems with wetwork, setting aside any discussion of moral objections, is that it puts people against the wall. When you're going in for the kill, the people you're going up against aren't going to have thoughts of restraint. They aren't going to hold back. They are going to fight for their life, and they'll use their desperation to try to take you out.

- Please. This isn't different than any other day in a shadowrunner's life. It's not like security is looking to arrest us, or scare us off with warning shots. They're happiest to see us dead. They don't suddenly amp up the level of violence just because we're going in for the kill.
- Riser
- Not every spot is a zero-zone.
- DangerSensei

As assassinations become more common—and they have—people don't just hire more security. They get hair-triggers. In this climate, you shouldn't plan on being able to talk anyone out of a rash action. If they see you coming for them, they're going to assume you're going in for the kill, and they're going to react accordingly.

People are also getting more suspicious about who they meet. If you want to get a meeting with someone you don't know, you're going to need a nice collection of references before you'll get a face-to-face (assuming they have some power, which is generally a prerequisite for someone being willing to pay to have them killed). So work your network, or get a bunch of acquaintances who are skilled at the art of vocal and physical disguise to provide some references for you.



- Or if you have more time, get a Matrix meeting and build some trust until you can get a face-to-face. I worry sometimes that technology and magic have made people forget the art of the long con. Not that magic doesn't have its uses in that fine work.
- Thorn

Other than that, wetwork remains what it is. Dangerous, occasionally messy, and likely to make someone want payback. If you're the type of person who will take this kind of job, nothing I say here is going to change that. So lock, load, and be careful. Which brings us to ...

The warning signs: If you're a proper assassin, you're going to do your legwork on your target, so while you're at it, take a little extra time to learn who they are. Who are their allies? Who might be pissed at them? And most importantly, who might want revenge once they're dead?

Consider the assassin who took out Elliot Eyes-of-Wyrm. He—or she—knew. He knew what was going to happen as soon as he took the fatal shot. The only way Eyes-of-Wyrm was going down is if the person hired was good, and if they were good they knew who it was they were killing, and just how angry Hestaby would be. They knew the shot they were going to take would put a target on their back. And he took the shot anyway.

I'll be honest with you—personal feelings on wetwork aside, I wouldn't take that shot. Yeah, I'm sure he (or she, but I'm not going to say that again) got paid plenty, but no paycheck is big enough to buy immortality. Plus, I've lived on the run, and it's not fun. This shooter is going to be living on the run for the rest of his life. I don't think there's cash enough to make the job worth it.

- You're thinking about this all wrong, sugar. The money is not what's important to this guy. He wants to be on the run. He gets a huge charge out of knowing that something as big and mean as a great dragon has him in her sights, but he's managed to not be dead yet. And he loves it. Cash can't buy the continual rush he's getting.
- Kane
- So does this mean you know who the shooter is?
- /dev/grrl
- Naw. I just know the type.
- Kane

So, warning sign number one—you're assigned a target with a close relationship to a dragon.

Warning sign number two: Your target has an aura you don't understand. I assume all of you are assensing your target, or having someone who does it for you. I also assume you're not a wet-behind-the-cars noob who's befuddled by any aura that's more complicated than telling the difference between Awakened and non-Awakened. If you assense properly and see something you truly don't understand—and I'm not talking about seeing that someone is angry but not knowing *why* they're angry or any such crap, I'm talking about readings that simply don't fit the codes you've learned to read—then be very, very cautious. At this stage in the game, you don't want to be getting involved with any strange magic.

And warning sign number three: It all seems too easy. Security is less intense than it should be and the guards are barely competent with magic, and the target regularly sticks out his head like a gopher looking around the prairie. This means you're being set up. The person you "kill" probably won't even be dead at the end, but all of the sudden evidence of your crime will come out, and all hell will rain down on you. Why are people doing this to you? Could be any number of reasons, but you won't have time to figure any of them out until you can outlast the heat pouring on your head.

- A job like that can work as a distraction. Security goes after you, a person who really didn't do anything, which keeps them from paying attention to something important that's about to happen. Or it could be a way of rallying the troops, giving an organization someone to root against. The intention is that you end up dead, and the people who helped take you out feel strong and confident, ready to move on to their next task.
- Stone
- Bottom line? Serious games are being played, and there's no way you're going to be able to anticipate them all. Don't let this scare you from taking work—we all gotta eat—but be ready to be fast and creative. And make sure you have a really good safe house lined up.
- Black Mamba



... THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE ...

PART ONE

He stepped out the front door of the Tarislar Elegy (a dive bar in Puyallup) and the famous “Tacoma Aroma” sailed across the sound from the northwest and hit his nostrils like a motorcade of burning dump trucks. Vive Seattle, vive humanité. He turned the high collar of his coat up against the ever-present rain and chill and headed south. The MP3 player in his pocket was an ancient relic, coated with a thick resin of venerable grime that rubbed off on his finger when he pressed play. Guitars, drums, and bass ramped up through the ear buds with bouncy menace, and then Jello Biafra’s singing completed the picture.

The next corner he turned revealed an ugly scene. A trio of Ancients, easily identifiable by the neon-green symbols on their black synthleather jackets, had cornered a teenage ork girl in the shadows beneath an abandoned monorail station, backing her up against a wall and looming over her. Through the sound of the Dead Kennedys, he could make out just enough of their city-speak patois and bastardized Sperethiel to infer that the girl’s cousin had some nebulous association with the Chulos, which made this part of town less than safe for her. The Hispanic ork girl couldn’t have been more than thirteen, and she was fighting back tears. She was wise enough to know they would only make things worse.

For some reason this made him think of the vast, pale sweep of the white wrym’s wings as he vanished into the rift; the self-important demands he’d made of Jane during her stay in Denver, but more than that, of Aina’s body, lifeless, on a gurney surrounded by armed soldiers. And he felt something sweet, something so sweet that he realized how much he had come to miss it, since besting Ehran at Althain.

Anger.

“Think this trog’s old enough to turn tricks for her skinflint cousin?” the leader asked one of his cohorts, who brayed laughter. Harlequin didn’t see what was so funny. But then again, he was still thinking of Ghostwalker’s tail vanishing into the rift, and of Aina’s vacant, lifeless eyes.

“Can’t shut up, can you?” the painted elf asked, announcing his presence. “Every bully I ever met can’t seem to shut his mouth. Except, of course, when he’s afraid.”

The elven hooligan turned to him, his face all cheap cybereyes, spiky piercings, post-adolescent acne, and dripping condescension. He saw only the motley; fools always did. It was why he wore it. He thumped one of his compatriots with an elbow, laughing.

“Look at this fucking clown.”

The razor-wound slashes of crimson-on-white at the corners of his mouth stretched as Harlequin smiled. The sword that runners had retrieved for him was sitting in his hotel room downtown instead of at his side. Of course, he wouldn’t need it any more than he would his magic. Some things begged to be done by hand.

“You a Halloween or something, asshole?” He wasn’t. “Where’s your chummers? You’re a long way outside of your t—”

The ganger was interrupted by Harlequin’s forehead, snapping suddenly forward to break his nose on impact. A smear of dark blood from the punk’s shattered septum stained the place above and between Harlequin’s eyes, like an Ash Wednesday smudge, as the Ancient staggered backwards and fell on his ass while he tried to stem the tide of blood with both hands.

Harlequin felt only the tiniest glimmer of satisfaction; this was not who he really wanted to hurt.

The other two—kids, really, especially by Elven standards—exchanged an uncertain glance. One of them then snapped out a switchblade, and the other pulled a Colt America from the sweaty waistband of his torn-up jeans.

“You don’t want to do that,” Harlequin said, sounding bored. “Get your friend a tampon for his face instead.” He made the barest flick of his eyes toward their still-prostrate leader, then he moved to turn lazily away. The one with the gun hesitated, while the one with the knife went for him while he was turning; stupid, but it’s not like they’d have fared much better if they acted in concert. Harlequin caught the kid’s wrist, pivoted, twisted, and spun, redirecting the momentum of the thrust. The blade disappeared to the hilt in the other ganger’s stomach, hitting the soft patch of tee-shirt between the unwisely unbuttoned fringes of his armored jacket. The gun fell from suddenly nerveless fingers as his mouth opened in an “O” of surprise. Harlequin let go, and both of them fell to the ground.

“What did I just say?” he asked, in Sperethiel.

He ignored them as they staggered to their feet and fled to seek medical attention, leaving a trail of blood and curses in their wake. He turned to the ork girl, who was staring at him, wide eyed, like he’d just turned into a feathered serpent in the middle of the street. He knew it probably wasn’t the violence she was shocked at—you didn’t reach the age of thirteen in this neighborhood without seeing worse. She expressed her surprise with some colorful Spanish vulgarity.

“Not any way to talk about your own mother,” he said, and winked. Then he fumbled through the pockets of his leather jacket for a rumpled silk pocket square, and wiped the blood off of his forehead. His head hurt, slightly. Pocketing the handkerchief, he sketched a tiny little bow (a bit theatrical, really) toward the girl, who seemed more surprised by that than anything else thus far. “You see, not all elves are so bad.”

He was lying; he was probably the worst of them.



"Should I check him for weapons?" Alec Tintagel asked. He knew from the angry frown that his patron was about to painstakingly explain why what he'd just said was stupid, so he hastily added "That was a joke." Because it had been.

Lugh Surehand, the former High Prince of Tír Tairngire, smiled thinly. Humor was never either man's strong suit, and their current situation—fugitives, hunted and in exile—didn't help.

"Bring him in," Surehand said, wearily, and with a dismissive wave of his hand. He seemed about as eager for this meeting as he would be to wrestle, naked, with a barghest. Maybe slightly less.

Tintagel did a quick sweep of the devices connected to his PAN before doing so. The log-cabin lodge they were staying in was rustic and traditional to the extreme, but the security network he'd set up was not. Hidden thermographic cameras and chemical sniffers covered the interior and the exterior of the cabin, and motion detectors surrounded the perimeter. On top of that, he had drones in the sky to watch out for any suspicious thermal signatures encroaching on their position, and he'd left a few men out in the treeline, wearing thermally insulated chameleon suits—it was fucking cold up here—and taking rotating shifts. The place was, in short, as much of a fortress as he could make it, but still a flimsy line of defense if push came to shove. Their best defense, their only *real* defense, was that no one should have any way of knowing they were there.

Except *he* knew.

Gritting his teeth, Tintagel pulled open the door. His men had picked up the painted elf traipsing obliviously into the perimeter and hadn't known what to make of him. They'd forced him into one of the ATVs at gun point and driven him up to the cabin before contacting Tintagel and asking him if he had been expecting "a guy in clown makeup." Tintagel was thankful the target had cooperated and come along willingly. Good help was damn hard to find.

Even without the motley painted on his face, Harlequin looked ridiculous, wearing a puffy goose-down insulated nylon jacket, stamping the snow off his feet—his boots, Tintagel observed, appeared to be anaconda skin—on the porch mat, his breath misting in the air. He grinned awkwardly at Tintagel, stepping inside as Alec shut the door behind him. He was at least half a head shorter than either the former High Prince or his paladin, and a good thirty pounds lighter than Surehand. Like Alec, he was clean-shaven. His hair—tied back in a ponytail—was dyed a red similar to Surehand's natural color, but at the roots it was growing into a golden-brown color, showing a touch of gray. For an elf, he looked old, which was in keeping with what little Tintagel had been told about him.

Harlequin stepped over the wooden bench on one side of the cabin's sole table and sat.

"The Cypress Hills in the lovely Algonkian-Manitou Council lands," he said. "Been a while since I've been up here." He frowned, suddenly. "Actually, I'm not sure I've ever been here, come to think of it." He shrugged. "No relation to the hip hop group?" A joke of some kind, and apparently not one he expected anyone else to get. Surehand, for his part, sitting across the table on the bench opposite Harlequin, managed not to let his face show any bewilderment or exasperation. He was wrapped up in his heavy Mortimer of London greatcoat—even with the space heaters running, it was cold in here. A sharp wind blew through the lodge's glassless windows, causing the candle flames and their cast shadows, to dance wildly, stirring the incense-laden air.

Tintagel was busying himself setting up a white-noise generator. Just, he thought, in case. Surehand hadn't responded, so Harlequin went right on babbling, picking up his momentum again after the pause.

"What are you doing up here, anyway? Thinking of running for Ceremonial Chief? I wouldn't recommend it. The higher-ups here have some life expectancy problems." This was an understatement. Every chief elected to office in the last ten years had died by violence. "Or are you just laying low? Not sure how well that's working out, either. You, me, him, and the charming gentlemen in the balaclavas outside are the only palefaces I've seen since I left Calgary."

"I could study you for a hundred years and never understand how you do it," Surehand finally said. Tintagel turned to face the two of them, now that the white noise generator—producing a faint, unpleasant whine, keener than the howling wind—was running. "How the more and more you talk, the less and less you're actually saying."

Harlequin sniffed. "It's a gift. I missed you in Seattle. I came there to talk to you. I'd heard that you were hanging around Puyallup. My old stomping grounds."

"The situation in Seattle became difficult," Surehand said, desultorily. "I had to get out of town for a while." Another understatement; they'd been dodging bullets as they fled the Daisy Chain restaurant in Tarislar, Jonathon Reed's Paladins making a game attempt at killing the former High Prince. It had been entirely too close, and Tintagel was intent on not letting it happen again. "How did you find me? For that matter, how did you get here?" Tintagel noticed that Surehand didn't mention why he'd chosen the AMC to go to ground, namely his ongoing, delicate negotiations with the leadership of the disenfranchised Elven Manitou tribe. Surehand's efforts at gathering a power base here had made much more immediate gains than his work in Seattle. He was ready to back the Manitou in their move against the Algonkian-controlled Council government in exchange for their support—assuming they won—in retaking the Tír when he was ready, and a position in their government in the meantime. This would, of course, pit Surehand directly against Aztechnology, who were the major backers of the Algonkian Council government, a fact he seemed to regard as an acceptable risk.

"Shadowrunners," Harlequin said, momentarily distracted by playing with the zipper of his coat. "I love those guys."

Surehand narrowed his eyes, clearly displeased with the vagary of that response, but knowing he wasn't going to do any better.

"How can I help you?" Surehand asked Harlequin, abruptly cutting to the point, which was somewhat unlike him. Tintagel remembered why his patron had said Harlequin made him uncomfortable. "I don't understand him, have never understood him. I don't know what the hell he wants," he'd said. "I've never known what he wanted. But now he knows what I want, doesn't he?"

And he did.





Harlequin paused in the doorway, perhaps trying to compose some final witticism to accompany his exit.

"You do know this won't bring her back?" Surehand asked.

The painted elf turned. His gold-flecked green eyes fixed the former High Prince with a look of such intense, withering venom that Tintagel winced. It was, he later realized, actually quite similar to Surehand's own "how can someone as stupid as you still manage to draw breath" look.

But instead of responding, the painted elf left. Vanished. He didn't walk away, and he certainly didn't cast a spell—Tintagel would have known if he had, although he most likely couldn't have done anything to stop it. He was just gone, like he'd never been there.

"That unbelievable bastard," Surehand said wonderingly, rubbing an old scar on his cheek. "He doesn't know, does he? How can *he* of all people be the only one of us who was there that doesn't know that she's not gone, at least, not *really* gone." He shook his head. "You know, Alec, even the world's greatest liar never could deceive people half as well as they can deceive themselves."

He didn't know what to say to that, so he said nothing. After shutting the door, Tintagel did another sweep of the perimeter security via his PAN, until he was satisfied. It was a silent night out there, if not a holy one. Now that the painted elf had gone, Tintagel wanted to feel relieved, but his patron's attitude seemed to be the precise opposite.

Surehand climbed into his bunk, interlacing his fingers behind his head as he leaned against the pillow and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"I have no idea what we've just gotten ourselves into," Surehand said with a weary sigh. Tintagel unbuckled his chest holster and hung it and the heavy Savalette Guardian inside it dangling from the wooden bedpost of his own bunk.

"You really think he can get us Hestaby's support?" Tintagel asked.

"Those two have always been close," Surehand said, sitting up and stroking his beard. "If she's really in a position to choose her own successor, like he says, then all we have to do is choose our successor."

Tintagel sat on his bunk, rolling his head around his shoulders, trying to work out some of the kinks in his neck. "Then was everything we've done here and in Seattle all for nothing?" he asked.

"Of course not. It's not like I actually *trust* that mad fool. And you can never have too many contingencies."

It was, Tintagel knew, one of his favorite sayings.

"Then why do you seem so..." He trailed off.

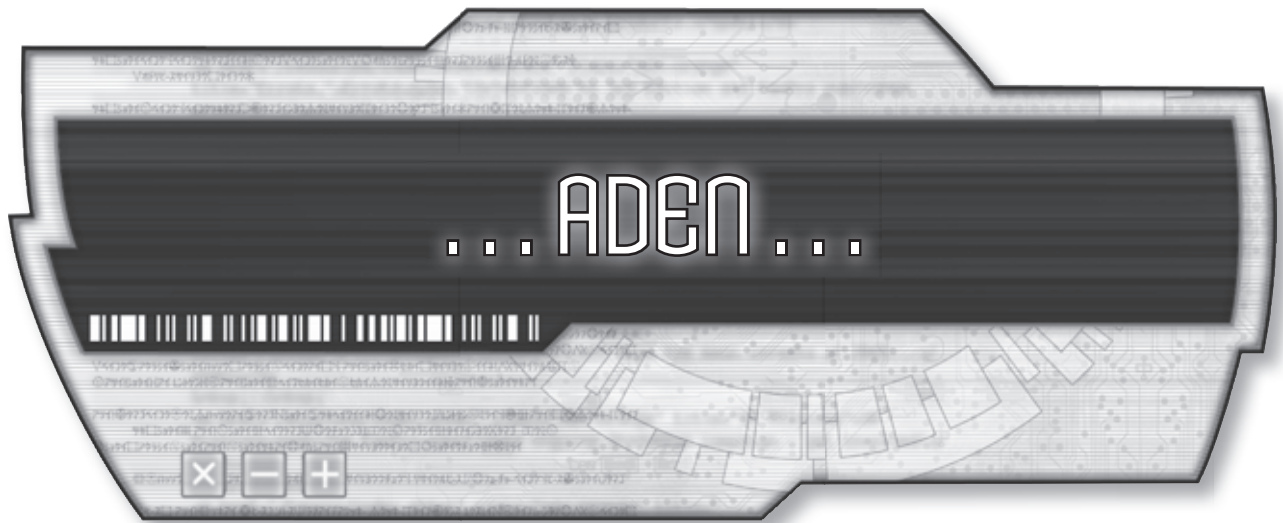
"Pensive? Regretful? Terrified?" Surehand barked laughter. "Pitting our interests against Aztechnolgy's is one thing, but this..."

"... could be even worse." Tintagel finished for him. Both men fell silent for a while. *Then why did you agree to it?* Tintagel wanted to ask, but in his heart, he knew why. It was because the jester was no fool at all. He had known what Surehand wanted, and had dangled it right in front of him. After so many years living as an exile, a refugee, a fugitive, there was almost nothing Surehand wouldn't have risked to see his home and his throne restored. As a Paladin, it wasn't his place to question his master. Only to trust and serve.

"How many deniable assets—and their fixers—do we have good working relationships with? Only list the best people, ones who are reliable, efficient."

So Tintagel listed them, the fixers they used in Seattle, Calgary, London, Dublin, Hong Kong, Neo-Tokyo, and all the rest. The runners that they'd hired and contracted through proxies and the proxies of proxies.

"Hmm," mused Surehand, glancing sidelong at Tintagel as he toyed with the ring he wore on his pinky finger. "We're going to need more."



- Some of you might know my old friend Snasta Barney. What you may not know is that he's one of Aden's top runners. He's done wetwork across the Middle East, with most of the jobs affecting Lowfyr's interests one way or another. He'll say otherwise, but he is responsible for the dozen or so S-K scientists that recently turned up dead. When I asked him to give us data on Lowfyr's lairs, he said he'd rather talk about Aden. Which, hey, we can use, so I told him to go for it.
- Fastjack

THE COLLECTOR

Posted by: Snasta Barney

There is an upside to being old. You remember drek that nobody else does. You can say you were there and nobody gives you lip because they weren't there. You know things that keep you alive and things that can get you dead. I know, for example, where Aden hides her treasure.

- Everything I've seen points to Aden being male. Why the feminine pronoun here?
- Riser
- Call me old-fashioned, but I've never seen a male dragon value eggs so highly, or put so much effort into their care and protection. She's got a mother's instincts.
- Snasta Barney
- Which brings up a question: just how do you determine the gender of a dragon? It's gotta be harder than, say, determining the sex of a devil rat.
- Pistons

I need to tell you my side of things first. Afterwards you'll understand why. I was born in 2012 when Britain's SAS made the push through Kandahar trying to wipe out what would become the New Islamic Jihad. My father was an SAS trooper. My mother, a native Irish woman, pushed files for MI-6. I was born a dwarf;

one of the early ones I'm told. Back then Aden was still a children's tale that service wives told us to make sure we went to bed on time. When I turned eight I watched my bedtime story take flight and burn Tehran to the ground and my parents with it.

I hated Aden. I made it my life's work to kill that dragon. When I was old enough I joined up with the SAS and got myself posted in the Middle East. I chased terrorists for two decades. Work at a job that long and you start to see the connections. You also figure out who is pulling the strings. The Middle Eastern Jihadic movements are divided by ideology. Sunni Muslims make up seventy percent of all Muslims. They follow the Sunnah set forth by the prophet Muhammad, and they live to repel foreign invaders. We targeted the other thirty percent, the state-funded Shia minority. I'm not going to worry about what they are in the eyes of others, or the eyes of themselves—in my eyes, they were political terrorists who mostly targeted corporations. You Western blokes might recognize this as fighting Mexican separatists along the Texas border when you should have been dealing with Howling Coyote's Great Ghost Dance.

So why weren't we going after the terrorists that threatened Britain and Tír Na nÓg? Our best intelligence at the time told us the Shia extremists were working for Aden, so if they wanted me to go after them, I would. I played along, hopeful we'd do to her what Germany did to Feurschwinge in '12. The fighting was vicious, close-quarters stuff, running and gunning through mountain tunnels chasing an idea. We came close once. My team tracked a terrorist cell up to the Alborz Mountains. The terrorists had kidnapped an Iranian woman who later turned out to be an *Aurah*. We tracked them to a cave tucked away far back from where local villagers ever go. There were markings all around the entrance that one of our guys, a history buff, claimed were Babylonian. We went in after them.

The cave dipped straight down into the earth. The deeper it went, the older it looked. There was more of that Babylonian writing and footprints telling us the terrorists had come this way. We knew by then we'd stumbled onto something a lot older and more dangerous than we'd anticipated. We had a shaman with us, and after ten minutes he was doing everything but offering us a blowjob if we'd just turn around and head back to the surface. We



didn't listen, and not long after this brown-and-red-scaled thing that looked like a miniature wingless dragon slithered out of the darkness and sank its teeth into the man in front of me. I opened fire—we all did—but it did no good. Three soldiers survived the raid, including myself.

Each time I lose someone close, I ink a dragon's claw on my body. Two full sleeves and a chest full of ink later we weren't any closer to figuring out Aden's connection to terrorist threats against Britain. Care to guess why? Because there was no connection. Our military responses were designed to help specific corporations get ahead without any interference from terrorists or the government. And what corps profited? Lowfyr's.

For the first time since puberty I stepped back and thought about what I was doing. I'd dedicated my life to chasing one dragon, only to be used by another. For twenty years I'd laid down suppressing fire for Lowfyr. The anger I had toward Aden for killing my parents bled out of me then. She didn't know who they were. Wrong place, wrong time. But what Lowfyr did was intentional. All those claws on my body, he put them there as true as if he'd drawn the lines himself. Lowfyr wasted British lives all so he could cut through the red tape and get his claws into Middle Eastern oil. I made all this public years ago. I wrote a report to my superiors and got kicked out of the service for my trouble.

I said I had to tell my side of it and here's why: After I left the service I switched sides, started taking mercenary contracts from Global Sandstorm and every other group I thought could nick up Lowfyr a little. I went looking for Aden—to offer her not a bullet but a hand. I gave up hard paydata about the link between the SAS and Fatima Petrochemicals, information that could help her break their foothold on the region. It was a chance to make things right for all those claws. And then, after I no longer gave a frag, I finally started to see how Aden's operation fit together.

I don't hate Aden anymore. Hell, I work for the old wyrm. Still, a debt is a debt. So, this is my payback to Aden for what she did. Knowledge is the only actionable weapon we have against the greats. Use it wisely.

- Rest in peace, Snasta Barney. You shouldn't bite the hand that feeds you, especially when it's attached to a dragon.
- Kane
- I warned him this network isn't one hundred percent secure. He wanted to post the data anyway. I decided to respect his wishes.
- FastJack

THE LASTING STONE

There is a saying in the Arabic world that predates Islam: "It is the flesh that culls passion. It is the blood that breathes life. It is the bone that gives strength. But it is only the stone that lasts." These are the words of a culture that understood its own mortality and wanted to believe in something that could live on. As early as 658 ACE, Arabic tribes began to coalesce around the idea that there was a being that walked among them who could, and had, lasted the ages. The Kharijites were the first to mention the SIRRUSH as a prophet of Allah's divine protection and vengeance.

When Aden rose from Mount Ararat to level Tehran, the people of the Middle East began to revisit those ancient texts. In

no time at all Aden reignited a mythos; one designed to protect her interests—her hoard. The faithful believe she is a true avatar of the region, the lasting stone as if cut from the same chunk of rock that rests in the Kaaba.

This mythos she wields is a part of her hoard (in the modern sense of what we call a hoard), but most of her holdings are old fashioned. It is what an old half-Irish ginett like me calls fair pure right class. It is the kind of thing you read about in the fantasy pages. There's gold, fine gems, and art you've not seen for centuries. But there is more. She is breeding dracomorphs with the help of science. Her claws are buried deep into the criminal and terrorist networks that dominate the region. Even some government forces, including Iran's famed Black Scorpions, are loyal to Aden ahead of their governments. Once I knew this, I wondered how I could have ever been so arrogant to think I could get close to her?

Aden fooled me. I thought her to be weak, because she doesn't control a megacorporation like Lowfyr or Celedyr. She doesn't try to own the Matrix, or a movie studio, or even bother with public appearances. Aden's true power is her ability to control the extremist conversation. Ever since she leveled Tehran, she has held sway over a host of terrorist organizations that believe her to be a true prophet of Islam and protector of the region. Of course, those same levelheaded terrorists also believe her to be a man who is dedicated to expelling the capitalist Lowfyr from their region. Aden doesn't really care about metahuman interests the way her kin does. Hell, she doesn't care about becoming Loremaster. She cares about taking from this world whatever treasures she deems worthy.

I'll lay out a few lairs for you, but the fact is the entire Middle East is the great dragon's lair. Aden lays claim to the territories running east-west between Morocco and the Indian Union. She prefers mountain lairs for her material treasure troves, but not all of her treasures are locked away beneath the rocks. Others are spread out across the world, inhabiting museums from the Smithsonian to the Shanxi Lishi Bowuguan.

The Artifact Network

I was surprised by how much Am-Mut left out of her post on fences in the *Vice* posting. For example, she failed to mention that the Al Basrah network is controlled by Aden and serves as the base for the dragon's artifact network. While the dragon refuses to invest in modern businesses, she bankrolls hundreds of well-placed individuals and corporations who turn around and invest the nuyen in fences, museums, private collections, young artists, and any other access point that can provide data. Her network radiates out from Al Basrah and touches cities as far away as JoBurg and Dhaka. I wouldn't be fool enough to expose all of the names, but even our own Am-Mut's operation was seeded by dragon money.

- I resent the implication, but I'd be a fool to say I wasn't infobrokering for Aden. The fence network is teeming with clients, and any number of them could be fronting for Aden. But fencing networks service as many megacorps as they do black markets, so to say our network was built by and to support Aden feels a bit like fanboy gush.
- Am-Mut



- We are talking about a dragon here, right? The amount of financial influence such a creature can bring to bear is enough to control a fence network. Why doesn't Aden just come out and publicly take control of the Middle Eastern network?
- Baka Dabora
- That answer depends on your definition of control. From a business perspective, control could mean you influence such a large portion of the network that if you shift that influence in any particular direction, the network will be significantly affected. We can assume that Aden's agents number in the hundreds and don't hold the collective influence of, say, NeoNET. If Aden's people stopped using the network, it would not collapse. On the other hand, the loss of income and supply would dramatically shift the pricing structure. Likewise, for Aden to admit ownership of the network would also cause a lot of damage. I would mention the old adage about dealing with dragons, but I believe that phrase is getting enough of a workout in this posting as is.
- Mr. Bonds

Not everything Aden collects is what you or I would call treasure. I've seen an agent in Morocco spend twenty thousand on a battered tea set. The objects hold particular importance for the dragon, and she is extremely particular about where they wind up and even how they get there. The dragon moves her legal treasures through a global network of antiquities dealerships owned by various members of the Al-Masri family.

- The Al-Masri name is a front like Brackhaus or Johnson. It looks legitimate on the surface, but I dug into their books. A different individual or shell corporation funded each of the dealerships. None of the backers have the Al-Masri family name, and that name never even comes into play until the business is opened. Once up and running, the business signs on a so-called member of the Al-Masri family as a silent partner. The whole operation reads like a money-laundering scheme.
- Goat Foot
- Or a front for terrorist operations. It wouldn't be the first time a terrorist group used a seemingly benign storefront to fund and outfit their jihadists.
- Axis Mundi

When Aden needs to move something more discreetly, she calls upon private contractors to move goods acquired elsewhere into the region. Once the contractors deliver an item to a drop point accessible to outsiders, some place like Casablanca, the Kabul Maffiya steps in and humps the package the rest of the way. Most of what she smuggles into the region ends up either in her Moroccan lair or redistributed to museums throughout the world.

I recently discovered a connection between Aden and the Apep Consortium. You might have heard about several artifacts that went missing from an Apep dig site following a raid by Beetle shamans. Not long after, I was on security detail for one of Aden's personal representatives during an exchange. We met up with a team of Apep scientists and Dr. Sen Abasi, chief curator for the Egyptian Museum. The scientists handed over what I recognized from news reports as the missing artifacts. Aden's rep and the

Egyptian curator made a thorough inspection and pronounced them genuine. Aden's guy then ordered my crew to take most of the artifacts. We loaded up the rest for Dr. Abasi.

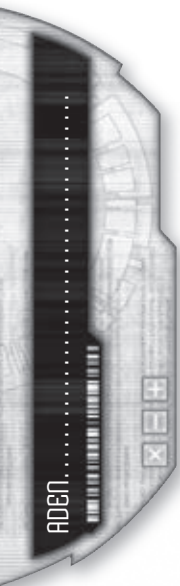
- It isn't too surprising that the chief curator would be involved in this sort of meeting, as Aden is heavily invested in the Egyptian Museum. The dragon has agents on the board as well as a major Babylonian exhibit on display there. Furthermore, Dr. Abasi is known to care more about furthering the museum's collection than he does about any legalities that might get trampled in the process.
- Elijah

Atlas Mountains, Central Morocco

In 2013 a private interest discreetly commissioned the construction of a 150-acre estate to be cut into the Middle Atlas, overlooking the Oum Er-Rbia river. The project took eight years to complete and cost upwards of what would be eight billion nuyen today. The above-ground portion of the estate consists of the main home, six guest homes, a security building, and a carriage house for the estate's many Berber workers. Below ground, the complex is a mystery. I can tell you that it houses several vaults filled with paintings, sculptures, and rare books, but I have no idea how many or how to get to them.

Aden took possession of the home in 2022, but she rarely nests there. It is primarily a meeting place for her agents and friends. The land near the remote estate has since become extremely popular amongst the world's wealthiest people, with lots nearest to the dragon's estate selling for millions of nuyen per acre. Aden profits from the sales and from the proximity to the world's wealthiest people.

- Aden also uses the estate as a meeting ground for dealing with other dragons. There have only ever been four such meetings. Aden met with Dunkehlzahn shortly before his bid for the UCAS presidency, and she met with Mujaji and Masaru a decade ago. There was a meeting with Lowfyr a year ago, and just last month Aden hosted Rhonabwy and his entourage.
- Winterhawk
- That is a fair amount of meetings for a dragon that supposedly wants to stay out of the fight.
- Arete
- The last two, at least, supposedly had something to do with dragon eggs and the unnamed dragon found dead outside of Mahssad, Iran a few years ago. There are rumors the dead wyrm served Aden, but then again there are rumors that the dead wyrm was targeting Aden.
- Winterhawk
- I never heard anything about a dragon turning up dead in Iran.
- Sunshine
- Are you surprised that you didn't? Dragons only ever let you know what they want you to know.
- Axis Mundi





Aden's Moroccan retreat is less impressive than the network it fronts. While serving as the face for the dragon's very limited social presence, it also fills a more important role as the distribution point for her art collection. Aden uses the exhibits the way I use a worm on a hook. The collection draws in upper-class and wealthy gawkers, not to mention artists. The nearby city of Khenifra has become an artists' haven, full of people she's bankrolled or commissioned for specific works.

The dragon supports no less than two hundred museums throughout the world, with intermediaries sitting on the board of most. Don't mistake her support for philanthropy. Through this support Aden sinks her claws into many of the art world's most important people, and she uses these connections to locate and acquire the pieces that she wants. And when her agents cannot purchase the art objects she wants outright, she turns to the shadows to acquire them.

Mount Ararat

Aden's main lair rests deep within Mount Ararat. Some time before the Awakening, researchers located what they believe to be the remains of Noah's Ark near the peak. In fact what they found were the Bronze Age remains of a Bedouin tribal encampment. These tribes prayed to Aden millennia ago, and now they serve the great dragon as foot soldiers.

Kurdish Autonomous Zone leader Ahmed Massoud has publicly thrown his support behind the dragon. The base of the mountain is heavily guarded by KAZ military. When I was still pursuing her, I learned that Aden and four adult dragons, one of which is a SIRRUSH, also spend time there. The lair's entrance is believed to be through the volcanic crater at the top. I cannot confirm that this is the only entrance, but Aden and the handful of other dragons that frequent the lair have only been spotted leaving from the top.

- We're talking about memetics at its worse here. Ever since they reappeared in the world we've been treating dragons like Gods, affording them a level of respect that, frankly, is unearned. I'm not surprised the government cast their lot with Aden. A weak group always seeks out a strong ally for support. While dragons are dangerous, we make them more dangerous by falling into the trap of the draconic legend. I have to say, though, that a dragon latching onto religious mythos as a way to control people is a new low.
- Dr. Spin

What I've heard about the Ararat lair speculation. I have never known anyone to be invited to the lair, and the ones who wrote their own invitation never came back. What I personally believe is that this is the place that Aden keeps her eggs. About a decade past, the SAS broke into encrypted transmissions between Iranian military and parties unknown, saying they'd uncovered a dig site south of Masshad. The unknown party, possibly a corporation, claimed to have found a heavily warded cache of dragon eggs half buried beneath the earth. There was a dead adult dragon at the scene along with the remains of several dozen dracomorphs. By the time our intelligence people got a satellite up over the area, everything had been cleared out. Aden was sighted flying toward the spot of the incident earlier that day, and after the event she was seen flying toward her Mount Ararat lair.



Al Karak Castle

In 1132, the Crusader, King Fulk, built the castle at Al Karak on a triangular plateau of land frequented by the many Bedouin tribes of Jordan. That action stirred up the Bedouin tribes right awful, and the plateau became a central piece in the struggle against the infidels. Nobody could quite figure out why until nearly a millennia later. Aden appeared over the Castle moments after leveling Tehran. She circled the city for some time, inspecting it before she flew off to her lair in Mount Ararat. That marked a sharp change in life in Al Karak. The now nomadic Bedouin tribes return to the city regularly to leave tributes of precious metal in the wide moat that surrounds the castle.

I don't know exactly what is under Karak Castle. Locals report hearing deep rumblings beneath the castle that grow more frequent during the summer months. And then there's that moat filled with treasures that never rust or weather. Aden's never returned to collect those tributes, but on rare occasions dracoforms have been observed digging through the piles, evidently searching for specific items they collect while leaving the rest. The Bedouins believe Aden placed a curse on the castle. They say that families that don't leave tributes are destined to be barren, and those who steal from the moat are struck dead within hours. While those last bits are unsubstantiated rumor, there is enough solid evidence mixed with the local lore to mark the spot as one of Aden's lairs.

- A ley line runs beneath the plateau, along with a peculiar background energy that reminds me of the Cermak blast site in Chicago. I don't mean the bugs, but the energy feels a lot like the shielding that was in place there prior to the nuclear explosion.
- Winterhawk

The Golden Sea

The two resources most worth controlling in this world are fresh water and oil. Iran's Lut desert is soaked in the latter. Aden claims this black gold as part of her hoard, divvying out drilling contracts through intermediaries. The Al-Shammar family's Global Sandstorm maintains control of the majority of Lut desert contracts, despite pressures by S-K. Now, Aden doesn't own Global Sandstorm. She doesn't pretend to own any corporation or anything other non-material holdings. But she maintains a relationship with the al-Shammar family, ensuring the company gives her a fair exchange for her pot of oil.

- That fits. The only way Global Sandstorm could resist Saeder-Krupp for as long as it has would be by having a very powerful backer. I think Aden qualifies.
- Mr. Bonds
- The Gandum Beryan Plateau is covered in blackened molten rock. An ancient Scythian legend claims the plateau was the site of a city that bucked Aden's will. The great dragon supposedly razed the city and scorched the earth so that nothing would ever grow there again. Anyone else thinking Tehran got off easy?
- Elijah

Alborz Mountains, Iran

Next to oil, the Middle East's primary export is drugs. I've often thought that Aden keeps so many lairs though help

her stay closer to the poppy. Drugs are the backbone of the dragon's finances. Her voice in this matter is a man named Stepan Markarayan, one of Interpol's fifteen most wanted men. Markarayan operates from an estate buried deep in the Alborz Mountains. The Alborz lair is a less flashy, more covert version of Aden's Moroccan lair. Instead of a meeting place for legitimate business and political VIPs, Aden uses it for her agents to meet with leaders of the criminal organizations that operate in her territory. Even warring groups voluntarily come to the table at Alborz to hear Markarayan, because they know he speaks with Aden's voice. Through Markarayan Aden imposes her will upon the Kabul Maffiya, Grey Wolves, and even the Alta Commissione.

The compound is difficult to reach because of the intense fighting taking place in the region between remnants of the New Islamic Jihad and various smaller terrorist organizations. The Iranian military is embedded in that part of the Alborz range with the reported mission of handling dissidents and invaders, but it is clear that their mission is much like the British military one I took part in. They are to eradicate anyone not paying their fair share to the standing government. In fact, I've been attached to caravans moving goods for the Kabul Maffiya. We would role through military checkpoints without bothering to show ID.

- Aden has been able to keep the peace between Al-Akhirah Aswad Mayia and the Grey Wolves. The way I heard it is that after the memory of Tehran started to fade, these two organizations in particular started to get bold, causing a lot of damage in the region. The organization's leaders were invited to Alborz to see a demonstration of how Aden could be a discreet killer as well. The men were introduced to several dracomorphs, including drakes that assumed the forms of women and young boys. The group's leaders were informed that their organizations could be infiltrated at any time, and the leaders themselves removed.
- 2XL

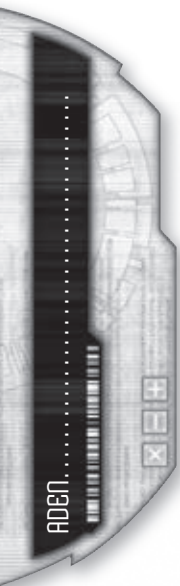
Aden is never directly involved in the local drug trade; she stays well behind the scenes and controls everything through a handful of principal agents. In addition to her spokesman, Markarayan, she maintains a relationship with the Grey Wolves and the Kabul Maffiya.

Aden's Breed

For all of the material treasures Aden hoards, the most impressive aspect of her collection is the creatures protecting it. Since making her presence known, Aden has been breeding species including dracoforms and dracomorphs. She raises them from hatchlings and sets them out to guard her lairs.

Genetics is the only area where the great dragon has stepped into the Sixth World. She matches draconic breeding practices with the genetic engineering technology of Universal Omnitech. The company utilizes their breakthrough genetic marker alteration technology to engineer dracomorphs. It is hard to say what Aden hopes to gain from the genetic manipulation. I can tell you that the thing guarding the drug routes near her lair in the Alborz Mountains has a mean streak and is about as damn close to unkillable as they come.

So far as I know, Aden does not hold shares in Universal Omnitech or any other corp. Nor does she permit UO to keep

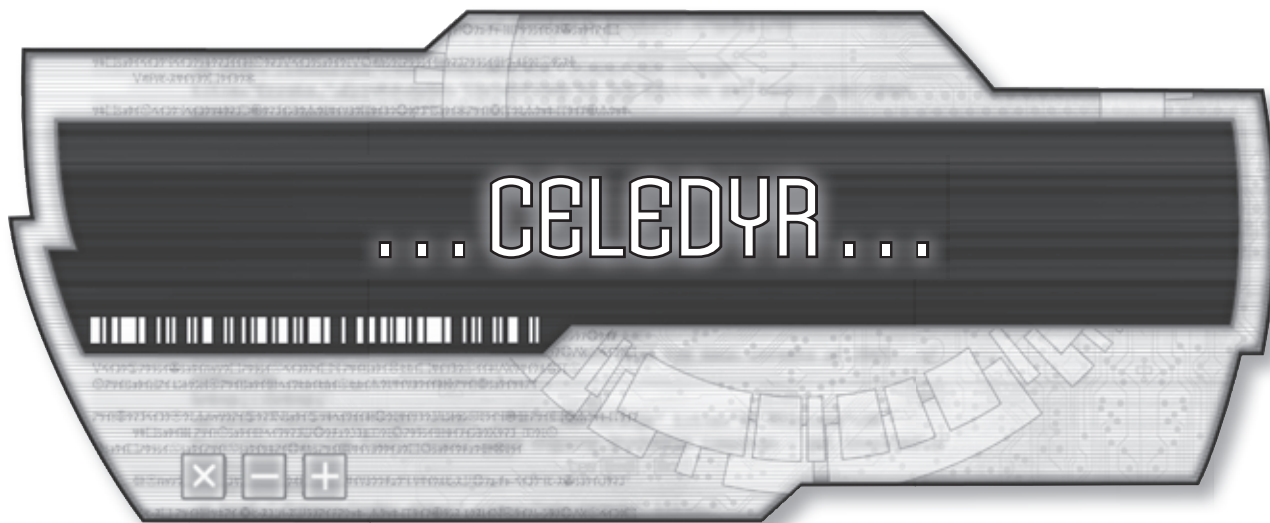


any of the specimens they grow. Instead the dragon sits on an extremely short list of special friends to the corporation. This friendship is responsible for UO's recent opening of a laboratory in Morocco, a second in Islamabad, and a third very secretive facility in Turkestan somewhere along the new Silk Road.

- For all of the secrecy surrounding the worm, most of what Aden does seems mundane. This is the first thing about the dragon that really scares me. If you really start to consider the implications of a dragon doing genetic experiments, you'd be scared too.
- Plan 9
- You're starting to sound like Axis Mundi. There is nothing malevolent about Aden's selective breeding program. Metahumans do it all the time with our pets and even with ourselves. We experiment with different matches until we find the one we feel will produce the best results.
- Butch
- This isn't a high school student experimenting with fruit flies in the science lab. Aden is breeding dracoforms to have specific genetic traits. We know that the dragon couldn't care less about the continued survival of metahumanity, so who is to say Aden isn't breeding these things as weapons to use against us in some future battle?
- Plan 9
- The relationship between Universal Omnitech and Aden might be born out of necessity. SIRRUSH dracoforms are notoriously difficult to develop past the hatchling stage. They require a special diet that includes plants, which have been extinct for decades. Aden could easily have sought out the corporation to help bring the new dragon into this world.
- Frosty



ADEN.....



Posted by: Cosmo

When I was contacted not too long ago about looking into some of Celedyr's dealings, I was hoping to land at least a week or two in Wales in return for my troubles. No such luck. While Caerleon is the location most associated with the NeoNET research ace, his lair in the Sandia Mountains near Albuquerque were the target I was asked to investigate. Lucky me—instead of green meadows and rolling hills, I got to hang out in the rock and dust with the tumbleweeds.

- Come on now. Albuquerque's not like that. Yeah, it's not as green as Wales, but it's also warmer and drier. And the sunsets there are spectacular. I'd say the deal worked out fine for you.
- Mika

My employers told me that according to their information, Celedyr had been spending more time at his lair in the Sandia Mountains lately, and they wanted to know what was going on there. I have to say, they put together a pretty impressive team—the day I arrived, I walked into NeoNET's local headquarters and no one gave me a second look. I made lots of visits during my time there, and while I couldn't get complete access to every part of the building (my team was good, but they weren't miracle workers), I was able to learn a few things about what Celedyr might be up to. On top of that, while I was messing around in the corporate headquarters, other members of my team were building relationships with some members of the Underground Awakened, a tribe of Awakened individuals who live largely without technology in the Sandia Mountains. By most accounts, Celedyr's lair is near some of the tunnels the UA use, and some even say that UA members are able to access parts of Celedyr's lair. This means that members of the UA know more than anyone else what's going on in Celedyr's lair. So, to keep things organized, I've broken up what I have to say into two parts—what we learned from the headquarters, and what we learned from the UA.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE HEADQUARTERS

The activities taking place at NeoNET's Albuquerque facilities are what everyone expects Celedyr to be interested in. Cutting-edge technology, new prototypes, and the latest in software developments. And, of course, loads of espionage, as everyone in the city tries to keep an eye on everyone else. We've talked before about the Edgecrusher combat bike, which inspired a flurry of runs as everyone tried to figure out the secrets behind its speed and handling. While the Edgecrusher hasn't taken off among shadowrunners yet—it's too fragile—some combat bikers have taken to it thanks to its exceptional handling. The more rough-and-tumble bikers won't use it, of course, but those who like to dart across the field and avoid contact find them great for staying out of everyone else's reach. I'd talk in detail about how Darren Xiu of the Hong Kong Cavaliers made a stunning goal on one of these when he completely out-pivoted every player on the field and made a clean shot into an essentially empty goal because no one was expecting him to be where he was, but that would very possibly be getting me farther off the subject than I should be.

While many different types of research are taking place in the city, the real name of the game in Albuquerque is software. The war in Bogotá has led to more powerful software being developed, and coders in the city are working to keep pushing the envelope. Of course for every move, there is a counter move, which often leads to an end result of stasis. Encrypt programs make a leap forward, then decrypt programs get a counter move. People get their standard upgrades, and everyone remains at about the same position relative to each other.

- Except the poor bastards who can't afford the upgrade plans. Don't be them.
- Glitch

During my first few trips to the building, I visited the software labs, which were exactly what I expected them to be—large rooms of people working in what some people would describe as sweatshop conditions, except for the fact that the workers love what they are doing. They often work sixteen-hour shifts, and the

only reason they don't work eighteen hours or twenty or more is that NeoNET forces them to get some sleep, since they're well aware that the human brain needs at least some downtime if it's going to continue to perform at a high level.

- The joke's on them, then, because most of these code monkeys go home and work on their own crap for five hours, then sleep for an hour, then get up and watch some cartoons or some such shit, then go back to work.
- Slamm-0!

I didn't bother trying to get access to the code the hackers in the room were working on, because it would have been meaningless to me, but I was able to get a look at some documents summarizing the projects the hackers were working on. It was pretty much what I expected it to be—upgrades, new versions of existing software, that kind of thing. The projects were not really secret—a lot of known programs were being worked on—though I'm sure some of the techniques they were employing were both bleeding edge and proprietary. That told me that the real interesting coding work was happening somewhere else.

It took me over a month to find it. The first clue was obvious—some astral exploration by my team members revealed two lower levels that didn't show up on building directories, and that couldn't be accessed by the regular elevators. Or, as it turned out, they couldn't be accessed unless you had the right pass. Thanks to the diligent hackers, I eventually got the clearance I needed, and I found my way down to the secret lower levels.

Initially they were disappointing. I wanted flickering lights, eerie atmosphere, and the occasional distant, echoing scream. What I got was office corridors, not especially nice, but at least well maintained. Linoleum floors (but nice linoleum) and plaster walls, not much else. The one thing that made it immediately different was the locks on every door; pretty much all of them required clearances that I didn't have, and there were no windows or anything on the doors to allow me even a look inside. The one room I got in on my first visit looked like a break room. It appeared to be used very rarely. The information I was able to find told me valuable things such as one room was working on "Project 82A9L," while another room hosted "Group 928A."

Needless to say, that was not a satisfactory result. So we buckled down and enhanced my security access, putting our team's hacker through all sorts of paces until I could get in some of these rooms. We had to proceed carefully; people in secured areas like this one tend to recognize each other, meaning they'd be able to quickly pick me out as a newcomer—or intruder.

It helps that I've been in business settings long enough to know how to enter a room and not be questioned. Look angry, step boldly, make all of your actions firm and decisive, and scowl at someone if they look like they're about to address you. While these people were pros and not easily cowed, this is basic human nature. People don't like to confront angry authorities. If said authority is not talking to them and seems like they're just going to go about their business and leave in short order, people are generally happy to let him go. The downside was I'd draw attention, but that shouldn't be much a problem because we were getting toward

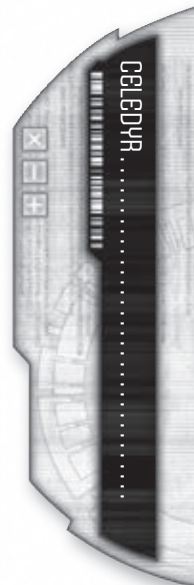
the end of my time in Albuquerque. By the time they got around to describing me to anyone, I'd most likely be out of town.

The other downside was that I couldn't stay in one place and gather a concerted amount of data about anything. I had to grab what I could get, and a lot of the information erased itself as soon as I left the secured area. The end result was that I was able to look at things that should have been locked away from me, and this was the basic information I came up with:

- The documents I saw talked about things that sounded a lot like artificial intelligences, but they didn't use that term. Instead, they described them as "electronic souls." I don't know if this was a stylistic preference of whoever wrote it, or if they are talking about something distinctly different. If the latter, I don't know what this difference would be.
- In the documents, corporate personnel seemed very excited about what they termed "parallel existence streams." They seemed to believe this would bring in significant revenue.
- There are other parties involved in this research, though it's difficult to tell what the nature of this partnership is. I don't know if they simply are sharing data, or if resources are being transferred between various megacorporations, or just what is happening. I don't know who all the partners are, but Evo seems to be one of them.
- The megacorporations that are not partners seem very interested in learning about what's going on at this facility. NeoNET has a team of twenty or so hackers working on dynamic security for the place, regularly adjusting tactics to stay ahead of the competition.

So what all this add up to, and what does it mean for Celedyr? There's no question that Celedyr is aware and approving of this research. It fits, generally speaking, with his areas of interest. Matrix and networking technologies have always been where his greatest interest lies, and whatever these electronic souls are, it fits right in those areas. The partnerships are interesting; obviously, if Saeder-Krupp is involved with Celedyr's project, that could have significant ramifications in the positioning among the dragons.

- It would also be significant if Aztechnology is involved. Anytime you're on the side of the Big A, you're on the opposite side of Ghostwalker. So if Aztechnology is one of the partners, Celedyr won't be able to do much significant outreach to Ghostwalker, which would limit his participation on that side of the issue. So partnering with S-K doesn't automatically put Celedyr in the anti-meta camp.
- Marcos
- Is it possible that the rumored electronic version of Corporate Court Chief Justice Hino is one of these electronic souls? If Evo is involved, could electronic personas be one of the things NeoNET's project is looking at?
- Nephrine
- Absolutely. Remember, Evo has the Dickens Program researching AIs, e-ghosts, and the like, while NeoNET has Project Imago and





INCOMING FEED.....



Eliohann/Cerberus/Neurosis or whatever the hell that thing is. The point is, both of them have an interest in a range of things that could fall under the heading of “digital entities.” Additionally, it’s possible that in the course of their research they’ve come up with some other entities.

- Baka Dabora
- What else is there?
- Ma’Fan

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE UNDERGROUND AWAKENED

The Underground Awakened have a simple philosophy. As the height of the Night of Rage, they took a look at what civilization had to offer and said, “No thanks.” In the light of all that violence, it’s difficult to blame them for taking a Rousseu-ish view of metahumanity—it is most pure in its natural state, and civilization only serves to corrupt.

This does not mean they live like animals; instead, the UA took to the hills to follow the communal ways of our pre-civilization forbears. They lived off the land, worked together, and eschewed technology. They dropped out of contact with most of society, and as a result most of society forgot about them. Celedyr, however, did not. He built his lair in the Sandia Mountains right on top of their caverns, or perhaps below them, or perhaps intermingled with them. The exact placement is unclear, but this much is known—The UA and Celedyr mingle with each other, and they seem to have good relations. The mystery is the bond

that backward-looking metahumans have with one of the most forward-looking dragons.

Though to be honest, calling this a “mystery” perhaps overstates it some, because at least one part of the solution is known. When the UA migrated into the Sandia Mountains and made a home for themselves in mountain caverns, they soon came across the local spirits known as the gan. These spirits were named after their counterparts in Apache mythology, who were mountain spirits that, by and large, treated humanity with kindness. They were the type of spirits who would bring gifts from the Giver of Life, or would provide the advice the Apache would need to live a better life—hunting techniques, medical knowledge, whatever. Sure, they could occasionally get a little vindictive when crossed, but who doesn’t have that side to them? My opinion is, anyone dumb enough to cross a messenger from the being they believe to be their deity deserves what they get.

The UA and the gan seemed to have got along famously, but you don’t have to take my word for it. Through a lot of preliminary conversations, the socially gifted members of my team were able to build a relationship with a member of the UA, to the point where he felt comfortable taking one of them up to their caves and giving him a tour. A few things didn’t happen—our man didn’t meet any of the gan, and he didn’t set foot in any part of Celedyr’s lair. But plenty of other interesting things happened, and my teammate—an earnest guy named Churchill—wrote it up nicely, so I won’t bother making my own summary when there’s already a perfectly good document out there.

CELEDYR.....



ELIOHANN/NEUROSIS/CERBERUS

In case you haven't been keeping up with the whole ElioHann/Neurosis/Cerberus situation, a little briefing is needed to help the rest of this make as much sense as possible. We'll start with the known facts about these three individuals. First, there was a dragon named ElioHann, the only known dragon with a datajack. He worked with an R&D company called Emerging Futures, and he was deep in the Matrix when Crash 2.0 hit. The Jormungand virus devastated him, and his heart stopped. For all points and purposes he died, but instead of being buried he was put on life support.

- By order of Celedyr, incidentally, since Transys Neuronet had acquired Emerging Futures.
- Plan 9

Cerberus is a fixer, one who does all of his business over the Matrix. He appears as either a faceless man dressed in grey or the three-headed dog of legend. He has been attached to a project named Project Imago at Transys Neuronet; rumor is that this project has something to do with uploading information from organic brains to digital machines. The scope of these efforts and ultimate end result is not known.

Neurosis is the most unclear of the three. We have record of a hacker who went by that name—well, actually, we have records of at least a half-dozen hackers who went by that name. The most notable for our purposes, though, is one who turned over a file about ElioHann and Cerberus over to our very Plan 9, and who then forced his way into JackPoint and commented on Plan 9's subsequent distillation of that information.

One more fact: We know that when ElioHann was with Transys Neuronet, he was working on something called

Project Cerberus. The goals of this project, as with Project Imago, are unclear. It's commonly believed that ElioHann was using the project to experiment on himself, but the nature of his experiments is not known. The most common theory, though, is that he exploring ways to build or transfer consciousness into the Matrix.

- Don't get me started on this. What makes people think that a digital copy of them would actually be *them*? Do they think that if they were cloned, the clone would be them? A copy is not the same as the original—even if it's perfect.
- Goat Foot
- You're getting us into questions of what defines one's "self," which is probably beyond the scope of this article. But I'll just say that to some, having a version of themselves with their memory and personality means that the crucial things about themselves continue to live on, which is close enough to functional immortality for them.
- Glitch

Once the facts are out there, we're left with a ton of questions, many of which are intriguing. Did Project Cerberus succeed, and is Cerberus ElioHann's online consciousness? Did Neurosis turn over the information to Plan 9 to harm Cerberus or help him? Could Neurosis and Cerberus be the same being? If so, is it deliberately working through two different personas, or does it have a fractured identity where the two personas are not aware they are part of a whole? How does what ElioHann is or was figure into their duality? I have no good answers to these questions, but I know that diving into them can take you down a long, dark rabbit hole.

Report from Churchill, 3/13/74

I was looking forward to walking around the caverns in the Sandia Mountains until I got off the mule. I told our contact, whose real name will not appear here and will be called Doug throughout this report, that I'd be happy to provide just about any means of transportation the world had to offer to get us to the mountains, but he refused. Mules, he said. We were going to take mules. So I rode on a beast for a good ten kilometers, and I'm pretty sure I could have walked it faster, and I know for sure I wouldn't have bounced up and down along the mountain switchbacks as much as that mule did, but once I was on the back of the thing the die was cast, so I took my ride and then spend a fair amount of time walking in the way that people walk when they don't want any part of their inner thighs touching each other.

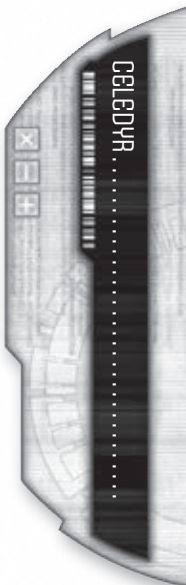
But I've gone through an entire paragraph here and not said anything about the object of my report, so perhaps this would be a good time for me to focus. I promised Doug I wouldn't say anything about the specific location of the cave, so I won't, and I'm certainly not going to transmit the exact coordinates as recorded

by my commlink in a separate encrypted file. Once we arrived, we walked in, and it was clear that these people had the benefit of nearly two decades to make these caverns their home. It was also clear that they didn't have the benefit of industrial equipment to settle those caves. They'd done a whole lot of good work with pillows and blankets, and of course even ancient people knew how to shape rock, so they'd enlarged some caves and polished some walls, but there was still a rough feeling about the place. I think they like it that way. If they wanted finished and modern, they'd live in the city.

Doug and I chatted as we walked in, small talk about blankets and the smells of chili peppers that filled the caves. My first chance to talk about what I wanted to talk about came when a small, barefoot child ran into the chamber we were standing in, nearly bumped into me, looked at me with wide eyes, than ran right back out the way she had come.

"I guess I wasn't what she was looking for," I said.

"You're a stranger," Doug said. "We don't get too many of them around here, so it's a little startling for her."



“But people know I’m coming, right? I don’t, you now, want to catch the gan by surprise or anything. How well do they react to surprise?”

Doug laughed. “The gan are never surprised. And you would not see them until they are ready to be seen.”

“Do you think I’ll see any of them?”

“No.” Doug didn’t hesitate for a second before offering that answer.

We went on for a time and saw some of the caverns the UA uses for mushroom farming, though Doug was frank in saying the farms only provide a small part of their food. They have some above-ground gardens they maintain, and they do some hunting as well. I couldn’t help but ask about the vast supply of food sitting just kilometers away from them. If they have a shortage or a disaster, couldn’t they run into town and buy what they needed.

“I suppose,” he said. “We’re traditionalists, but not radicals—if we had to choose between survival and maintaining the purity of our way of life, we’d choose survival. But it hasn’t been an issue yet. Whenever we worry about running short, the gan are always available with tips or ideas to help us come across more food.”

“Why would they do that? What do they get out of the deal?”

Doug then gave me a look making it clear that he was thinking that I was clearly part of what was wrong with the world. All he said, though, was “They don’t have to get anything out of it. It’s just the way they are.”

- People often ask the same question about spirits doing things such as cooperating with intelligence agencies, and if it’s a question we’re going to ask, we should not forget what should be obvious—spirits are both like us and not like us. The not-like-us part is what people often focus on. Spirits have no real need for material goods, so how do you buy their loyalty? This, though, is where the like-us part comes in. Like us, spirits often want companionship. They want to feel valued and liked. Or even loved. They want people to do the things they want them to do, meaning they want power. Just because they don’t want money doesn’t mean their not susceptible to some of the same levers we use on material beings.
- Elijah
- Or you could just hand over a small portion of you soul to them. That can work a lot like currency.
- Haze

We kept walking around for a while, and we made enough turns, ascents, and descents to ensure that I’d be a useless guide if I ever came back to the place. It wasn’t one continuous series of caverns, though. We came outside at least three different times, though it was only to make short walks to another entrance. We also didn’t thoroughly explore the caverns we were in; a number of times there were passageways that Doug hurried me past before we could explore, and there was once when I saw a blanket that looked like a simple decoration wobble, as if it was blown from a breeze behind it. I had figured from the outset that there were things they would not be showing me, and I was their guest, so I didn’t confront Doug about that. But I had a job to do, so I kept targeting him with questions that wouldn’t scare him off. I also had a few microdrones in my pocket, but I had to be

careful—there is, of course, no Matrix access in the area and no nodes that I could find, so I’d be operating of the strength of my commlink’s signal and nothing else. I didn’t want to lose any of them, and I especially didn’t want to leave them behind where they’d be found. I deployed them when I could, and I was especially happy when I got one to sneak behind that wall blanket that I mentioned before. I couldn’t monitor all the drones I sent out, since looking too scattered or distracted would be a giveaway, but for that one, I made sure I kept an ARO up so I could see what it was seeing. More on that later.

As we traveled, Doug pointed out a cavern that was off limits due to structural instability, by which he meant that the damn thing could collapse on any occupant’s head whenever it felt like it. I figured there was a hook in there somewhere, so I went after it. We chatted for a while about the dangers of traveling in caves, I showed off my knowledge of the word “spelunking” (which I picked up from one of those old Hardy Boys trids), and eventually we got to what I wanted to talk about—the variety of dangers that wanderers in the caverns might encounter. Especially the danger of getting lost.

“The honest truth is, if we got separated, I’d be best off throwing myself on a sharp stalagmite and ending it right there, because I wouldn’t have a chance of finding my way out,” I said.

“You don’t have to worry,” Doug said. “Even if I somehow lost track of you, one of us would find you.”

“Or maybe the gan would. They know these caverns and are helpful, right? So maybe they’d give me a hand out.”

“Maybe. But they’d probably do it through us. They’d come to one of us and tell us where to find you instead of leading you out themselves.”

“But what if I was wandering around, lost, and I went someplace they didn’t want me to be. Wouldn’t they just appear and get me somewhere more appropriate?”

Doug smiled, the way someone smiles at a dim-witted dog that’s having trouble catching a bouncing ball. “They don’t need to appear to you to steer you where they want to go. If they don’t want you someplace, they’ll simply make sure you don’t go there.”

“So they’re kind of in charge here.”

“We don’t really need to subscribe to the rest of the world’s notions of hierarchies here. No one group needs to be designated as being in charge—we coexist and respect each other’s territory.”

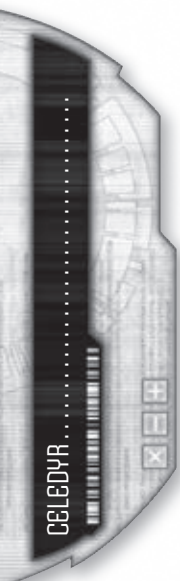
“Makes sense. So if they don’t want you in a certain area, they mind control you out of it. What do you do if they are in an area you don’t want them to be in?”

“Why would we not want to the gan to be somewhere?” Doug asked.

This just confirmed what I’ve always known, and that’s that the only people who ignore hierarchies are those who would rather not acknowledge that they’re on the bottom of them. The gan could take over the UA’s minds whenever they wanted, and the UA let the gan go wherever they want. The power dynamic is clear.

If the gan are above the UA in this particular power structure, then the UA only exists in these caverns because the gan allow it. So what do the gan get out of the relationship? I thought that at this point, I knew Doug well enough to ask.

“They were sent to help us. Why would they then not want to be among us?”



You can see the trouble I was having here. Doug was trying to describe to me a situation where people are not engaged in mutual exploitation, but rather a situation where people dwell together and help each other out of a feeling of mutual respect, without expecting to gain an advantage from the relationship. Honestly, who lives like that?

- Let's revisit the list. Companionship, feeling valued and liked—these are all things the gan are clearly getting from the UA, and that may well be enough for them. But there are a fair number of UA residents and they are clearly breeding, so if the gan wanted to drain a little energy from the UA every now and again, it would hardly be missed, and the actions may well be welcomed. That's not a bad setup for a group of spirits.
- Elijah

But let's say I bought all this, and believed that the UA and the gan just happened to be the perfect neighbors for each other. There's another element in the caverns, and it's an element that typically has not been engaged in pure altruism. Or anything close. So why did Celedyr plop a lair down in this happy, supposedly technology-free communal utopia?

That, of course, was a question I couldn't ask directly. In fact, while Doug generally was happy to talk about the gan, he was more evasive when I talked about the resident dragon. It wasn't an easy subject to broach, but I got the chance when there was some sort of loud rumble from the ground beneath us. It was a deep sound that vibrated the earth a little.

I stopped walking for a second, then looked around as the sound faded.

"What was that? Celedyr coming home?"

Doug didn't smile, and he might have scowled. "The dragon's whereabouts are none of our business."

"But you have to notice him coming or going sometimes, right? Dragons aren't always subtle."

"Dragons are exactly as subtle as they need to be. If they do not want to be seen, they will not be seen. And since we are good neighbors, we do not intrude where we are not wanted."

Doug refused to be drawn out any more on the subject. Digging out any more information would require an extremely indirect approach, but that's the sort of thing I'm supposedly paid to do, so I sucked it up and did it. For part of our tour I got Doug talking about metaphysics, which is something he's interested in, so he can go on at length about it. I played devil's advocate, mainly to keep him talking, and that led us to a discussion of the nature of life (stick with me here—I promise that relevance will be forthcoming).

"One of the real problems was that humanity hadn't come up with entirely clear definitions of life even before the world changed this century. Sure, some things were clear, but the boundaries were fuzzy. Are viruses truly 'alive'? When should a fetus be considered actively alive? And what rights and levels of respect should be given to the various forms of life that are out there? Some people thought that the Awakening would with this question, as it brought up the concept that if a being has an aura, it is alive. That quickly fell off the table, though, because it's not just living things that have auras—it's magic. Spirits, for example, are believed by some to be magical, non-sapient constructs, and

the fact that they have an aura will not convince anyone otherwise. They find themselves in the same situation as things such as artificial intelligences—they have to convince the world of their sapience so that they can gain the rights that other intelligent creatures possess."

"I'm kind of surprised you are keeping up with AI rights," I said.

"We live a simple life, but that does not mean we are completely unaware of the world around us. Some of the citizens of these caverns have a gift form bringing news of the outside world into this area with them."

That had to be a reference to Celedyr, but I wasn't going to push my luck by forcing Doug to admit that. I took another tack instead.

"So how do spirits and AIs convince the world that they are sapient?"

Doug smiled. "I have a personal theory on this," he said. "There's the Turing Test, of course, and other measures whose effectiveness can be argued about indefinitely, but in the end if people are to be convinced of the sentience and sapience of these beings, it won't be because of some test or other objective measure. It will be an emotional reaction, something that comes as the end result of someone actively convincing others about the plight of non-corporeal beings and getting them to feel empathy for the difficulties they face. That individual who does the persuading may be a spirit, an artificial intelligence, or some corporeal being lobbying on their behalf. But like so many advances in rights over the years, the final push will not come because of a logical argument. It will come from an emotional argument made by a good-sized group of persuasive individuals."

I thought I could hear what was being said between the lines, and I did my best not to surface it in a way that would set off Doug's alarms or make him clam up. "That's an interesting point," I said. "But how do you go about recruiting people to a cause like that?"

"Through whatever means you have at your disposal," Doug said. "Someone people can be bought, but their loyalty is, of course, questionable. Some people are close to being allies. They just need a nudge, and that nudge can come in one of a number of ways. And sometimes, if you put the right pressure on the right people, you can get certain obstacles to your progress to just fade away."

So there it is. One the one hand we have Celedyr, *draco digitalis*, a dragon interested in new frontiers in technology and intelligence, and the ultimate sponsor of Eliohann's Project Imago. On the other hand you have the gan, spirits that are supposedly quite helpful to humans, but also spirits who can be quite persuasive when they want to be and who are protective of their territory beneath the mountains. And on the third hand (hey, with all the technology and toxic waste that's everywhere, third hands are abundant), you have the UA, dropouts from society who still manage to be aware of the possibility of a movement to persuade people of the sapience and sentience of a variety of incorporeal beings.

What does this all add up to? Something I'm not paid to figure out. But I have one more note—remember the drones I sent out? None of them ended up recording any data. Not a thing. I got them all back, but they hadn't transmitted anything while

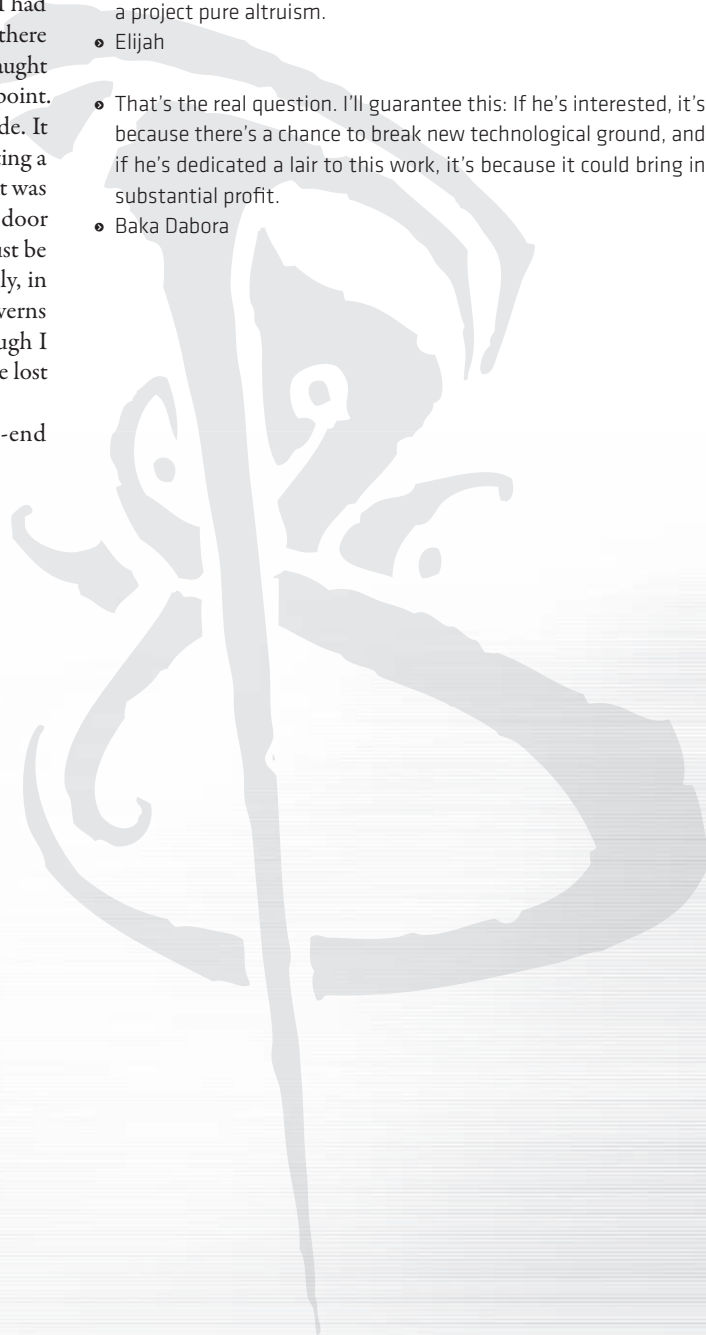


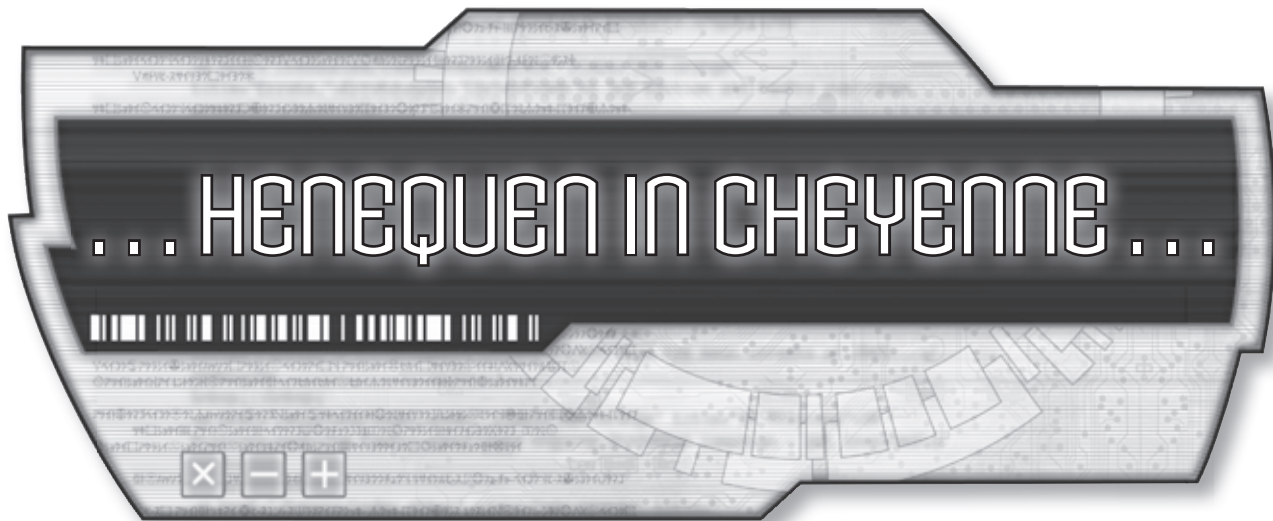
they had been out, and they hadn't recorded anything internally. So for a group of spirits and technology-shunning cave dwellers, these people have some awfully good Matrix security. But there was the one drone I sent behind the wall hanging, the one whose progress I monitored. It wandered through some dark caverns for a while, generally heading downward. There were other passages leading here and there, but the drone was carefully watching the cave floor for both traces of heat and for places where dust and dirt had been disturbed, with the goal of following what passed for the main route. Eventually it made its way to a security checkpoint. No metahumans, just scanners and machines and a metal floor that would likely fry whoever was standing on it the moment they turned out not to be who they were supposed to be. I had the drone look the area over for a time, and saw mainly a door I had no hope of getting through. The drone wandered here and there for a time, not seeing anything significant to do, but then I caught a break. Someone walked down the hall and into the checkpoint. I was able to get the drone on her pant legs and hitch a ride. It took a few minutes for her to get scanned (I didn't risk getting a look at her face, so I can't say anything about her other than it was a human-sized female wearing dark pants), then the large door opened and she strode ahead. I caught a glimpse of what must be part of Celedyr's local hoard. It gleamed coldly, metallically, in a long room. It was brighter than any other place in the caverns I had seen. The treasures lined every wall I could see, though I didn't see for long before the signal and the drone itself were lost for good.

The hoard in question was row after row of high-end mainframes.

End Churchill report

- Now there's some paydata. If you have the balls to break into a dragon's lair and steal what's stored on there, that is.
- Riser
- I'm happy to speculate about what this all adds up to, because it doesn't seem that tricky. Celedyr, on behalf of Elohann, is going to be working for more recognition of AI rights, and possibly spirit rights. The gan are acting as advisers, and they might add some of their persuasive techniques to the cause.
- Nephrine
- But what does Celedyr get out of it? It's not likely that a dragon is going to set up an entire lair in an area just so he can get help on a project pure altruism.
- Elijah
- That's the real question. I'll guarantee this: If he's interested, it's because there's a chance to break new technological ground, and if he's dedicated a lair to this work, it's because it could bring in substantial profit.
- Baka Dabora





... HENEQUEN IN CHEYENNE ...

- I made a call out to a friend in the NAN and asked if he could put together some information on Henequen. He took the job with one big request: no names. Considering the risk he's taking, I'm honoring that. I'd like all of you to keep speculation on his identity to yourself. He did a decent job putting together pieces of the puzzle, but feel free (as always) to chime in on anything he didn't cover.
- FastJack

I wonder how many times since the news came out about Henequen that he's heard a crack about the "arms race" and his lack thereof? I'll bet the count matches the number of unexplained disappearances in the Cheyenne area among known associates of the feathered serpent. All kidding aside, Henequen was a great man to know and is now a great dragon to know if you need products moved anywhere in the world. These days you just need to look for him in a different place.

Let me lay some quick groundwork first before I get too much further. Henequen was the name of a very well-connected fixer in Denver, a rainforest shaman who had a serious issue with the Azzies. As a fixer he specialized in import/export and was known as the go-to guy for getting anything to or from anywhere. He would trade almost anything for arms, and it was known on the streets that wherever those weapons ended up, they'd fall into the hands of people who would point them at guys working for Aztechnology. Whether it was the Aztlan sector of Denver back before Ghostwalker laid claim to the town, down in the Yucatan before that got settled, or more recently in Amazonia, Henequen was known as a staunch supporter of anyone who opposed the Azzies. He worked out of the Sioux Sector up in Denver until Ghostwalker came to town and politely invited the fixer to vacate.

When GW gave Henequen his walking papers the truth came out that Henequen was not a man, but a feathered serpent. The Denver shadows went crazy; fantastic stories started flying out of nowhere. Henequen never talked about his past or where he's from, and most of what is told about him is rumor. But there are a few facts in the mix. By building on what can be confirmed and making some choices about which parts of what rumors to believe, I've put together a pretty probable sketch of the feathered serpent's

history. Before the revelation of his true nature, Henequen claimed to be a rainforest shaman. "Henequen" is the name of a plant indigenous to the Yucatan peninsula, and I don't need to tell you that the place was a bloody war zone. Rebels and Aztlan military tore each other to pieces until the local spirits got tired of their domain being corrupted and enforced a peace of sorts. Combine the source of his name together with his abiding hatred for Aztlan and the fact he's a feathered serpent, and it's no stretch to figure Henequen once called the Yucatan home. Probably still does, no matter where he's settled, and it's quite likely he'll always fight to free his home.

When his cover got blown, everyone in Denver freaked out about how they'd been dealing with a dragon without knowing it. I really think they should have added the word "great," but I digress. A few Denver-area runners cut ties with Henequen over the revelation, but most looked at the solid reputation he had developed and just changed the contact number to reflect his new home. The nice thing about an import/export operation is it doesn't really matter whether it's based in the Sioux Sector of Denver or the Sioux Nation capitol, as products get shipped and received all over the world. The real pros know that.

Like I said, Ghostwalker was civil to Henequen and let him leave peacefully, without drama or unnecessary conflict. Henequen moved his operations a hundred and sixty kilometers north to Cheyenne in the Sioux Nation, without any apparent enduring animosity between him and the white wyrm. Henequen Enterprises (HE) was quickly established in Cheyenne and continued operations without missing a beat. Of course, the new hometown was not without its problems. Cheyenne is the capital of the Sioux Nation, and like every such city it's rife with corruption, organized crime, and long-standing feuds. Tossing a new player, especially a dragon, into the mix made Cheyenne a really interesting place for a few years after the move, and the ripples of those waves are still roiling the waters today.

First let me give you the rundown of Henequen's move to town and some of the subsequent effects. Since HE already had an office in Cheyenne, the physical move only required expanding the offices from a single storefront to the entire strip mall and remodeling the area, both inside and out, along with



the surrounding lots. HE still has that same storefront for casual transactions. The rest of a block-long office complex has been modeled to resemble adobe housing (though they used reinforced ferrocrete instead of clay), and the buildings are used for storage, shipping, and business meetings. The grounds have four helipads, each large enough to land an Ares Dragon, and four hangars for storage, repair, and fueling of the HE copters. The company has six registered helicopters. Four of them have the unmistakable paint scheme of HE, which is a full-coverage paint job of brightly colored feathers. Now, I have to point out this is not a new development. From the very beginning, long before the revelation, HE helicopters were feathered Ares Dragons. Seems Henequen had a sly—or sick—sense of humor all along. The other two Ares Dragons are painted matte black with no markings other than the smallest display of registration numbers allowed.

- At least one of those Dragons isn't matte black—it's ruthenium coated. And all of the HE Dragons are armed. Unlike their owner (ha ha).
- Rigger X

- Another crunchy joker/snack for Henequen.
- Bull

The HE headquarters is a regular target for thefts. The fact that the owner is a dragon does not deter contractors from hiring runners to grab valuable items being transported by the firm. Runners would be wise to remember the place is owned by a dragon, and the defenses are worthy of the owner. Evening security is run by a half-dozen cockatrices and their handler. The day shift is augmented, literally, by a warform cybered cougar. The thing is set up with an RFID scanner. Broadcast the right code and you're all good; don't, and you get mauled.

- HE had an incident last year with the cougar and a pilot who landed and got mauled inside his helicopter when he didn't activate his RFID before opening the door. When you get security protocols, follow them!
- Pistons

- All those scary critters are for the mundanes to see and fear. His real security hangs out on the astral; no sign they're there until they move in to take care of a security breach. Henequen keeps no less than four spirits in the astral at all times scanning auras. They don't give warnings, and they're not interested in stand-up fights. First hint they've seen you is when you're hit by their powers from cover. The street shams of Cheyenne know there is no shame in fleeing from Henequen Enterprises HQ.

- Haze

- Same goes for HE's other facilities around the Sioux Nation. Henequen has attracted some solid arcane assets to the company, and he uses them wisely. A former colleague of mine took a job with HE and told me Henequen requires every skilled summoner on his staff to bind as many spirits as they can control to be used as site security and escorts for shipments.

- Lyran

HE puts out contracts to recover stolen goods quite often even though they have their own internal investigation division. Nice thing is, jobs for HE often come with great leads from their investigators. They don't use their own people so that they can avoid inter-corporate and legal issues, especially since many of the items that need to be recovered are stolen or illegal in the first place.

Speaking of illegal, the second hurdle Henequen had to make when he arrived in Cheyenne was finding a way to get along with local organized crime syndicates. Henequen already had a reputation as a survivor before he came to Cheyenne: Henequen the fixer had been targeted twice by William Whiteclay, previous head of the Lakota Mafia, while still in Denver and survived both attempts. Shortly after Whiteclay found out Henequen the feathered serpent was relocating to Cheyenne he ended up in the hospital, victim of a heart attack. It seems that having a dragon you've targeted move into your territory can be stressful.

From '62 (when Henequen relocated) to '72 (when Whiteclay got a terminal case of lead poisoning), the pair went back and forth in the shadows of Cheyenne. They seemed to develop a certain level of respect for one another; neither ever made a direct attempt on the life of the other. Instead they maneuvered for control of criminal enterprises in the city like it was a chess game. Henequen really had little interest in criminal expansion in Cheyenne—his business was always smuggling—but he enjoyed the competition. Whiteclay kept him on his (figurative) toes.

Whiteclay's usurper has not been quite so cordial. I'll get more into that action later, but first let me relate Henequen's history with the law and politics of Cheyenne. Moving in was smooth. The local government happily accepted his business with the appropriate bribes and tax forms. The trouble came when certain divisions of the government came into disagreement with other departments on how to work with the feathered serpent. Well, that and the serpent's bid for a seat on the Sovereign Tribal Council.

Even though Henequen was already a Sioux citizen, the fact that he was not a human as most believed him to be caused a bit of an uproar and drew a lot of unwanted attention. Henequen had a few friends in the Sioux government thanks to his well-known dislike for Aztlan, but the revelation he'd been lying about his nature gained him some enemies as well, including a person codenamed Sinopa, director of the Office of Military Intelligence (OMI). Before Henequen settled in Cheyenne, Whiteclay had been doing a steady business with Sinopa. Whiteclay had eyes and ears everywhere, and he provided Sinopa with solid information on everything happening all over the Sioux, in exchange for some leeway on certain legal issues.

The shadows got exciting when Henequen moved to town; many parties placed side bets on how the trio would settle their conflicts. In the end Henequen's hatred for Aztlan and tight connection to La Venta were more valuable to the OMI than Whiteclay's internal intelligence network. Henequen was also a lot easier for the intel director to deal with, as the dragon asked for fewer favors than the Lakota crime boss. Whiteclay lost serious traction, and he eventually succumbed to poisoning. There are many suspects in his poisoning; some fingers point to Henequen, but others blame Camber Crowell, Whiteclay's former chief lieutenant. Rumors said that in the last year of Whiteclay's life, Crowell grew discontented with his boss' growing weakness,

and he decided a change in leadership was needed. The power structure in Cheyenne has become uncertain these days, what with rumors of a dragon civil war, and under the new leadership of Crowell, the local team may be making a comeback.

Speaking of La Venta and Henequen's years among the leadership of the anti-Aztlan/Aztechnology group: In Denver, Henequen focused La Venta's efforts heavily on the Aztlan Sector, trying to keep the Azzies off-balance. When GW kicked La Venta out of his city, Henequen lost a good number of undercover assets. But that loss quickly turned into a gain. Members of La Venta who were forced out of the Azzie sector of Denver were relocated all over Aztlan. Henequen's local intelligence operation became a network of spies and informants all across the Central American nation almost overnight. That network becomes more valuable all the time because his spies—who already had impeccable backgrounds as far as Aztlan security can tell—are now victims of a great dragon's injustice. They have an extra incentive to work against Ghostwalker, and the ability to look like martyrs to other Aztlaners.

- For runners looking to get into Aztlan and do some dirty work, Henequen and La Venta are great contacts. But be careful. The Azzies have tried to infiltrate them more than once. Give them any reason not to trust you and it's over. They don't take chances.
- Haze

Back when everyone thought he was a rainforest shaman, no one was surprised Henequen put significant resources into supporting agricultural and environmental research. He invested heavily in a Sioux-based botanical research firm called AgriAlternatives that was dedicated to engineering cash crops that could grow under any conditions. Henequen's support came with one proviso: flora indigenous to the Amazonian rain forest had to be included in the program. Since his hefty grant more than covered the costs, the research firm did not hesitate to take up the challenge.

The research generated a few dozen species of rainforest flora that can carry out photosynthesis with very little light. As long as moisture, nutrients, and other environmental factors were present, they can flourish with intermittent doses of artificial light. Henequen used these engineered plants to create a jungle lair that fills an abandoned copper mine somewhere in the Black Hills.

At about this time AgriAlternatives got hit by a series of crippling runs. Their data was valuable and there were a lot of dangerous corps in agri-business, but founder and CEO Martin Darkhorse thought at least some of them were inside jobs. He was angry at Henequen for not doing enough to protect his people. That anger turned to hate after he went looking for work when his company went under. The Wind River Corporation of Laramie, famous for the Shoshoni Hydroponics Farm project, was happy to take him on, and they made him executive research director. Which is when he gained access to WRC's database and discovered every bit of AgriAlternatives' research was already there, tagged as originating with Henequen Enterprises. Darkhorse now has a serious grudge against Henequen Enterprises and Henequen himself. Wind River's execs came down on his side when Darkhorse used his own records to prove HE had pirated the information. Relations between WRC and HE have been chilly ever since. It's not a conflict, and the two sides still deal

with each other; Henequen supplies the OMI with intel they need to protect the SHF from Aztechnology, and other business is conducted, but nobody's friendly.

All that history sets the stage for the current events—and as we all know, ignorance of current events can bite us in the ass. The big things to be aware of this second: Henequen's relationship with Sinopa; a serious increase in recent Aztechnology operations targeting Henequen; his new feud with the Lakota mafia; the Concrete Sidewinders; Wind River and with Martin Darkhorse; Henequen's entertainment investments; and his relations with the Tribal Council.

The current situation between Henequen and Sinopa can best be described as tense. Henequen strained his relations with the OMI director when he tried for an STC seat, and the current issues between the dragons has the director trying to distance himself for fear of being perceived as being on the wrong side in the controversy. On the other hand he doesn't want to lose the benefit of Henequen's La Venta contacts, which are even more valuable as Aztlan gains ground in the south. Amazonia isn't out yet, but they are definitely on the ropes. If Aztlan wins that war they may look north toward NAN lands. Closer to home Sinopa is aware of the connections being built between the new leader of the Lakota mafia, Travis Siouxkiller, and Aztechnology/Aztlan, as well as the crime boss' escalating conflict with Henequen. Henequen has his metaphorical hands full trying to deliver enough good intel to Sinopa to keep their partnership reasonably stable. This need has Henequen pushing extra work out in that direction while Siouxkiller and the mafia try and thwart the dragons efforts.

With so many of their assets tied up down south, you'd think Aztlan/Aztechnology would be leaving any issues to the north on the back burner. In many ways they have, but not their war with Henequen. The feathered serpent is fueling troubles within and around their country, including down south, so geography is not a consideration. It's no surprise the shadows of Cheyenne and the entire Sioux Nation are busting with jobs intended to bring Henequen grief. The vast majority of those jobs can be traced back to Aztechnology. The Azzies have teams making steals from Henequen Enterprise unmanned transports, but the stolen cargo never hits the streets. Street stories say that all HE merchandise, no matter how valuable, is being dumped in mineshafts or far out in the wastes—anywhere it can't be found. It's a pretty clear message from the Azzies to Henequen: "We don't want what you have; we want to ruin you."

The attacks are reducing the number of transport companies willing to take HE goods over land. Henequen has in turn started hiring more independent couriers, but the cost is exponentially higher, cutting into his profits. Henequen Enterprises has also put some extra covert security on a few shipments. None of those have been hit yet, which leads me to think the dragon's got a rat in the house. And if I think it then I'm sure Henequen has already thought it. HE helicopters have had a few close calls in the last few months, too. If anti-aircraft weapons were easier to get in the Sioux, I'm sure they would have lost a bird or two already. None of these attacks lead straight back to the Azzies, but how often do jobs lead directly to their source?

All of this activity on the roads and around the country is one of the reasons why Henequen has sunk his claws into a go-gang. The Concrete Sidewinders are the largest go-gang in

the Sioux Nation. They're bikers and hot-rodders that blaze along the highways of the Sioux, calling I-80 between Ogallala and Cheyenne their turf but cruising anywhere there's pavement. These guys are all speed freaks; many race the NAN racing circuit. The gang as a whole has a solid win record, so not only do they like speed, they can ride. For years Whiteclay tried to get them under his umbrella, offering the incentives he'd used to tame so many other Sioux go-gangs, but their leader, Mustang Sally, refused every offer. She was quite famous for her tag line: "A wild mustang's gotta run free."

Story is those were her last words, spoken to her killer right before she was shot in the head at a diner outside Vegas. She was running solo when the hit took place, no witnesses, so the story's just a story, but it makes a good legend. Whiteclay lost no time spreading money among her possible successors and promising to find her killer if they'd ride for the Lakota mafia.

His search didn't take long. One of Whiteclay's own men, an up-and-comer named Trevor Siouxkiller ("sioux" means enemy in Lakota), came to him and laid out the details of how he'd solved Whiteclay's problem. Siouxkiller expected Whiteclay to reward him, maybe up his rank a few levels, for bringing the gang to his side. Problem was Whiteclay had promised the Sidewinders he would deliver Sally's killer to the gang for retribution. At the time he gave his word, Whiteclay had no idea one of his own men had pulled the trigger. Now he was stuck—Whiteclay may have been a crook but when he gave his word, he kept it. He told Siouxkiller he had no choice but to give him up to the Sidewinders. Then he got the final surprise of his life when Siouxkiller killed his guards and then him.

Siouxkiller stepped into the sudden power vacuum at the top of the Lakota Mafia with no protests from the guys he stepped over. He told Fast Freddie, Mustang Sally's successor as leader of the Concrete Sidewinders, that Whiteclay had ordered the hit. Fast Freddie, with the help of a shaman, saw through the lie and broke off the brand-new relationship between the criminal organizations. Siouxkiller did not like getting called a liar, especially when it was true, and declared war on the gang. Fast Eddie knew his go-gang could not match the Lakota Mafia's firepower, so he threw the Sidewinders in with the most powerful rival of the mafia he could find: Henequen. When Siouxkiller sent his people after the Sidewinders, Henequen sent his agents after the Lakota—and his weren't people. Siouxkiller was smart enough to back off fast, but he knew hanging on to the number one position with the Lakota—not to mention his life—meant he had to do something. The something he chose to do was sell his soul to the devil: Aztechnology. So now the Lakota mafia in Cheyenne is headed by Siouxkiller, with the backing of Aztechnology. While the mob sees the benefits of being sponsored by a megacorp—having no direct attacks from Henequen topping that list—they're not thrilled with being a wholly owned subsidiary. Which means Siouxkiller's control of the criminal organization is not solid. Expect Henequen to play on this rift, using politics and leverage to hurt Aztechnology and get Siouxkiller out.

Henequen also has enemies among companies and businesses that aren't criminal. Remember Martin Darkhorse and the Wind River Corporation? WRC doesn't have a real issue with Henequen, they're just not fond of the way he conducts business, but Darkhorse hates him. One history point I didn't mention left



out a minute ago—Darkhorse had been in preliminary talks with Aztechnology about selling his little company to the megacorp immediately before AgriAlternatives started having its runner problems. Even though Darkhorse has been very successful since the loss of his firm, he would have been rich—and retired—if the deal had gone through.

Wind River Corporation has no fondness for Aztechnology. When they were bringing the Shoshoni Hydroponics Farm project to fruition the megacorp was sabotaging their projects, going after their data, and attempting extractions of key personnel. These go on, but not on any large scale, the Azzies would like WRC's agrotech but it's not a high priority. Except recently they tried to extract Darkhorse; it was supposedly an involuntary extraction, but the way it unfolded indicated Darkhorse had arranged it. At any rate, the extraction was thwarted by Henequen working with the OMI and Darkhorse was injured in the process when a bullet shattered his shin shattered.

Word is Darkhorse wants Aztechnology to extract him. He's promising WRC's tech and everything he knows about Henequen's lair in exchange for the wealth he thinks he deserves. No telling what he knows about the lair, though it's likely significant, as he designed all the plants and may have delivered them as well. If Henequen's taking precautions, it doesn't show. Wind River on the other hand can't afford to lose Darkhorse—as a researcher he's spearheaded development of some innovative agrotech, and as an executive he's got thorough knowledge of their database. Wind River has upped security around him but can't afford to do much beyond that. I suspect Henequen will move to end this threat before Darkhorse gets to the Azzies.

While Henequen Enterprises remains the backbone of Henequen's business operations, he has diversified since coming to town. The Sioux entertainment industry is centered in Cheyenne: trid studios, recording companies, and simsense producers all call Cheyenne home. And in them, Henequen has found a hobby that pays. The feathered serpent has invested in a number of smaller studios. His influence is evident in a few of their latest releases that portray enemies with remarkable resemblances to Aztechnology and Aztlan. The feathered serpent actually made an appearance in one of the films when they needed a dragon flying in the background of a battle scene. He's not named in the credits, but he'll tell you it was him if you mention the movie.

- The scene he's talking about got bashed by bloggers all over the world. They complained that the dragon was the worst CGI they had ever seen. Hilarious!
- Slamm-0!

Problem with investing in things like this is not every film is a hit, and slowing production can run the budget way up. Both of these things can mean lost investments. Other groups (read: Aztechnology and Lakota mafia) have been causing problems for these smaller companies by scaring agencies away from promoting the films and causing trouble for the film crews and productions. One production company distanced itself from Henequen after their entire studio burned to the ground in an "accident."

So how does a feathered serpent operate in a town that headquarters the Native American Nation Sovereign Tribal Council? He tries to join. He failed, but he still tried. It wasn't

an issue of him being a feather serpent with an unstated national origin, but rather the fact that he couldn't claim an authentic tribal affiliation. He tried to get some tribal rules changed—kind of like the UCAS changed their constitution to include Big D—but couldn't get enough leverage.

What the action accomplished was to make him look more legitimate as a citizen. He had no trouble concealing the fact he was a feathered serpent until Ghostwalker outed him. He's smooth enough to hide his connections to criminal endeavors from even the most industrious muckraking reporter. The result has been plenty of press documenting his integrity. Of course, while pushing for a spot on the Council, Henequen did a lot of digging of his own. Word is he dug up some serious dirt on several politicians. Not enough to get laws changed, but probably enough to sweat anyone caught in the wrong video.

Along with the nice history and current events lesson I was asked to discuss inter-dragon relations and my point of view on their stance in the expected Dragon Civil War. When history and current events are filled with twists, turns, and surprises, they are often caused by the mental machinations of men. When it comes to the world of dragons, a different standard is set and different social norms are expected. The dragons have their own ways of settling disputes and arguments to which we are not privy, but I can lay out a few basic relationships from the metahuman point of view. Take all of this with shaker of salt and remember that dragons don't play by our rules or think in the way we do.

Ghostwalker

Henequen and GW are on neutral terms. Henequen may have left Denver promptly when told, but he has been back a number of times since. He doesn't sneak into town; instead, he sends a spirit ahead as an envoy to announce his approach, and he does not enter the city without Ghostwalker's approval. Henequen has never been refused entry, unlike others, and he never overstays his welcome.

Not too long ago there were rumors Ghostwalker had been weakened somehow, and events in Denver during that time seemed to indicate the great dragon was off his game, and that he has not been seen. During that period of apparent weakness and/or absence, Henequen became a significant presence in the Mile High City. Some speculated he was taking advantage of GW's weakness, but astute observers noted he was actually acting in support of the white wyrm. Henequen took a strong and active interest in dealing with spies and smugglers who tried to take advantage of Denver's reduced security, which was a task well suited to his skills. Cynics who argue he was only acting to protect his own smuggling operations are missing the bigger picture. Ghostwalker is a powerful force, an adversary with whom no one trifles. Henequen on the other hand is a far less imposing dragon with nothing like GW's reputation for ferocity and implacability. His defense of Denver cost some powerful individuals money and earned him enemies who aren't afraid to target him for revenge.

That marked difference in their reputations is a factor in their relationships with Aztlan as well. Both dragons oppose the country/corporation vehemently, but while Ghostwalker has little to fear in his own domain, Henequen is plausible target for Aztlan retribution. If the Azzies decide to field test any of their anti-dragon toys, you can expect some operations in Cheyenne



attempting to bring down Henequen. Henequen's aware his greatest enemy perceives him as vulnerable. He thoroughly investigates every rumor about Aztlan's infamous anti-dragon R&D program. There's word he's concerned about the rumors circulating about Aztechnology working the bugs out of a new superweapon in their African facilities. He has no assets or influence in that part of the world, severely hindering his efforts to confirm or deny the stories.

Perianwyr

Henequen and Perianwyr were allowed to lair in Denver for years before Ghostwalker decided he didn't want any other dragons in his town, but they had little or nothing to do with each other. Many years ago rumors linked Perianwyr to Aztechnology; why was never clear and there's been plenty of evidence confirming Peri's anti-Azzie sentiments since—he's a wanted fugitive, in fact. But the rumors were enough to keep Henequen from fully trusting the other dragon. There's never been any open hostility; just a cool distance. The only thing they have in common is supporting dragon/human relations.

Zacaultipán

Ghostwalker didn't just kick Zacaultipán out of Denver, he gave the feathered serpent one hell of a beating. Only Henequen's intervention saved the lesser dragon. Zacaultipán made a beeline for Tenochtitlan where, after spending some time licking his wound, he opened another bar; another Serpent's Feather. The bar became a significant draw for the ex-Denverites and haters of all things in Tenochtitlan. When drinks and emotions combine and lips get loose, Zac and his people listen closely. Everything they hear gets to Henequen inside twenty-four hours. Zacaultipán owes Henequen for saving his life, and being his eyes and ears in Tenochtitlan is his way of showing gratitude. Considering how much Henequen risked, it's little enough. On the other hand, having Zacaultipán working for him boosts Henequen's leverage in Denver.

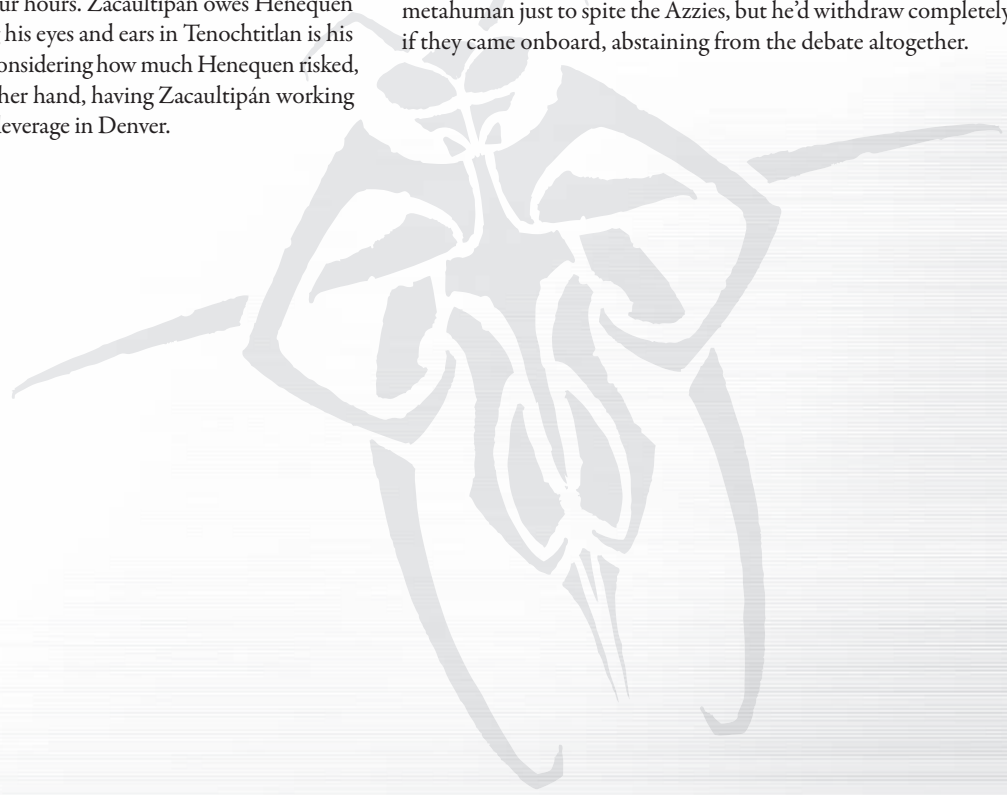
- Expect trouble in this relationship. Zacaultipán got made not too long ago. Aztechnology gave him some choices, none pleasant. Now he's on their payroll. I don't know if Henequen knows yet, but he'll figure it out fast enough when his intel starts to make ops go sideways.
- Kane

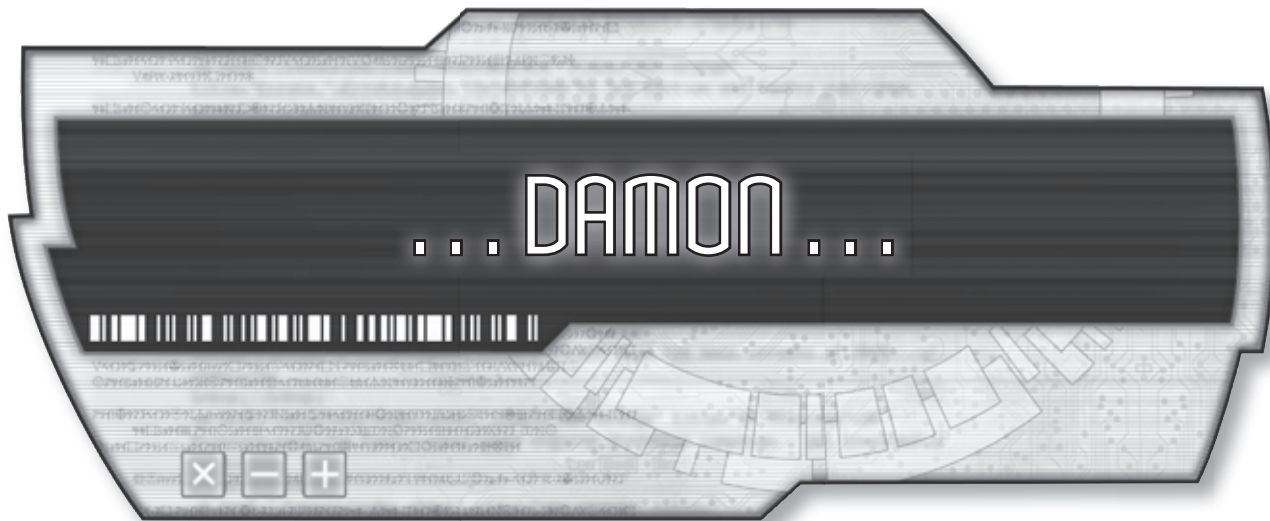
The Dragon Divide

As noted above, Henequen built a profitable and extensive business with metahumans while posing as a metahuman himself. When his cover was blown he didn't pull back; he continues to run his business personally and moves comfortably in metahuman society. His whole life is fully integrated into the metahuman world. In the balance there can be little question that Henequen is on the dragons-and-metahumans-working-together side of the issue. I can think of only two concerns that might upset that balance.

The first concern is Ghostwalker: the white wyrm has never stated where he stands on the issue. If GW comes out on the side of dragon superiority, Henequen's going to have little choice but to follow suit. There's no formal alliance between the two, but every enemy of Henequen's knows GW is close and has to wonder if he'll take an interest. Hestaby is far away, and hasn't made any effort to draw Henequen on her side.

The other concern is Aztlan. Under the right circumstances being pro-metahuman could become pro-Aztlan. Aztlan is deeply anti-dragon, pretty much the opposite of the dragons-are-superior camp; if any conflict develops, they'll throw all their weight behind the dragon/metahuman coequality camp. No way in hell Henequen will stand shoulder to shoulder with Aztlan no matter what's at stake. I'm not saying Henequen would become anti-metahuman just to spite the Azzies, but he'd withdraw completely if they came onboard, abstaining from the debate altogether.





Posted by: Southie

- Since Damon is as much of a cultural phenomenon as anything else, I knew we needed someone who knew Boston culture to talk about him, so I invited Southie here to throw together some thoughts. He's a little blunt at times, but like I said, I needed someone who understood Boston culture.
- FastJack

First let me apologize up front for my street-level view of the world. I'm just a Southie tuskier with enough street cred to get a tap by Jack to brief the community at large about "Damon." I'm gonna try and not bore you to death with old news like 'Jack did when he was talking to me so I'll keep the history lesson short and concentrate on the here and now. We runners live for today and our next score, and strangely enough, that seems to be this dragon's current philosophy as well.

A (REALLY) BRIEF HISTORY

"Damon" (that's the last time I'm using the damn quotes) is not a Boston native, but something about the city has lured him to stick around here longer than any of his last dozen places of residence. He moved here from Manhattan (Dion), and before that he lived in Miami (Eshu), Houston (Bowie), Cheyenne (Heyoka), Los Angeles (Coke), Seattle (Angel), Denver (Skydancer), Tokyo (Odoriko), Vladivostok (Fokine), Paris (Bast), Berlin (Drake), Portland (Tset), and Rio de Janeiro (Daimos). Now I said brief history and I'm sure you're worried about all these cities (and names) making for a really long story. Don't you worry, they don't. Every city has the same story. Wild partier with the listed name comes to town, buys a luxurious pad, stirs the local nightlife into a frenzy, and suddenly moves on somewhere else.

The names are different in every town, but the electronic trail doesn't lie. I-Ching Property Management purchased and owns every single one of the properties these "individuals" (okay, I lied about the quotes) lived in. The company started around Atlanta back in the late '50s buying and selling properties for small one-time profits, though they worked at a massive volume that ended up accumulating a nice sum. They made the money (and are still making money) that paid for the first luxury pad in Rio.

Daimos came to town there, partied hard through Carnivale and for about a month beyond, then moved on. The process repeats every few months in each new city. The physical description of this chief partier never mathes, but every single time they've got a house bought by I-Ching, and they carry the same "party like a rockstar" attitude and lifestyle.

Now this is good to know when considering Damon's current business because of what he's doing with all those old properties. He has never gone back to any of them once he's done with the city. Instead, I-Ching rents them out. Renting out property is not an abnormal behavior, but I-Ching's renters are all runners. I-Ching charges a pretty penny, but the spots have nice security, high-end amenities, most include a nice car for use while you're there, and best of all, there are no nosy neighbors. The spots are rented by the day, week, or month.

Outside of those spots there's not much reason to look into Damon's history. This dragon is an international party animal who's leaving a trail of crash pads for runners behind him. No one knows where he came from originally, and he has so many different names and appearances it's hard to pin down his history.

- I'm sorry to interject here and increase the length of this history, but there are a few other important facts and/or rumors that might be good to keep in mind. I'll start off with rumors and I'll break my posts up so others can toss in anything they might have.

First let me state the largest of the rumors. "Damon" is not a dragon. Due to the many forms he takes some folk have postulated he is actually a powerful free spirit that uses the dragon persona to throw off suspicion. If he is a free spirit it makes some of his other rumors and interactions problematic, but who knows the games that spirits play when piddling around in our world.

The second major rumor speculates on why he spends so much time in metahuman form and copulating with so many metahuman females. Tales of his sexual adventures and their consequences pop up all over every sprawl in which he's taken up residence. Some made it into a shadowfile a few years back. Rumors claim many pregnancies from these recreational interactions—all with very strange results. Drake babies, lizard births, and babies clawing their way out of the womb are just a few of the claims.

- Arete



INCOMING FEED.....

- Interesting. An Interpol contact of mine asked me to consult on a serial-killer case because of some weird astral signatures on the victims. Every victim had been killed by severe lacerations to their very pregnant abdomens. I was able to identify a similar pattern in the signatures but not the nature of it. Cross-checking my files with what we're getting here, the killings all took place five to seven months after a Damon was in town.
- Lyran
- Sounds like a dragon hater offing dragon lovers to me. Especially if there was any chance of a pregnancy between the two. Just for the record, I think the idea is ridiculous. This isn't Greek mythology, this is modern biology and arcane. Pregnancies just don't happen that way.
- Bull
- Expert on dragon magic are we? Might be something to this. I've never seen a good explanation of drakes. This sounds as good as any other theory.
- Lyran
- Fact: Damon has altered the astral background in every city he has visited. The nightclubs and the overall atmosphere of the cities shifted. The astral flavor became "happier," for lack of a better term. I understand many aspects and skills within the field of magic but nothing that shifts the aspect of mana in such a short time. MCT, Manadyne, and DIMR have all put research teams together to follow the trail of Damon and study the astral affects.
- Arete
- Not all of those research teams are on the up and up. I've talked to a lot of runners who have gotten jobs in these towns on both sides, and no one plays nice. A lot of the research teams are hiring more runners to sabotage their competitors than to help check out the astral.
- Kane
- That does not really qualify as news. More to the point: If Damon is a spirit, these astral changes and all this positive energy could be what he was after. Similar to the shades and wraiths of Bogotá, but feeding on positive energy instead of misery and pain.
- Man-of-Many-Names

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

I got through the past quick because there isn't much there. Damon's Boston activities, on the other hand, are going to take a while, so grab a drink and a snack. Now that he's here and he's settling, he's been all kinds of busy. I'm not sure if any dragons sleep, but this one surely does not. Since digging his claws into Beantown he's gotten into a number of business interests, including drugs, magic, clubs, and the music scene, all while dealing with corps, crime families, dragons, and witches. He's not your regular dragon building up a massive hoard of gold, a corporate portfolio like Celedyr, or running the world's largest megacorp like Lofwyr; this dragon is delving into the fast-paced party world with a vengeance. Let me break this down one component at a time and build the links along the way.

CLUB SCENE

Given his rep, it's no surprise Damon dug his claws into the club scene before he was even settled in. The party dragon made a few calls to a pal named Perianwyr on the other side of the continent to get some advice on how to invest in the entertainment business. Probably checking to make sure he wasn't stepping on any claws while he was at it.

Damon must have made some sort of record for hitting every major club in Boston at least once when he first arrived. Clubs knew they were privileged to get a weekend visit, but the ones that really benefited from a Damon appearance were the ones he hit during the week. Sometimes he'd give a twenty-four hour warning before showing up; sometimes three or four hours; most times one to none. The clubs used whatever lead-time they had to spread the word Damon was on his way. He never takes his dragon form at the clubs; his true nature is a hot rumor everyone loves to believe but no one can prove is true. The appearance of Damon packs the house at every place and clogs the street for blocks with both traffic and lines of clubgoers waiting to get in.

- That scragged a run once. Made a clean extraction from an office near Monte's. Didn't count on Damon picking that night to pop in. Jammed traffic so bad we had to dump our target to get clear.
- Turbo Bunny

Damon doesn't own any clubs outright, but he's put serious money into four big name nightclubs, and money follows him. Once he simply mentioned that he liked a failing club, and the investment that followed his words brought it back from the brink of oblivion. He's also invested in two medium-sized mainstream sports bars and a half-dozen local taverns. His investments have been in expansion, remodeling, enhanced security, and special events. Gotta tell you, I've been back and forth about naming Damon's clubs and decided against giving him free advertising. The info's not hard to find—just ask around.

Damon makes a point of showing up at at least one of his clubs every day; some days he does the full circuit. This means a packed house for all of them with everyone hoping to get a look at the playboy dragon. Every club has a line service—servers working the line outside, handing out drinks. In neighborhoods where it's allowed, the music plays outside the club as well. Quite the street party. But for Damon, this mass of metahumanity is more than just public relations; they represent protection, since going through them would create collateral damage on a scale even stone-cold killers would think twice about. Not to mention the massive flow of citizens makes it hard for the police to sniff out possible customers, since there are too many leads to follow. Some of Boston's elite social and political shakers are generally in the mix, hoping for a glimpse of Damon in the flesh—the potential public relations meltdown makes police busts or stings unlikely. All those are important because Damon is deep into something I don't think any other dragon deals in, at least not directly. More on this after I wrap the club scene.

Damon has also been talking to Perianwyr about music for his clubs. Perianwyr's music-business acumen is well known, and a number of Weekday Eclipse's bands have played Damon's clubs. Some watchers have even claimed to have spotted the dragons talking together at a show. Neither one of them is going to confirm

any connection, of course, since two dragons close together might be too tempting for an enemy willing to invest one bomb. The trick is that both dragons attend shows in metahuman form, so unless some club hopper knows what Perianwyr looks like it's just as likely that Damon is chatting up some good looking guy during the show. Who knows?

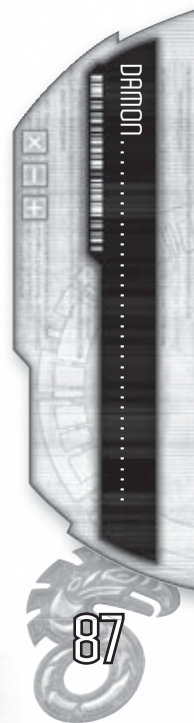
- So can I see a show of hands of people who have quick access to a bomb powerful enough to take out two dragons? Yeah, that's what I thought.
- Riser

TRIPLE D—DRAGON DRUG DEALER

There are thousands of individuals in Boston who break the street rule about dealing with a dragon daily. That's because Damon has become the largest distributor of bio-Awakened drugs, or BADs, in Beantown. He brings 'em in through international and local connections, then shoots 'em out to the public through his various clubs. He's been stepping on the toes of a few other criminal syndicates, but they haven't hassled him on it for two reasons. Number one, the BAD market got such a bad (pardon the pun) rep after the tempo craze that the other syndicates have been skittish about trading in hard-to-get compounds. Number two, the profit margin for BADs is not great, so Damon's not cutting too deeply into their profits. This doesn't mean they're happy about Damon's pharmaceutical sideline, but dragons have a reputation. Even if this dragon has never eaten anyone (as far as we know), none of the crime bosses wants to take the chance on becoming a meal.

There's a chance this situation could be changing, though. Damon's involvement means ever-increasing popularity for the product; an expanding market where there once was nothing. Also, the dragon's connections seem to be both plentiful and better than anyone else's. Word is spreading to other sprawls that Boston is the place to go for the best BADs in the Americas. The other syndicates have lost all but their most loyal customers (and we all know how loyal drug addicts are) and are taking a hit in their sales of their more mainstream drugs as well. What wasn't a problem at first is growing into one. The local syndicates are trying to work out their own approaches to the Damon situation, and whatever they decide to do will be spilling into the shadows of Boston soon enough. Word on the street is the yakuza favor a direct approach, but their dragon puppet masters are keeping them on a tight leash. The crime families work against each other; the O'Rilleys are trying to cut off the dragon's international pipeline, while the Morellis are trying to work a deal to get back a cut of the action.

BADs aren't the only part of the drug scene Damon has gotten into. The Boston Tea Party is an infamous underground socialite group so exclusive that even the dragon playboy couldn't get his foot in the door. Which of course meant Damon took a keen interest in it. His entrée was a very rare BTL. No one's sure how he records it, but Damon gave the Boston Tea Party a special set of five chips, each with only five minutes of feed. The Boston socialite scene doesn't talk to me a whole lot, so I've got no specifics on what was on the chips. What I do know is that after the chip got out, Damon was invited to the very next Boston Tea Party and every one since. Word is he brings a new set of chips with a different series of recordings to each party. Word also is some of the social elite have come down from their ivory towers



to prowling Damon's clubs looking for more chips. Problem is, the chips he brings to their parties are not available on the street. Been quite a few angry socialites lately.

- And that's why we get this stuff on JackPoint. Socialites in Seattle with friends in Boston claim Damon's offering is a tweaked hot sim recording of a possessed subject. No, I'm not a magic expert I don't know if that works, but I'm just repeating what they are saying. They say the spirit changes each time, and that's what flavors the BTL.
- Sounder
- If this is the case, then Damon's got something hot here. I'm sure some others would be really interested in the process. Watch for jobs bringing possession mages to Beantown.
- Bull
- Those angry socialites have been spreading serious cash looking for other sources of the chips. A few runners claim they took jobs against Damon looking for his stash or production facility.
- Netcat

Salem Witch Hunt

One of Damon's biggest BAD connections comes from his dealings with the local witches. Massachusetts (Salem in particular) is famous for its connection to witchcraft and has been since the 1600s. After the Awakening Salem's reputation drew droves of tourists—newly Awakened witches able to cast real spells on pilgrimages to who knows what. Most realized their calling had nothing to do with colonial religious persecution and left again. But way more than you might expect felt a real connection to the place and settled in the area. The Salem coven is the largest in the world, maybe ten times the size of the second-place group. Not that they publish global rankings.

Damon went to Salem for the spring festival of Beltane his first year here, and being Damon that meant he partied the whole festival. Made quite an impression on the witches, both good and bad. He has made trips out for all the holidays since and has caused quite a rift in the ranks of the witches. Those witches who support a dragon in their midst have become part of Damon's local BAD supply line. The witches grow and gather the drugs, and Damon distributes them through his establishments. The relationship is mutually beneficial both financially and magically, as the witches also get reagents and seem to be one of the few sources of dragon reagents that has not been attacked during recent months. Witches on the other side of the Damon question find his presence disturbing to the rituals and sacred rites. This cadre feels making connections with the dragon will lead to far more trouble than it's worth, especially when he moves on. One of the many rumors about why Damon is staying in Boston revolves around trying to appease these women. Not that a dragon needs to appease anyone, but he treats the witches—including the ones who don't like him—with a level of respect given to few others.

The presence of a dragon in their midst and at their festivals has had the same effect as Damon's visits to his clubs. Salem always gained new residents around every Wiccan holiday. Many were witches who came here to join in with their peers, but the majority were tourists looking to be part of something magical. By the third festival Damon attended the word had spread, and Salem's

population density entered the top ten in the world for three days. The visitors covered the full spectrum of believers, from dragon and/or magic haters to dragon and/or magic lovers. There were research firms, news networks, local curiosity seekers, and enthusiasts who travelled halfway around the world. Salem's woods became filled with tents; RVs parked along the highways and local streets; hotels and motels were booked to capacity with rates for single beds at no-tell motels rivaling those of posh New York suites.

The massive increase in local population and the overall excitement level for kilometers around had a powerful impact on the local astral. The witches' rituals were vastly more potent, and they took on strange twists, flavors, and dimensions. I'm no spellslinger, so I don't understand exactly how things were different. But I do know a spellslinger who braved the masses for the Litha festival at the summer solstice, and from what I understand this difference is one of the major tension points between the pro- and anti-Damon witch camps. The increased power allows them to do way more with their magic, but it comes at a price; without the dragon's support, they would have lost control of the flow of mana. On top of that, no one knows what Damon is doing with that power. Smart runners should look for some arcane work out that way during the next Wiccan holiday.

- Work may come sooner from the witches who want Damon gone. Word around the cauldron is there's a deep desire to have him moved on, gone, or uninterested before the next holiday.
- Haze

CORPORATE CONNECTIONS

Damon's interests seem very street oriented, but some of his efforts have gone to making deals with local Boston corporate giant NeoNET. Damon has been spotted heading into their Boston headquarters. I haven't found the perfect source yet, but low-level wageslaves have said he goes to one of two places on every visit. No one I have is positioned to have accurate details, but he sometimes he heads for the executive levels, possibly to Celedyr's penthouse. Other times he heads down into the depths of the R&D labs and production facilities. I mean that literally—they are secured underground.

- Hmmm ... looks like we may know how he's getting his BTLs produced.
- Kane

No one I've talked to knows who he is going to see or what his business is in the building. Speculation is rampant and often wild, but sources point out the presence of Celedyr in the building when he visits the upper floors, and they say there are packages in his hands when he leaves the production facilities. On more than one occasion my contact at the corp said Damon was in his dragon form when he left meetings with Celedyr—either that, or another dragon was at their meeting and Damon left after my contact was off duty.

If my contact is correct, Damon's dragon form is quite interesting. The dragon he saw flying away was rather small. Larger than your largest drake, but small compared to others of its kind. It had a deep blue coloration on its back and a lighter sky blue over the belly. His tail ended in a split, and his head had a long alligator-like snout. The creature's body was



lightly muscled but wiry according to my contact. All these descriptions combined with the fact that Damon is rarely seen in this form might mean he's hiding his draconic weakness under a metahuman guise.

- Don't get the wrong impression from this guy's supposed description. Even a small dragon is big enough to rip off a troll's arms and beat five of his buddies to death with them.
- Frosty
- So? A weakness is still a weakness. The main difference is who he is hiding it from.
- Mika
- Dealing with Celedyr puts a crimp in the not-a-dragon theory.
- Bull
- Not really. Celedyr is just as likely to be doing business with a powerful spirit as with another dragon.
- Frosty

Damon hasn't made any other visits to other corporate HQs in town, but that doesn't mean he isn't dealing with any other corps. The clubs he invested in are seriously raking in the dough and getting filled every night. Advertising firms, synthahol distributors, entertainment agencies, and security firms have all sent in representatives to get a piece of the action. Any of them who approach Damon are shooed away before they get close and directed to the club owners. Even though this is never a successful approach, it's better than the alternative. Sales reps who go directly to the owners piss off Damon, almost guaranteeing they won't ever do business with the club. It's a lose-lose on the first approach for every rep as the dragon plays his little games.

Some of those corporate types don't like games, though; make the mistake of thinking coming back hard will impress the dragon. Damon lost a club manager a few weeks back when he told an entertainment syndicate rep their bands weren't right for his club. Rep tried to backdoor the deal and bribe the manager. Manager turned him down cold and was next seen floating in the harbor. Damon repaid the slight by contracting a local wizzer to conjure a water spirit that drowned the rep. Not the first or last time Damon's shown he needs to remember to keep some distance from a job if he wants to maintain roots in Beantown.

CRIMINAL ACQUAINTANCES

I mentioned Damon's interactions with the Boston crime families, but the situation is more complicated than maybe I let on and isn't limited to drugs. Not to mention the two families most engaged are dealing with the dragon quite differently. I should probably expand on how things are because organized crime families love hiring runners to do stupid shit like go after dragons.

The Morelli family has been wheeling and dealing with Damon. Angelo Morelli, a nephew of the Don and trusted *soldato*, has been the major go-between for the family and Damon from the get-go. Angelo ran into Damon at a club while the dragon was in one of his female forms, and the pair hit it off. No one faults Angelo for his bestial romp (at least to his face), but the encounter created a solid connection for the Morellis, something the O'Rilleys don't have. Through this connection the Morellis have

been trying to get back in the BAD business. They understand the dragon has a strong position with solid control of the supply, a nice distribution network, and connections with some powerful addicts who greatly enjoy the dragon's products and don't want to lose that connection. They have been offering an expanded distribution network within Boston and have offered to develop other markets for Damon's legendary BTLs. So far Damon has been playing his cards close to his vest, and nothing has really happened.

The O'Rilleys are the top dogs in town, and they aren't playing nice with the dragon. Don O'Riley is an elf with a long-game view of things. Of course when you're working the long game, you don't want a dragon in town who can play an even longer game. The O'Rilleys are actively working to cut off Damon's international BAD pipeline by clamping down using their connections in the port and airport customs.

Damon may start playing one off the other soon if he feels they are threatening his business. Mob wars aren't uncommon, but this one could be really interesting. Not to mention really short if the dragon backs a mob coup. If he does back the Morellis, expect Angelo to move up in the ranks after the dust settles.

- It's strange that the more traditional (read: anti-magic, meta, women) of the families is the one dealing with the dragon. Anyone out there got any insider info on why this might be?
- Clockwork

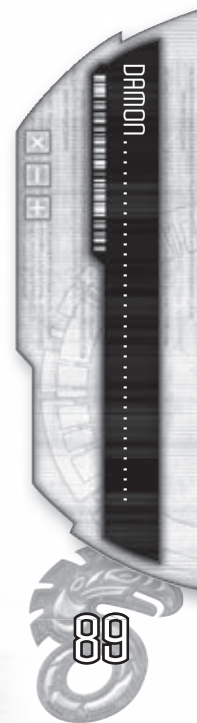
As far as the other crime syndicates in Boston are concerned, the dragon is keeping his distance, doing nothing beyond making it plain he'll protect his assets. For their part the syndicates are keeping an eye on him but leaving him be. Since his clubs are spread around town and not concentrated in anyone's territory, none of them feel too threatened. But they all are alert. I know the yakuza hires people to check out the dragon's clubs. It's a great way to have a good time while you're working. Just make sure you remember to do your job and not enjoy yourself so much you don't bring back good intel—the yakuza pays in a different way for failure.

ODDS AND ENDS

The playboy dragon also has a rep as an adrenaline junkie. Fast cars, fast bikes, skydiving, and rugby all draw him like a moth to a flame.

His tricked out Dynamit is a common sight blazing up and down the highways in the Northeast, especially in the wee hours of the morning after the clubs have closed. He always has at least one guest in the vehicle (ladies usually, but our playboy dragon enjoys the occasional boytoy). Two-fifty KPH is his cruising speed on the empty streets. No one's ever been hurt and he pays all his fines, but the traffic patrol never seems to see it as good, clean fun. He's had to do some serious lawyering more than once when the cops arrest him for reckless endangerment (he's learned you can outrun individual patrol cars, but you can't outrun radio signals).

Due to the weather in the Northeast, Damon saves his bike racing for drier climes. He hits a few of the major illegal race circuits with his classic Hyabusa. The Blue Streak, his motorcycle, holds a number of speed records among the racing clubs participating in the races. A few insulting claims have come down about magical interference, but Damon has allowed all



comers to assense the bike before, during, and after races for astral signatures. The truth of the matter is the speed comes from what's inside. Damon's bike was the fastest street-bike in existence during a time when petrol ruled the roads and speed was king. Multifuel and electric just don't have the same gusto. A few members of the Concrete Sidewinders out in the Sioux Nation have been scavenging junkyards for Hyabusa parts looking to build a machine to rival the Blue Streak.

Skydiving it might not sound like a thrill for a creature that can fly, but Damon jumps in metahuman form. He gets a thrill, but serious injury is not a real possibility. The dragon goes up at least once a week, sometimes more, and has been known to dive to his clubs. He lands in the street without clearing traffic or anything. He's had a to pay a few repair bills when he lands on a car (almost never a parked one), and he wires the fine to the proper authorities as soon as his feet touch down. The show, or just the possibility of a show, always boosts attendance at his clubs, though a lot of the extra attendees never make it inside and spend their nights on the line.

So you might ask, how does a dragon play rugby? By playing on a team of trolls against other troll teams. Damon really took an interest in the sport before he arrived in Beantown, but playing was no fun—he simply dominated the field. In Boston he started posting messages for trolls to play rugby, no experience necessary. Half the trolls who showed up didn't even know what rugby was, but they liked the idea of scrapping with a dragon. Enough trolls answered to form four squads, so Damon hired coaches and developed four teams. He plays on a different team each week and practices with his upcoming squad only once before the game.

- These games are a hoot. You would expect one little guy dodging and weaving around the big guys, but what happens is a full blown rock'm sock'm pitch brawl. Damon is small but he's strong. The games are exciting and funny.
- Slamm-0!
- And more serious than when they started. The coaches have been known to do some underhanded things between and before games to get an edge. If Damon knows about this, he ignores it. Two weeks ago the team Damon was playing for got crushed. The whole team looked like they were playing in molasses. Turns out the whole team got doped pre-game. Security was increased last week.
- Ma'fan

These aren't the only "rushes" Damon goes for, just the most frequent. Damon has one more source of excitement I should mention. It's called "The Hunt." Yes, something gets hunted, but it's not what you might expect. Damon hires a team of runners to hunt him. The game is played out in South Boston; Damon goes to ground somewhere in a tight area, and the runners have twenty-four hours to find him. Bedrock rules are nonlethal munitions and magicmuts be used, and participants cannot intentionally hurt locals; use of torture has serious consequences. Other rules are added or changed for each hunt, evolving based on previous runs. It's a real rep boost to be tapped by Damon to hunt him down. Runner teams started volunteering to be recorded on the hunt, and the resulting footage sparked a viral Matrix sensation. The attention those feeds received led to other groups, most notably

the Boston PD, looking to get in on the action by asking for the chance to prove their skills hunting Damon. So far the dragon hasn't taken the PD up on the offer, probably to protect South Boston from being spied on during the hunt.

This spot is as good as any to point out that Damon rarely looks the same on any two occasions. He plays at all the metatypes, races, and genders and no two versions of the same character look alike. But one feature never changes is the eyes. No matter what else is different, s/he always has cobalt blue iris' with jagged lightning-bolt lines of sky blue. The general look can be replicated by others and a few people have done just that, but Damon's are unique; once you've seen the real ones you don't get fooled by duplicates. But ever since Rio, every shape and identity Damon has taken sported those same unique eyes.

- Pretending to be Damon is an entertaining pastime for schmucks trying to get chicks. Works easily on the dumb ones; for the ones with two-digit IQs you need to spread enough money around to make it look real. Just don't let the real Damon catch your act. He's quite the brawler.
- Slamm-0!
- The Damon identity has been linked to a series of murders over the past six weeks or so. The real Damon has an alibi for almost every killing, so he's been ruled out, but it's made a number of folks leery of dealing with any Damon. The killer uses the Damon identity to get targets out of the club and then kills her in the parking lot. There have only been four killings so far, but the cops have nothing to go on. No killings have occurred at any of the real Damon's clubs. Yet.
- Thorn

Now all of this hasn't stopped Damon from maintaining his playboy ways. He's still at the clubs every night and dancing up a storm. The big difference is now he has a lot of business coming in and out of those clubs, and many of his club stops are a combination of business and pleasure. When he does hire our types for certain extracurricular activities, the job offer usually comes at one of his clubs. That doesn't mean every job at one of his clubs is a deal with a dragon, as they all offer private rooms for other Johnsons. What it does mean is that if you find out you are headed to one of his places for a meet, you should keep an eye out for angles a dragon might be playing.

This is also a good time to point out that the usual "Never deal with a dragon" tripe doesn't hold water with this guy. I'm not saying don't look for tripwires; I'm saying give him the same chance we give anyone else. He's played fair in Boston and given a lot of people here opportunities they wouldn't have had otherwise. The way I hear it, back in the day Dunkelzahn was called the "People's Dragon." Not making a direct comparison here, but this guy's a "people dragon" to the bone. He spends almost all of his time in metahuman forms, he hangs out with metahumans, and—if half the street rumors can be trusted—does everything with metahumans that one metahuman can do with another.

Take it from this Southie tusker that boring old Boston has certainly gotten a lot more interesting since Damon came to town. This dragon is giving Beantown a good shake, something this stuffy little burg could use.





Posted by: Lyran

It hasn't been easy to do much in the way of actual dossier-gathering lately. I've been able to comment here and there on assorted posts, because I think checking in on JackPoint is important (information being a weapon and all). Doing any prolonged thinking, however, has been difficult, and putting it down into any sort of comprehensible form has been even more of a challenge. There are some things, though, that cannot go ignored, no matter what else is happening around me. A new dragon is one of these things. If the old ones are going to be so worried about me, I really need to know if any new ones are emerging, and if so, what they might be up to.

- A new dragon can mean a lot of things, but I'm hard-pressed to come up with anything that's remotely good.
- Winterhawk
- How about that dragons generally have hidden hoards, and when they emerge that means a lot of forgotten wealth is re-introduced into the world economy. That's gotta be worth something.
- Marcos
- I don't know. It's kind of like being in the middle of a war, and then suddenly an army that had been sitting on the sidelines for a while can afford to buy a shitload of bullets. Point being, not every addition to the economy is positive.
- Picador

While I've managed some time to compile information, I haven't been able to give it the detailed compilation and fact check that would be ideal in situations like these. So instead you're going to get some primary sources—news articles, audio-cast transcripts, and such. The good news is all this is happening in Shaanxi, which has a relatively open media as these things go. If this was happening in, say, Yakut, I'd probably have a lot less information to share.

But before we get to the reports, here's a little background on one particular area that's been the focus of some activity. When the

First Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, went out, he went out in style. The only way he could have chosen a more over-the-top burial would have been to have all of his subjects and their homes actually interred with him. He was merciful, though, so instead of doing that, he ordered the creation of thousands of terracotta figures—soldiers, horses, acrobats, court officials, and more. They were lovingly detailed and painted, then brought together and buried not far from the emperor's eventual tomb. They sat there for a few thousand years, an unseen tribute to the emperor's power.

It was also, of course, more than that. The emperor thought a lot about death; while most of those thoughts were pre-occupied with avoiding it, he also made some preparations in case the inevitable turned out to be, well, inevitable. The emperor would not only be protected by the army he had assembled for himself (which was important—he had kind of a thing about evil spirits), but if he was lucky he'd also stand to be advised and even entertained in the afterlife.

The extent the emperor went to in his efforts to avoid death are worth noting. Most of his work focused on obtaining an elixir of life that would grant him immortality, and when ancient people went after immortality, they generally brought in mercury. The city, when it was first built, was apparently built with rivers of mercury, showing that right up to the end, the emperor was serious about his work. It also demonstrated that he was completely unaware of the poisonous effects it had on humans, but that's neither here nor there.

- Not entirely—the emperor was taking mercury pills, and that's what killed him. Though I understand your point how that's not particularly relevant to the here and now.

On another note, Lyran, I'll look forward to comparing notes with you about life on the run. The worst times are when I realize that I've been in one place long enough to become complacent, even comfortable, and I've almost allowed myself to forget about the danger I'm in. That realization physically hurts.

- Snopes

The army the emperor built sat undiscovered for a few thousand years until some farmers discovered it in the late twentieth



INCOMING FEED.....

century. For a while after that, the site was involved in a delicate balancing act between discovery and preservation—the more digging was done, the more figures were put at risk (it didn't help that some of the diggers hired over the years haven't had the most skilled or delicate hands). The public had varying levels of access to the site up until 2071, when an explosion hit the site, destroying six hundred figures. Queen Chou declared the site off-limits to everyone except government-approved archeologists and security. According to her statement, grave robbers looking to loot Shaanxi's treasures were responsible for the explosion, and security was needed to protect the site from them.

- That explanation was nonsense at the time, and it has not started to make any more sense since. If this was grave robbers, then they are terrible at their job. The explosion was bigger than it needed to be to get someone into the tomb, and it also destroyed the kind of things that you would expect grave robbers to want to take. On top of all that, the explosion was far too obvious, drawing attention to the crime in progress well before they could get out with a substantial amount of goods. This was not grave robbing; this was an attempt to break the earth beneath the army. The purpose of such an action is exactly what Lyran is getting to.
- Lei Kung

In the past three years, there has been official silence from the site. No press releases of new discoveries, no changes in the site's status. That is not to say, though, that there hasn't been news. Such as this:

Sanqin Daily, 09/28/72
AREA FARMER UNCOVERS
ANCIENT IMPERIAL RELIC

A sword that is over 2,200 years old has appeared in the hands of a local farmer, and he seems just as confused as anyone else as to how the object fell into his hands.

Guo Qiang has farmed the Loess Plateau for two decades, often barely surviving through dry years and difficult soil conditions. Now he is set to retire in comfort, as the sword that has come into his possession is expected to sell to collectors for millions of nuyen. It is a bronze sword, just under a meter long and designed for two-handed use. While some effects of age are in evidence, the blade is in remarkable condition, which will make it all the more attractive to the collectors who are already lining up to purchase it.

The blade could, however, end up being purchased by the government. Queen Chou has long supported efforts to build Shaanxi's cultural identity, and spokespeople for the queen have said that the government would like to talk to Guo to discuss terms of the transfer of the sword.

"We will not expect him to simply make a donation," said Xue Juan, press secretary to the queen. "We cannot offer as much as the private collectors, of course, but we do not expect Mr. Guo to walk away empty handed if he decides to share his extraordinary discovery with the people of his country."

While delighted with the item in his possession, Guo also seems to be confused and overwhelmed by the situation in which he now finds himself. This confusion can be seen in his story of how he obtained the sword, which is muddled and sometimes

contradictory. He is clear, at least, in where it started—it started when he found a man sleeping in his field.

“He looked very comfortable,” Guo said. “He didn’t seem like a vagrant looking for anyplace to rest his head. He seemed like he was sleeping there because it was the most comfortable possible place to sleep.”

Guo says the man seemed old, but beyond that his descriptions are vague. He said he believed the man had grey hair, but he could not state for sure if he had any facial hair. He said he was well dressed but had no other specifics beyond that. What he can describe, however, is the man’s bearing.

“He was very confident,” Guo said. “Very comfortable in who he was. He didn’t feel any need to explain to me what he was doing in my field. He was friendly. He knew the area well and knew the land. We had a long talk about the difficulties of farming on the plateau. He listened to me and didn’t talk about himself.”

The part of the story he’s most confused about, though, is how this stranger came to give him the sword. While Guo is utterly convinced the sword came from the stranger, he does not remember seeing the stranger with the sword, and he can’t recall just when the man gave the sword to him. Again, what he remembers are the man’s feelings concerning the matter.

“He wanted me to have it, I remember that,” Guo said. “He said it was time I had good fortune.”

Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it cannot be debated that Guo’s fortunes have indeed changed for the better.

- If we’re going to be making connections here—and I assume that’s what we’re supposed to do—then we should remember that originally, the terracotta army was built holding weapons. Those weapons were long gone by the time the place was found in the twentieth century through looting or decay. Someone, though, may have saved one.
- Plan 9

Transcript of “The Witching Hour” audiocast, 01/17/73, Bell Family Media

Braden CARVER [host]: I can’t imagine what kind of aura would result from something like that continuously feeding on the people in its domain.

Emmalyn LUCROY [guest]: I wish I had the right words for it. It’s twisted, and it has a constant, desperate hunger to it.

CARVER: Doesn’t the spirit disguise it? I’m sure it’s learned some masking in its time on this plane.

LUCROY: I don’t think it *wants* to disguise itself. I think it’s willing for any mages around it to know what they’re dealing with. If they see that and decide to approach it anyway, more power to them.

CARVER: And sometimes a mask is a giveaway, right? If you see too much nothing where you’d expect to see something, you have to know that some being out there is putting out a pretty strong mask. That would put you on your toes.

LUCROY: Of course. And the very strong ones know that, so they don’t just snuff out their aura; they make it look like something else. People will play games, of course—sometimes they’ll make themselves look more powerful than they really are, sometimes less. It all depends on what kind of game they’re playing at the time. One of the more complicated games I’ve seen is in Shaanxi.

CARVER: What part?

LUCROY: The whole tomb complex of the Qin Shi Huang, including his terracotta army. I’d heard some very interesting things about that site, so I decided I needed to check it out for myself.

CARVER: You’re not going to tell me you got into the complex. Are you?

LUCROY: I got into the complex.

CARVER: No way. No possible way. That’s Shaanxi nationals only. How did you get in there?

LUCROY: That would be telling, which is something I definitely don’t want to do when the statute of limitations hasn’t expired on all my activities. But you know and I know that appearances and credentials are very ... malleable, let’s say, in today’s world.

CARVER: All right, I don’t want this to turn into a conversation that will get us both extradited, so instead of talking about how you got in, tell me what you saw.

LUCROY: You’ll never have a harder time reading an individual aura as you will there, unless you’re in some kind of mana void. There’s this background glow that just swallows up everything, so you can’t make out what’s happening around individual people.

CARVER: What, because the aura of the spot is so bright? Some sort of powerful background count?

LUCROY: No, that’s not it. I couldn’t detect any sort of background count at all. My spells worked there like they would anywhere else, no better, no worse, no easier, no harder. And the aura of the place isn’t so bright that it overwhelms everything. It’s actually kind of mild, but it has this effect of ... well, let me put it this way. You’ve played with drawing programs, right?

CARVER: Of course. Wouldn’t have survived high school trigonometry without that particular distraction.

LUCROY: So you’re familiar with blur functions. Drag your finger through a certain area, they blend together. Keep moving it around that area, and anything that was distinct gets blurred together into one average tone. That’s what’s going on at the tomb. Something is blurring every single aura, making it appear as one average tone.

CARVER: That’s gotta be some powerful magic at work.

LUCROY: Indeed.

CARVER: But wouldn’t that have the same effect you mentioned before—announcing that someone powerful is there, rather than hiding it?

LUCROY: Yes. But my theory is that the purpose behind the blending is not to disguise any individual or creature’s power. I think the blending is actually a side effect.

CARVER: Of what?

LUCROY: Of the effect the place has on people. Everyone I talked to there was incredibly content with their work. They could be given the most mind-numbing task—and archeology has a lot of tedium, no matter what the trids tell you—and they’d attack it with vigor and glee. Everyone, all the time, loved what they were doing. And the surest sign I got that it was time for me to leave was when I started convincing myself that there was no reason to leave. I started believing I could be perfectly content at the site for the rest of my days, just carrying out any duties I was given. That thought scared me so much when I realized I was thinking it that I got out that very night. Before it could get worse.





CARVER: So this seems to be magical in nature.

LUCROY: I'd assume so, but with the auras being as they are, it's tough to say.

CARVER: If that's what's happening, what's the point of it? What's the end game?

LUCROY: The terracotta army was built by an emperor marshaling the strength of his people to build a tremendous line of defense for himself, one that was steady and unwavering. I believe that an army is still being made, several dozen pieces at a time. These people will be loyal, dedicated, and completely open to suggestion. What I don't know is who is doing it and why.

- If I had a nuyen for every "a new dragon is plotting to take over the world" stories I'd heard, I'd buy a small army of assassins who would make sure I'd never have to worry about being on the run again. When things get weird, people are in the habit of saying "dragon" just by instinct. That, or "bug spirits."
- Snopes
- Got one more juicy bit of info for you. Read on.
- Lyran
- Before we go to the next step, is the stuff Lucroy is talking about even possible?
- Sunshine
- What we call "possible" is bound by what we experience as reality. Other realities are not always subject to our limitations.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- I'll put that down as a "maybe."
- Sunshine

<<Excerpt, Draconic Information Virtual Exchange, March 22, 2074>>

- On this 22nd day of March, 2074, we are going to discuss reported dragon sightings in Shaanxi. Who wishes to share their information first?
- The Incorruptible Scholar
- So far I've collected one hundred eighteen statements related to six distinct sightings. The fewest amount of witnesses at a sighting was one; the largest amount was fifty-three. Normally I would not keep record of a lone sighting, but the individual had cybereyes and presented a good-quality recording of the incident. Besides that recording, we have two still images (one in two dimensions, the other in three) and two other motion recordings.
Based on the accumulated evidence, we can firmly state that we are dealing with a new dragon. The images do not match any other dragon on record. It's an eastern dragon—naturally enough—but smaller than the greats like Lung and Ryumyo. All of the sightings have taken place in Shaanxi, near Xi'an.
- The Impartial Observer
- Hold on for a second. One hundred eighteen statements and only five pieces of visual evidence? Were those people not carrying commlinks?
- St. George

- The largest sighting happened very quickly—the dragon darted overhead, startling people at a funeral, which is the type of occasion where people are often not prepared to take pictures on short notice. Those are the least detailed of the descriptions we have, but we found enough agreement between them to match the visual evidence we have accumulated. In the other five instances, a single individual acted as designated recorder for those who saw the creature.
- The Impartial Observer
- I assume all the usual checks for forgery were made?
- New Lionheart 945
- Of course. All of the images but one rated a five on the Knoll scale, indicating high likelihood of authenticity. The other one, the three-dimensional image, rated a three, primarily due to some inexplicable blurring at certain points near the dragon. This is the most recent image; it's quite possible that it was manipulated by someone familiar with the other images in an effort to draw attention to the individual who posted it. Even if we discard that image, though, we still have compelling evidence of a new dragon.
- The Impartial Observer
- I've spoken with some people on the ground in Shaanxi. They say that stories of dragon sightings go back at least a decade, though a lot of their accounts are on par with old stories about the Loch Ness Monster. They've been calling it Fucanglong, after the race of underground dragons from Chinese mythology. These dragons are supposed to jealously guard the treasures they have, which puts them on par with all the dragons we know.
- IronLung53
- What are the reactions of the people who have seen the dragon?
- True_Believer8322910
- They're startled at first, of course, and somewhat nervous, but they generally don't panic. The three motion recordings we have were shot by people who were standing their ground calmly, watching the dragon move through the air. One of them was filmed by an individual surrounded by a dozen people, and they are talking and laughing throughout the recording. You hear them referring to themselves as "children of the dragon," which is an expression of good luck.
- The Impartial Observer
- But that's mainly based on superstition, right? It's not like this particular dragon has taken specific actions to benefit these people.
- Leatherwings
- That's debatable, at least in their eyes. There are stories going around about the Old Man of Xi'an, a mysterious individual who appears and grants people boons. Some people have connected him to this dragon. Many of them believe that the Old Man is in the service of the dragon, or perhaps is the dragon himself. I know that a dragon going around and helping out metahumans is foreign in our experience, but in Chinese mythology they are viewed very positively, so the citizens of Shaanxi are perhaps





more likely than westerners to believe that a dragon would help them out.

- The Impartial Observer
 - That's not really fair to the people of Shaanxi. They're not naive. They know how reality goes, and they are quite aware of Lung and his dealings with dangerous organizations such as the Triads. They are well aware of what a dragon can do.
 - EasternRise
 - Looking only at Lung's Triad activities is a good way to totally misunderstand him. Overall he has not had a negative effect on the region. If anything, he reinforces many Chinese people's opinion of dragons. But I'm getting off topic. Is there anything linking the Old Man and this dragon besides local supposition?
 - IronLung53
 - Not really. This is where more work needs to be done. We need some people with assensing ability on the ground in Xi'an, looking for unusual auras. The appearances of the dragon and the Old Man are sporadic and unpredictable, so there's no guarantee of meeting them. We can send some people in, and we should work this from both ends—trying to gather more information with our own Awakened assets, and recruiting people currently in the area to act as sources for us. Deniable assets are an option, of course, because if we send in people with a direct connection to us, we may put the dragon on his guard, and we don't want that. We also could be putting our own people at risk if this Fucanglong has heard of us and developed negative feelings toward us.
 - The Impartial Observer
- <<End DIVE excerpt>>

So those are the major pieces of information I have. The rest is speculation and hearsay. One interpretation of this information is that the army and the mercury in the soil have been serving their purpose since day one—confining a dragon under the earth, a dragon who was trapped there by Qin Shi Huang. In this interpretation, the explosion was caused by the dragon making its escape, and it has now found a degree of freedom, though it is keeping a low profile to help it stay out of the government's grasp.

An alternate theory says that this Fucanglong was not imprisoned by Qin Shi Huang, but rather was a friend of the emperor and helped secure his realm. The emperor created a hidden lair for his friend under his tremendous army, and when it came time for Fucanglong to hibernate between ages of magic, he chose the tomb because it was both isolated and comfortable. He's been asleep longer than some other dragons, but he has been stirring recently and will be fully awake soon. The government somehow learned about this dragon and his location, so they moved in on it to make sure they have control over the area and the ability to negotiate with the dragon when they can. In this theory, the explosion was either a ruse by the government to give them an excuse to lock down the area or the actions of a rival, possibly another dragon, though it's not clear if the intent was to harm Fucanglong or to hasten his awakening.

A third explanation is that this is all nothing. The magnificence of the terracotta army has captured the popular imagination for a century, and people are constantly coming up with explanations attempting to make it out to be more than what it is. It's not enough for it to be one of the most spectacular burial sites of all time—it has to be hiding some grand secret. And any odd activity that happens in the area, like the man coming across the ancient sword, is going to be tied into whatever secret people devise. So you have grand theories borne out of coincidences or things that, if they were investigated, are not as mysterious as they seem, and are not part of one central secret or conspiracy.

At the moment, I'll be damned if I can say what the actual truth is, but someone should probably find out. If this Fucanglong is real and actually is going around giving away boons, he might be metahuman friendly, which would mean Hestaby would be quite interested in finding out what's going on out here and making a connection to this dragon. The opposition, on the other hand, might want to neutralize or even eliminate this potential dragon. There's evidence of its existence out there, it seems, but you either need to break into DIVE's servers to find it or you need find the same people they talked to and see if they still have copies of the dragon footage. That information could serve as some serious paydata, so get it fast—the more these stories spread, the more people there will be trying to track down these rumors of a dragon lurking in Shaanxi. Competition can make life more interesting, but also more difficult. For my part, right now I'd be opting for simpler.

- DIVE has proven to be quite skilled at avoiding infiltration by the agents of various dragons, so there's a good chance that the information they have has not leaked out to other dragons yet. It's only a matter of time, though. Dragons have eyes and ears everywhere, and this Fucanglong (assuming he really exists) seems to be getting bolder in his appearances. At this rate, there will be no ignoring him for too long. Get your information now!
- Wyrms Watcher
- So how is Lung going to react to having another dragon in his back yard?
- DangetSensei
- Not well, probably. Lung is rather territorial and possessive, so he will not be at all enthusiastic about sharing any space with anyone. This is probably one reason Fucanglong is keeping a low profile—if he goes public, he knows there's a good chance Lung will come after him, and he needs to build up his own defenses before that happens.
- Wyrms Watcher





KALANYR, RETURNING REDMOND TO SPLENDOR?

- Sometimes it doesn't pay to be praised. Especially in the shadows. After I did a very flattering little piece on Serrin Shamander, he paid me a visit. Lucky for me it turns out he's not as cold-blooded a killer as is generally believed. We actually hit it off. Funny how things work out. Anyway, shortly after Hestaby's speech to the United Nations I asked Shamander to do a favor for JackPoint. As a skilled investigator and experienced runner I figured he was the perfect elf (yes, he's an elf, damn typos) to look into the activities of a dragon by the name of Kalanyr. With the dragon conflict heating up and problems arising left and right for me, I wanted to know where this dragon stood. Here's his report.
- Lyran

DESCRIPTION

Male adult western dragon. Variable coloration (see paragraph three). Long, undercurled horns; unusually large eyes; short, stout neck. Overall length 19.6 meters snout to tail; wingspan 51.4 meters.

For the most part Kalanyr is a rather dull example of his species. His velociraptor-like head and short neck give him the profile of a dinosaur, an effect that's spoiled by his eyes. The eyes are disproportionately large and bulge slightly. His horns are a deep brown and curl down from the rear of the skull, moving below his jaw line and out past the end of the snout. His body and limbs are muscular and dense without being massive; he's wiry, not bulky. His tail is of average length, and his wingspan is about ten percent wider than the average for his length.

Determining his coloration was an issue early in the investigation; there is only one known dragon named Kalanyr, but description of his color varied widely. Research revealed that until 2061 Kalanyr was a rich brown, slightly lighter than his horns, with tan highlights at the major joints and a cream-to-white underbelly. After 2061, Kalanyr's colors and patterns seemed to change at random. Evidently the dragon developed a chameleon-like ability to change his coloration at will at about the time of Halley's Comet. I would speculate this was the result of a SURGE,

but there are no other accounts of a dragon being SURGED. I have observed Kalanyr changing his color. It is not an adaptive survival mechanism, such as that of the bandersnatch; it takes him time and evident focus to effect the transition. I was able to assense him during the process, and I can report the ability is not arcane—there was no astral activity at all.

Recently all of Kalanyr's colors have taken on a certain iridescent quality. He has also developed a faint glow—almost imperceptible in daylight, but apparent to natural vision in low-light situations and easily detected with artificial vision. Best guess is it's a result of his extended stays in the Glow City area of Redmond, Seattle, and increased radiation levels in his surface tissue.

On the astral, Kalanyr reflects his physical form, typical of dual-natured creatures; his magical powers are far beyond mine, meaning I was unable to measure them with any meaningful accuracy. Recent scans show variations in his aura indicative of both acute radiation poisoning, no doubt related to his visits to Glow City, and extensive ritual sorcery. Though he seems to have little trouble clearing the radiation poisoning from his system, he does not wait until full recovery before returning to Glow City. Difficult to say with dragons, but there may be a cumulative effect.

I did not meet with Kalanyr personally—I make it a habit of staying out of dragons' reach—but my envoys did. I have also interviewed individuals who have spoken with him. All report his mental speech has an interesting accent, usually described as a cross between Bavarian German and London British. While Kalanyr is not condescending, it is clear that he thinks himself superior. He refers to metahumans as "the lesser races," as though it were a point of fact rather than a derogatory term. He addresses spirits such as my watcher envoys by my name, linking them to their summoners. I sent no spirits other than watchers for fear of manipulation. A free spirit I interviewed said the dragon has different titles for different spirit types. Despite a clear conviction of his own superiority, Kalanyr is courteous and shows a certain level of respect to everyone.

HISTORY (2011-2070)

The first local recorded appearance of Kalanyr was in 2045 on the Olympic Peninsula. A dragon of similar description had been





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observed living in the Schwarzwald (Black Forest) of Germany since the early teens; no interactions, just sightings within the woods. A dragon based nearby reportedly claimed the dragon in the Schwarzwald was the offspring of Kaltenstein, living within its father's protection until mature enough to flourish on his own. Conclusion was Kalanyr is the son of Kaltenstien, establishing his own place far from his father.

A crimson-colored dragon appeared in the region at about the same time, calling itself Urubia. Locals report Kalanyr and Urubia seemed very close in their early years but have not physically been seen together since about 2061. There is speculation that the two dragons fought alongside the forces of Tír Tairngire against the California National Guard at the Battle of Redding in 2036. Informal sources within the Tír confirm the legend—unofficially. Reportedly disagreements with the Council of Princes, particularly with Lofwyr, caused Kalanyr and Urubia to return to Salish-Shidhe lands not long after.

Kalanyr and Urubia requested Salish citizenship and, once it was granted, purchased a massive chunk of the Olympic Peninsula. This would normally not have gone through, but a third party, listed as “The Spirit of the Quileute People” was added to the contract and approval was given. There is no “Spirit of the Quileute People” in the arcane; the dragons struck a deal with the Quileute Tribe itself. My sources report every member in good standing of the Quileute Tribe receives a considerable annual stipend, though all continue to support themselves through traditional employment with Olympic Logging, Olympic Woodcraft, and Olympic Nursery. In addition, if the tribe votes against actions by the dragons, they have the right to reclaim the lands with no need for compensation.

Urubia and Kalanyr evidently had some kind of falling out. Details are unknown, but the split led Kalanyr to Seattle. His move to the big city did not go as well as one would expect for a dragon. Using personal wealth and profits from his holdings in the Olympic companies, he invested heavily in Federated-Boeing and entered into a complex, multi-step land deal in concert with

a Federated Boeing executive for a large parcel of land in the Verge near the Seattle/Salish-Shidhe border. At the same time, using the contract with the Quileute Tribe as a template, he negotiated an even larger land deal in partnership with the Salish Tribe, which appeared on all contracts and permits as the “Spirit of the Salish People.” Things did not go as planned. First the FB executive he'd been working with pulled a last-minute switch, cutting Kalanyr out of the land deal and giving him nothing for his money. A few months after that, not seeing the returns they'd expected on their investment, the “Spirit of the Salish People” activated the contract's reversion clause; the land went back to the Salish Tribe with no compensation to Kalanyr.

After two setbacks in a row, Kalanyr removed himself to the one parcel of land he managed to hold on to: the north shore of Beaver Lake, a large tract of prime lake front property he picked up from Gaeatronics for next to nothing due to the high levels of radiation in the water and surrounding soil. Gaeatronics tried to use the sale for a PR boost, but that backfired when Kalanyr did not play nice with photographers and drones that disturbed the privacy of his irradiated wasteland.

Kalanyr developed a keen interest in the effects of radiation on the local wildlife, which he studied intently. At some point, date uncertain, his studies expanded to importing wildlife and even metahuman squatters and observing how they fared in high radiation. It was while he was in the midst of these experiments that Halley's Comet came by and Kalanyr evidently developed the ability to change colors. The exact timing isn't known, and any speculation on causal effect is just that—speculation. It could have been SURGE, radiation, or a combination of the two. Whatever the reason, witnesses agree it was in full effect during what the locals refer to as the “Cleansing.”

The Cleansing took place in 2062, at the height of the comet craze. The background radiation count on Kalanyr's land dropped to levels not seen since the Awakening. His private retreat became a Mecca in Glow City. The excitement was short-lived—fading after the comet was gone and the land slowly returned to previous

radiation levels—but enough people believed the dragon had caused the change to make Kalanyr the object of a small but devoted following. These followers, who call themselves the “Isotopes of Kalanyr,” live in the area permanently and suffer accordingly. They are granted frequent healings from “Lord Kalanyr” in exchange for doing their master’s bidding.

- The work in Glow City and Kalanyr’s connection to Kaltenstien suggests research into cleansing the SOX, or maybe ways to survive the radiation so Feuerschwinge’s body (and horde) can be recovered. Could be little Kal is working toward getting back on daddy Kal’s good side.
- Aufheben

Kalanyr has not lived near Beaver Lake since the local radiation count returned to its previous levels, but he maintains his relationship with his Isotopes. No clear reason for this—the Isotopes do nothing for him as far as I can determine—but he makes regular, if very brief and infrequent, visits. He used profits accrued by his Olympic investments during his stay in Glow City to purchase property in Downtown Seattle. Records were lost in the Crash of ‘64, of course, but Kalanyr claimed ownership of the top four floors of the very upscale Madrona Park apartments, among other choice holdings. Residents initially claimed there’d been no such sales, but several investigations proved fruitless. Kalanyr and some smart lawyers negotiated a deal all residents have accepted, even if not all are happy with it. They remain, cost free, until they either move out or die. Their apartments then go to Kalanyr. Those top floors lost their residents fairly quickly. Some heirs raised questions about the deaths and others challenged the agreement, but nothing ever came of it. Kalanyr has converted the top two floors to his personal residence and is turning a steady profit renting out apartments on the two floors below him, usually with short-term leases.

- If you need a good spot to lay low or run an op around Lake Washington, see Erica Bryche in 27D. The rates are a little high, but two floors above you is the ultimate anti-snooping device, 20 meters of dragon.
- Turbo Bunny
- Which is why I wouldn’t go near the place. Dragons are trouble, period. You don’t just walk right into their lairs.
- Clockwork

In addition to the holdings he claimed after the Crash, Kalanyr has been purchasing properties all over Redmond since ‘64. Taking advantage of the already low land values and leveraging the panic among us lesser races, he has managed to pick up extensive tracts in every part of the Barrens. He consolidated these scattered parcels and their ownership under his umbrella company, Chameleon, Inc. He’s also worked out a near-zero property tax deal with the City of Redmond, and the fees he pays for services are even lower. It was while negotiating these arrangements with the City that Kalanyr developed his taste for politics; a taste that may be leading to some trouble in the near future.

Kalanyr has been investing in companies as well as properties since moving back from the wilderness. He’s developed a diverse portfolio of stocks in unrated, AAA, AA, and A-grade corps. According to the public records of Chameleon, Inc., his largest

investments are in Shiawase, Gaeatronics, Aztechnology, and Unlimitech. He also purchased a big chunk of Federated-Boeing. It’s certainly no coincidence ownership of the land in the Verge he’d lost out on years ago transferred to Chameleon, Inc. almost immediately, and it’s probably not a coincidence the FB exec who screwed him over died in an avalanche while skiing on that very parcel of land.

There were rumors years ago that FB was able to purchase the land so cheaply because people in the Verge were spooked by an unexplained earthquake and massive ashfall. Earthquakes are unusual for that region, and there had been none from the time of the sale until the one that killed the FB exec. I have no solid evidence, but personally I think Kalanyr was connected to those quakes, probably through some alliance or deal with a spirit. The first one dropped land prices dramatically and—if the guy he thought was his partner hadn’t swindled him—Kalanyr would have made a killing on the deal. He got blindsided, something that hasn’t happened to him since, and years later the guy who blindsided him was killed by the very thing that made the first deal possible. Dragons play a long game. We shorter-lived races are more focused on the here and now, which means in a fast-breaking situation we might outmaneuver a dragon. Temporarily. But dragons learn, and they don’t forget.

Speaking of draconic machinations and the long game: Since their arrival together, Kalanyr and Urubia have had little contact. It was thought they were having nothing to do with each other. But I put a watcher on Kalanyr, and it reported the two dragons were meeting astrally. That one report was all it was able to send to me before the dragons’ astral forms chased it down and destroyed it. One meeting does not automatically mean an ongoing relationship, but the fact remains that astral contacts are hard to detect; they could be meeting astrally every day with no one being the wiser. The relationship between these two dragons is a mystery. It’s almost certain they fought side by side in 2036, it’s definite they arrived together in 2045, and they’ve now lived uncomfortably near each other by dragon standards for a quarter of a century. It would be strange for them to not be in contact with each other, but resorting to the secrecy of astral contact raises even more questions.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES (2070-PRESENT)

After taking—or reasserting—ownership of the Verge property, Kalanyr returned to the Salish-Shidhe in ‘71 and negotiated a new land deal in which he bought land that abutted his holdings along the Redmond/Salish-Shidhe border. He now owns the Salish-Shidhe town of Novelty, not far from the squatter-filled ghost town in Redmond that was once Trilogy. Novelty is only a couple clicks south of Duvall, site of a major Salish Ranger station and infamous as the home base of Major Owl Firebranch. Firebranch is well known for his no-holds-barred methods when dealing with border issues. This proximity could be troublesome for Kalanyr, which may be part of the reason for the Salish agreeing to the deal.

Kalanyr has been developing a small but efficient smuggling network along his stretch of borderland, an enterprise that has brought him in contact with members of both the Finnigan family and the Dogmen. Both groups were unhappy with the newcomer for cutting into their profits by taking business from their routes in the Fall City area. Proof that Kalanyr learned from his experiences with crooked executives and city politics is the diplomatic finesse



he showed in heading off the conflict and negotiating a network of shared smuggling routes and resources that maximized profits for all involved. His success in dealing with the criminal organizations, especially the Finnigan family, led to new political connections, which he's been leveraging to his advantage. This is one area in which I think the two Redmond dragons are at odds. Each has a different set of political connections, and each seems to have their own agenda for Redmond. It will be interesting to see how this conflict plays out.

Kalanyr has also been working to revitalize the Barrens, especially out in the Verge. He's using local labor (read: squatters) recruited from the areas he owns to package ash, volcanic rock, and nutrient-rich dirt from the area for sale to a variety of companies. Meanwhile spirits, mostly earth and water, demolish buildings, process building materials, and clean up streets. Stonehome, a construction company Kalanyr founded, uses the processed building materials to construct remarkably sturdy buildings, and Stonehome communities have sprung up in the area around Trinity. The homes are quite impressive, as the dense building materials lend themselves to a medieval style. The Auburn home of Drash Skarsgood, lead singer of local Seattle trog rock band 3 Meter, is a particularly impressive example. It's a European-style castle built to troll proportions with four-meter ceilings and towers at each corner. Many of Seattle's elite have ordered one-off custom homes from Stonehome, but for quality-assurance purposes Kalanyr limits construction to two such projects at a time. At this writing Stonehome is building one custom home in Tacoma for a Weapons World executive and another in Bellevue for the mistress of a Gaeatronics VP.

- Must be one hell of a mistress. Stonehome projects never cost less than eight figures. I'm sure the Gaeatronics VP will probably find other uses for the place as well.
- Sticks
- Yeah, like hiding from his wife if she finds out he has a mistress. If it's who I think it is, his wife will probably pay serious money to get some payback if she finds out he's screwing around on her. Sounds like a nice double-op. Get the dirt, then get the revenge. Who's in?
- Cosmo

Kalanyr has two personal Stonehome structures, both medieval castles: one near the border in the Verge and another on the north shore of Beaver Lake. Both are built to dragon scale, though they include smaller areas for metahuman servants and guests. The homes have state-of-the-art electronic security, but the high radiation levels in Glow City cause frequent issues. Both houses are also intricately warded. The patterns can only be observed from a distance, of course, but the wards seem to form a labyrinth within the structures, with some areas more heavily protected than others. Kalanyr has a number of dual-natured paranormal guard animals on constant patrol, particularly in the areas that do not seem warded, to keep out astral intruders. There is an extensive underground structure beneath his castle on the Verge. No cramped, dank dungeon here; the subterranean complex is built to dragon proportions. Visitors are rare, but the reports we have indicate everything is scaled to impress and intimidate. Rumors of secret passages and hidden entrances abound, of course, but none can be confirmed (secret passages are not something you announce

publicly). Astral investigators report a "strange" background count and an unusual concentration of spirits they cannot identify. It's assumed conditions are similar at Kalanyr's Glow City home, but radiation levels play hell with any attempts to surveil or assense. Most of what we think we know are extrapolations based on comparing fuzzy partial readings with scans of the Verge property. Quite frankly, anything is possible.

- The place in Glow City has the same underground structures, but even the dragon rarely goes down there. Something strange took up residence down there shortly after the place was built.
- Ecotope
- If we're throwing out crazy rumors, let me drop one in. Kalanyr is working with radiation shamans in Glow City. These guys are nasty bastards who worship the atom as a totem and pretty much feed off the ambient radiation. Rumors say that Kalanyr is working with them to try to figure out cleansing methods that concentrate the radiation for the shamans to use. All rumors, no evidence, but if you're dealing with crazy it pays to keep an open mind.
- Sunshine

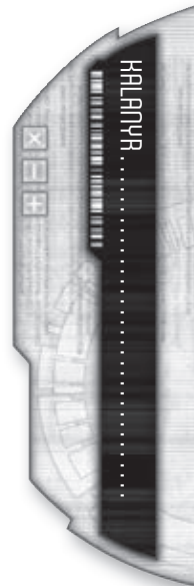
In addition to his high-profile money-maker Stonehomes, Kalanyr has also been putting low-key but serious efforts into revitalizing and rebuilding around Trinity and other areas he owns in Redmond. Small steps, nothing flashy, but definitely building toward long-term, self-sustaining revitalization. In fact, looking at all of his rebuilding projects in dragon-scale long view, the area from north Beaver Lake through his Salish holdings shows every sign of being cultivated to become a dragon domain. Whether this is for Kalanyr's personal use or if he's paving the way for other dragons yet unknown remains to be seen.

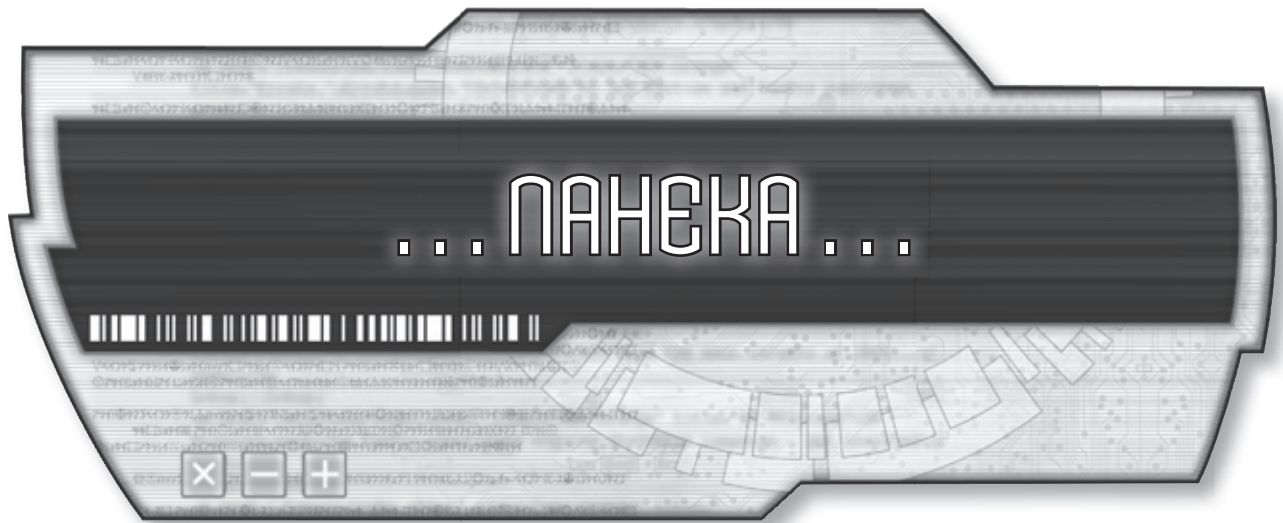
DRAGON CONFLICT STANCE

Though he treats metahumans with some level of courtesy, in his heart Kalanyr considers us to be useful servants and crunchy snacks. He is definitely not on the side of metahumans in this conflict. His possible relations to Kaltenstien and difficulties with Lofwyr when he was a T'ir prince would seem reason to not be within Lofwyr's camp. These considerations are not as significant as his relationship with Urubia, however. As noted we are not clear on the details of their link, but it seems to be intense and is definitely negative at this time. As Urubia is a staunch supporter of positive dragon-metahuman relations, this would seem to support the theory Kalanyr is not. Rumors Kalanyr refused a request to meet with Hestaby also favor a pro-dragon stance on his part.

It has been observed that dragons who support mutually beneficial relations between their kind and metahumans seem to share a common vision of overall progress. Dragons who oppose partnership, the pro-dragon dragons, either dabble at playing with humans for their own apparent amusement like great dragon Aden or are completely self-absorbed, interested only in their own goals. From what we can determine, Kalanyr seems to be in this last group.

Though the tides of the greater conflict could easily affect the local situation, it is vital for Seattleites to keep a close eye on the evolving relationship and mounting tensions between Kalanyr and Urubia. If the dragon tensions are going to hit home for Seattleites, this is where it will hit first.





NAHEKA: OUROBOROS RISING

Posted by: Dirk Montgomery

- I've known Dirk since I was knee high to a cyberdeck. In fact, he arrested me back then. Twice. Eventually he wandered 'round to the smart side of the law, but not before he ran afoul of some serious heavies. At the top of Dirk's Do Not Call list is a Feathered Serpent named Naheka who has been busy reshaping the Yakuza Empire. So, I asked Dirk to share what he knows.
- FastJack

Here's the thing: not all Dragons are evil manipulators bent on world domination. That might happen when they mature to greats, but the adults are the closest thing to normal a dragon can get. Sometimes a Dragon is just another slag trying to live up to the boss's expectations. Naheka has a boss—the Hawaiian feathered serpent is a vassal of Ryumyo. In other words, the dragon is a wageslave, a thankless servant of a boss he can't quit. Now, in truth, being a vassal is different than being a wageslave. You can't be extracted, and once you reach the status of great dragon you get to become your own wyrm with whatever territory your sponsor has gifted to you. Ryumyo announced intentions to give Naheka the Kingdom of Hawai'i in forty or so years, but will that be enough for his continued service? I'm not going to convince you that I understand how dragons think. I don't. I do, however, know a thing or two about putting evidence together to build a case. I believe I can make the case that Naheka is going to betray his master, and damn soon. It may be the only way that Naheka keeps his hoard.

In order to understand Naheka's dilemma you have to recognize the relationship between the feathered serpent, his master, Ryumyo, and his former Queen, Mujaji. Shortly after her awakening, Mujaji sent the feathered serpent on an expedition to gain a foothold in North Africa. Naheka saw this as an opportunity to expand his own empire and gain control of key artifacts before other dragons uncovered them first. Naheka overreached. He clashed with several other adult dragons, the most famous battle taking place over the skies of Morocco near one of Aden's lairs. Mujaji was forced to recall and reprimand her vassal.

The Rain Queen gave Naheka a second chance to prove himself. She sent him back out into the world with a more covert mission: Naheka was to establish agents within key metahuman organizations. Unfortunately for Mujaji, Naheka is old school; not in the sense of jamming out to JetBlack and Maria Mercurial tracks, but *old world*. The dragon lacked the adaptability to understand the world in which he now lived. This led to a series of critical, and sometimes public, failures. These missteps were brushed under the rug, but they made it clear that the feathered serpent was unprepared to deal with modern society.

- The Atlantean Group, that ever present thorn in Ryumyo's side, is partially Naheka's fault. I can't prove it, but what I've seen and heard on the net leads me to believe that Naheka has his claws deep in the Atlantean Foundation.
- Slamm-O!
- Naheka's involvement with Atlantean took place while he was still aligned with Mujaji. Naheka used the group to help Mujaji locate magical hotspots throughout the Pacific region. He donated millions into the corporation during its infancy and leveraged that into a seat on the board, but eventually the other board members out-maneuvered him and left him virtually powerless in the organization. He resigned shortly thereafter. Naheka still has some contacts in the organization and benefits from some of the knowledge the foundation gains, but he no longer has a say in anything they do.
- Mr. Bonds
- A dragon outsmarted by the board of directors of a foundation? I can see why Ryumyo took him under his wing. If word of that failure became public, it would embolden those who see dragons as vulnerable.
- Dr. Spin

Naheka disappeared soon after he was sent back out into the world. He resurfaced a decade later in Tokyo, working alongside Akane Ishino. In that moment it became clear that the feathered





INCOMING FEED.....



serpent had switched allegiances. Naheka did not formerly sever his relationship with the Rain Queen. Instead Ryumyo sent the great dragon a token to inform her that her vassal was now in the service of a new master.

The feathered serpent is not merely caught in a turf war between Ryumyo and Mujaji, but he seems to realize that his existence exacerbates that conflict. He also seems to be using this knowledge to his advantage. After all, Naheka is a feathered serpent, and his kind remains at odds with Ryumyo's breed. So what you end up with is an awkward, almost corporate coexistence with a vassal anxious to appear dutiful and responsible to his boss while still undermining that boss' authority.

Ryumyo sent Naheka to Hawai'i to control the ALOHA revolutionaries. The relative isolation of Hawai'i demanded that Naheka form alliances very quickly. He aligned with pirates, including some very well known shadowrunners, and put these forces to work securing control of the region's underworld. Once Naheka established himself as the Force Majeure of Hawai'i, he apparently stepped back and allowed the underworld machine he created to run itself. He was never more than a claws length away, though, if anything went wrong. From what I learned, this is Naheka's modus operandi. He puts systems into place and then steps far enough back to admire his work.

In Hawai'i, Naheka's main power came from the terrorist group ALOHA. This created the initial struggle between Naheka and the Kings. The dragon now operates secretly from behind a wall of terrorism. Officially he distances himself from the group, but if the death of King Kamehameha VI tells us anything, it is that the dragon is still in control.

Naheka's passion is not motivated merely by a desire to please his master. Ryumyo told his vassal that this would become his region once he matured enough to command it. In the meantime, Naheka would lair in Hawai'i, building connections to the land and protecting his master's interests. Those interests are the three major power sites in the Hawai'ian islands: Puowaina in Oahu, Haleakala in Maui, and the well-documented Honaunau Bay. Naheka controls two of these three sites outright, though he is forced to turn to rely on politics to control Puowaina and limit the number of tourists that frequent the popular site.

- Naheka's old-world roots are clear, as he's admitted to a number of contacts that he would enjoy flying over the region, Ghostwalker style, and devouring tourists until the locals get the point. Of course, the repercussions of that would be terrible. Hawai'i is too small and too geographically relevant for the megas to let anything short of a great dragon chew its way to power there.
- Winterhawk

Because Ryumyo controls the ring of fire and intends to keep control of it, little of what Naheka has is truly his own. He possesses three physical lairs, the first in Kauai. The second is located in a rock formation just off the shores of Waikiki. A third lair, the one from which he Awakened, is rumored to exist somewhere in Azania, but the dragon's rift with Mujaji prevents him from venturing to the region.

- Naheka's Azanian lair is in a nature preserve close to Table Mountain. The entrance is marked by a massive ring of burned trees. Mujaji's vassals patrol the region aggressively. No sentient creatures are permitted within a mile of the burn site.
- Glasswalker

According to local rumors, Naheka might have a hoard of gold and jewels buried deep below the waters of Waikiki. I am inclined to believe it does not exist, mainly because of the way the dragon operates. Naheka seeks out living assets, be it people or critters. He looks for people in positions of power that he can manipulate, and when there are no people where he needs them, Naheka works to put them there. So, Naheka's hoard is people, and the crown jewel of his treasure hoard is the Yakuza.

THE SERPENT'S FOOTMEN

No single entity owns or controls the Yakuza. The four rengo are made up of independent gumi that answer to an Oyabun mainly out of a sense of honor. If you followed Mihohi Oni's post in Vice you'll recall that each rengo is named after the family of the Oyabun, and one of the four is called the Naheka-rengo. Naheka won control of the rengo by shedding Yakuza blood. He protects it as a father does a child. Like a helicopter parent, Naheka leaves little to chance in his organization, even going so far as to plant spies in kai that he feels are not always following instructions. Should your group stray too far off message, you may get a visit from a katana-wielding drake, or worse, find yourself on Naheka's lunch menu.

Naheka's rengo was born out of the Australian Saiki-rengo, which he shattered in order to bring them in line with the machinations of Ryumyo who had been plotting to unify all the gumi under a single Oyabun. Ryumyo's plan ultimately failed, but it led to his vassal uniting ancient Yakuza bloodlines with a handful of New Way metahuman kai in position to determine the future direction of the Yakuza as a whole. Since '66, Oyabun Naheka has controlled the rengo and personally led the Sumiyoshi-kai in their fight with Masaru's Huk. The membership of the Sumiyoshi-kai is another example of how this dragon's hoard is different from many others. Following the purge, he handpicked each new member of the kai. Some came from his ALOHA organization, while others were brought in from the Shotozumi-rengo and even the Mitsuhamma Corporation. When Sumiyoshi was rebuilt, it was with the specific purpose of destroying the Huk Oyabun around the world

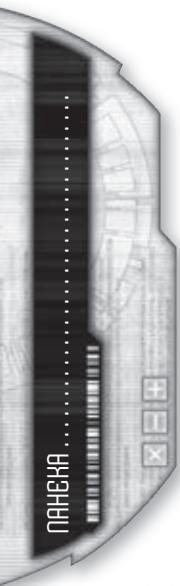
- While the group runs standard Yakuza moneymaking operations in the Philippines, in the past few years we've seen the Sumiyoshi-kai become something more. The kai is bolstered by paramilitary specialists courtesy of the Four Oyabun of MCT as well as operating a magical order rumored to be started by Naheka himself. Though easily the smallest kai, the group's combat tactics and capabilities are far beyond anything the Yakuza can muster. Other kai throughout the Yakuza refer to the old-school-aligned group as the "tip of the sword."
- Black Mamba

This is where it gets interesting. Naheka's rengo shares gumi with other rengo. For example, the Hidenaga-gumi of Aztlan also serves Oyabun Hanzo Shotuzumi and the Shotozumi-rengo. Such overlap should cause conflict between Oyabun, but from what I've seen it has drawn them closer together.

- Montgomery makes it sound like Naheka is going to make a power play to become the Oyabun-no-Oyabun and seize control of the organization. There are two problems with this. Historically, infighting between the Oyabun has been so fierce that not even Akira Watada with the backing of Ryumyo could hold it together for very long. Secondly, there is no chance that Naheka could pull this off without Ryumyo knowing exactly what is going on. If we are talking about it here on the net (even if it's not a public spot), then the old wyrm not only knows, but either approves of the coup or already has a plan in place to stop it.
- Mihoshi Oni
- Why would Ryumyo let Naheka take control of the entire Yakuza? A force that big would give the feathered servant enough strength to rival Ryumyo himself.
- Lei Kung
- You underestimate the difference in power between an adult dragon and a great. It is more than size and mana. It's cunning, along with the years of experience to know what is going to happen decades in advance. I suspect Ryumyo set Naheka down this path in order to become Oyabun-no-Oyabun and the focus of the other Oyabuns' displeasure. With Naheka in charge, the other rengo will have to turn to Ryumyo in order to thwart the feathered serpent's micromanaging ways. Naheka will get the glory and day-to-day hassle of running the Yakuza, but everyone involved will serve Ryumyo.
- Winterhawk

This is another example of how Naheka portrays himself as a unifier. It is all part of his carefully sculpted image as a fighter for the people, be it the freedom fighters of Hawai'i or the old-way Yakuza battling to preserve their way of life. I believe that his image is a tremendous part of what he values. Since his early stumbles, Naheka has worked hard to shape that image through the organizations he controls, as well as in his public appearances.

A clear example of his image cultivation is the millions of nuyen he dumps into the University of Hawaii. Naheka's work with U of H is pure public relations. The dragon donated a building to the university, which is used by the metahuman cultural studies department. He also funds the Savai'i Chair, a professorship dedicated to Sapience Studies, presently held by Dr. Lucy Shapiro. He funds a dozen graduate scholarships in Thaumaturgy as well. All of this makes it look like Naheka believes in building a bridge of understanding between metahumanity and other sentient races. The reality, though, is that this is a recruiting front. Naheka uses the university to locate and assess potential talent. And the talent pool doesn't stop at the scholarship students—Naheka's people scan the registers for talented students who slip through the cracks academically. Those students the dragon sees as worthy are then provided assistance through tutoring and advisement, often being given internships in local businesses, even placed in



corporations once they graduate. Not every student makes it, even with help. The ones that don't flower academically are pressured into other career paths. It has led to an extensive network of spies and contacts infecting every corner of the islands.

- Naheka's recruitment efforts include a massive battery of aptitude tests—magical, tactical, etc. From time to time they uncover talented individuals who are not built for classroom work. Once discovered, these individuals sometimes disappear from the system, SIN and all.
- Frosty
- What happens to them?
- Baka Dabora
- I don't know, but I am sure Sounder can answer that question better than anyone.
- Frosty
- Is that supposed to be some kind of joke?
- Sounder

Naheka's army doesn't end with metahumanity. During his time in the service of the Rain Queen, Naheka formed relationships with several tribes of shapeshifters, some of whom chose to continue serving the dragon after he left Africa. Naheka also left with a small clutch of lindworms that serve as his lieutenants.

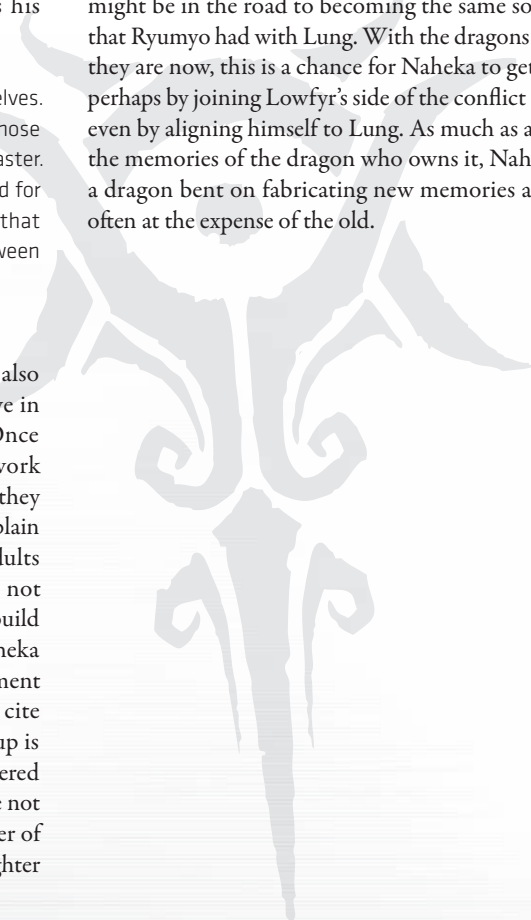
- Mujaji often employed Naheka as a negotiator with the Zulu elves. When Naheka left the Rain Queen to join Ryumyo, some of those elves reached out to him for information about his former master. That brief encounter flowered into a dialogue that has lasted for decades. Though the dragon hasn't given them anything that could threaten Mujaji's rule, the information exchange between them has been fruitful.
- Frosty

In spite of Ryumyo's objections, the feathered serpent also sits among a small clutch of adult dragons who still believe in cultivating the relationship between spirits and dragons. Once upon a time dragons conjured powerful ally spirits to work alongside them supposedly and even protect the dragons as they slept. The greats can point to Jurojin and others like him to explain why this happens less in the Sixth World, but a group of adults have resurrected the practice. Naheka sits at the forefront, not only conjuring his own ally but working with free spirits to build allegiances where they can help each other. In all of this Naheka is seeking power and image more so than any true development of relationships. Those who know the moves he has made cite his relationship with the spirit Buttercup as proof. Buttercup is the better-known figure of the two, and this upsets the feathered serpent's ego. He has worked with Buttercup, but the two are not friends. In fact in their last encounter the spirit got the better of him in a business deal. He responded by sinking an Evo freighter with full cargo.

Naheka is indeed old world and quite immature. He has not acclimated to the world of corporations and experienced several false starts in his attempts to gain control of one, including corporations cannibalized by Mitsuhama and Saeder-Krupp. In the latter case, his moves invoked the wrath of his former Queen, leading his present master to forbid him from directly intervening in human corporate matters. Now he invests his money with a small private firm called Ulu Maika Investments that seems to be part of his hoard. He is not their only client; they also handle money for other forces including a Mitsuhama executive, a key stockholder in the Horizon group, and several top film executives. Naheka owns the organization outright but does not control the day-to-day operations. That honor belongs to Adam Swire, a very young and sharp-witted dwarf accountant formerly of Mitsuhama.

- To throw some fuel on the fire, I looked into Naheka's investment group, and they are heavily leveraged in the Nagato Corporation, which is a front for the Nagato combine and Oyabun Hanzo Nagato. There may be some truth to this Yakuza takeover rumor.
- /dev/grll

In the end, when I think about Naheka the first image that comes to mind is the Ouroboros, a dragon swallowing its own tail. He works hard to bite off a chunk of land for himself and winds up putting himself in a worse position than he was in before. Ryumyo put a lot of faith behind this dragon, but now it seems like it might be in the road to becoming the same sort of relationship that Ryumyo had with Lung. With the dragons bickering the way they are now, this is a chance for Naheka to get clear of Ryumyo, perhaps by joining Lowfyr's side of the conflict as an ally. Perhaps even by aligning himself to Lung. As much as a hoard represents the memories of the dragon who owns it, Naheka appears to be a dragon bent on fabricating new memories and new treasures, often at the expense of the old.





PERIANWYR IN DENVER: SOOTHING THE SAVAGE BEAST

Posted by: Kat o' Nine Tales

- Not all dragons are all about politics and corporate machinations. Plenty are—these days it seems you can't turn around in the shadows without tripping over a job that reeks of dragon. With the big boys and girls like Lofwyr and Hestaby growling at each other, everyone's lining up to take sides. But there are a few dragons who don't really want to get stuck in the middle of this little dragon cold war, but they're caught there anyway.

There's one in particular I've been keeping my eye on for a number of years now. Before I dig into current events, though, it might be best to review some history, courtesy of my favorite trashy tabloid rag. I'll upload the original articles for you to amuse yourselves with.

- Kat o' Nine Tales

//Accessing ...

//KA-POW! KA-POW!

//Vol. XXIX, Issue 37, December 2062

Hoi once again, my fellow music lovers! We're back once again with all the latest from our favorite Harmonomancers! We've got the Top-Wiz 40 for the week! There's trouble in paradise for the Psychedelic Phlegm's front-man Johnny Phlegm! Scandal rocks the Nashville dwarfbilly country scene! But first <File edited. Deleting the extra drek you don't care about —Kat>

Big news from out of the Mile-High Treaty City, Denver! The city may still be recovering from and slowly adjusting to its new landlord, the big white dragon called Ghostwalker, but the music scene is alive and well. From out of nowhere a new recording label has set up shop there, Ceol Productions. Since they opened up three short months ago, they have introduced the music world to almost a dozen hot new acts, including all-elf boy-band T'ir Town Boys and the classic prog-rock sensation Kingsland. Of course we can't forget Ceol's biggest find so far, the band that's been tearing up the charts with their blend of punk-style lyrics and turbo-speed drum and guitars, Blitzkrieg!

So just where did Ceol Productions come from? So far that's shrouded in mystery. On paper the company is owned by the mysterious Evan Perry. Perry is a reclusive individual who has refused all requests for interviews. Little is known about Perry, and KA-POW! KA-POW!'s research deckers have been unable to find any trace of him prior to 2055. One common thread with all of Ceol Productions' finds is the Weekday Eclipse, a nightclub in the Denver UCAS sector. Owned by an elf named Ghabardi Smith, the Eclipse was a struggling club on the brink of financial collapse until it managed to snag Maria Mercurial to perform a sold-out show. The Eclipse closed down shortly after for remodeling and then had a grand re-opening concert this past September. The Elementals headlined, but newcomers Blitzkrieg opened for them and stole the show. The two bands closed the show out with a rock rendition of "Dueling Banjos" that blew the doors off the building. Pirate feeds of that performance catapulted Blitzkrieg into the public eye and led to a huge spike in Elementals song sales.

So where did Evan Perry come from, and how does he find so much amazing talent? That's a mystery for now, and our faithful fans know we love a good mystery! We'll stay on this until we find out the truth! Until then, watch for anything with the Ceol label on it, it's sure to be amazing!

//End File

- Weekday Eclipse is both the name of Perianwyr's club in Denver and the name of the company that runs all his business affairs, which includes his music production company Ceol Productions.
- Kay St. Irregular
- Evan Perry? I shouldn't be surprised. He was never all that good at subtle.
- Bull
- Care to share with the rest of the class?
- Slamm-O!
- It's been over a decade now, so I'm not surprised you don't remember. Keep reading, I think Kat has another KA-POW! article for us.
- Bull

- Indeed I do. I shouldn't be surprised you kept track of all this as well. Fortunately the KA-POW! author gets right to the point in this article, and for good reason.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

//Accessing...

//KA-POW! KA-POW!

//Vol. XXX, Issue 26, September 2063

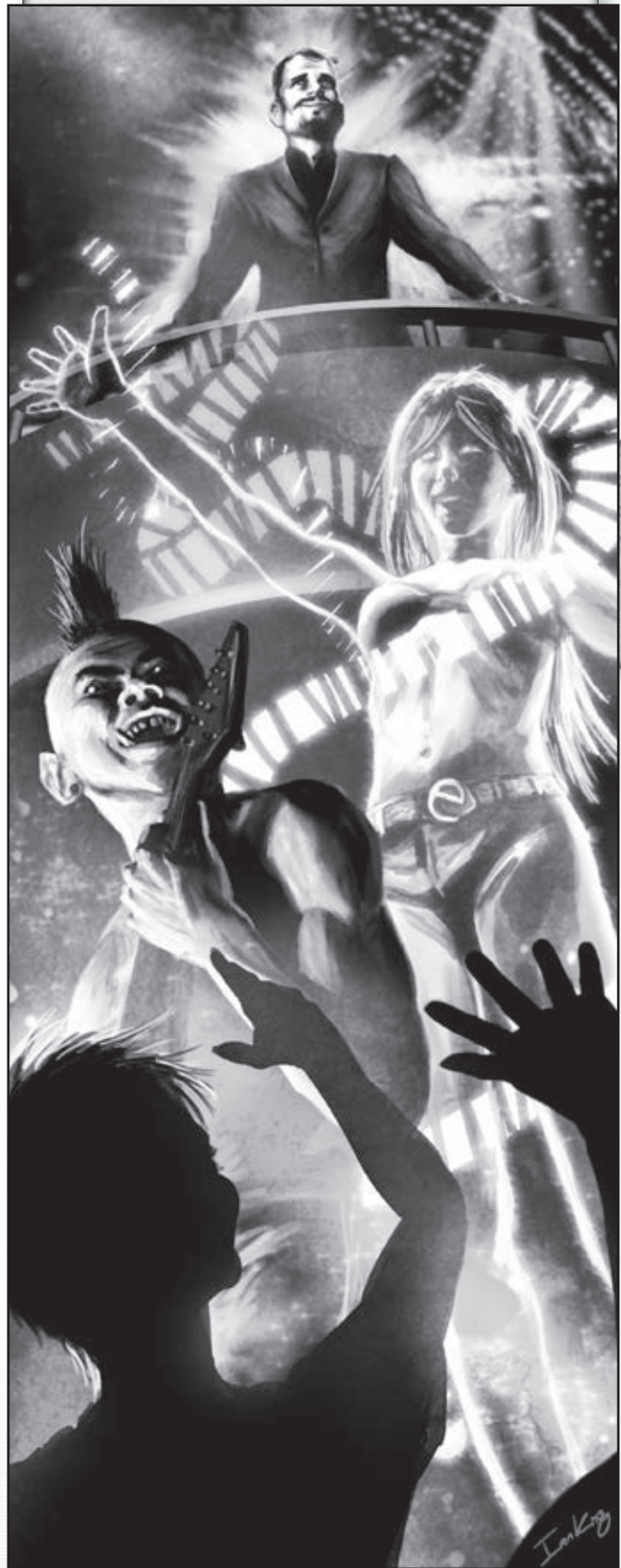
Hoi Stargazers! Welcome to a special edition of KA-POW! KA-POW! Have we got some big news for you, music fans! We've been following the career of Evan Perry and Ceol Productions with great interest this last year, as he continues to be a hit machine! Well, it looks like this time it's the machine that's taking a hit. Video surveillance records from Evan Perry's primary venue the Weekday Eclipse were uploaded to the Matrix earlier today by an anonymous source. I'm certain you've seen it by now, but if not you can see it for yourself [here](#). It shows a meeting between Perry and the owner of the Eclipse, Ghabardi. Part way through the meeting, Evan transforms into a dragon! Holy drek, right?

Ceol has been in damage-control mode since the video hit the 'trix, and they held a press conference less than an hour after the initial upload. Evan Perry, it turns out, is a dragon named Perianwyr! Some of you might recognize that name, as Perianwyr was one of the recipients of the late Dunklezahn's will. The Big D left Perianwyr his music collection, which is rumored to be priceless and to contain a ton of unique recordings, original masters, and memorabilia. I know I'd love to get a look at (and listen to) that collection!

The music world is reeling from the revelation that Ceol is being run by a dragon. Several artists affiliated with the label have already announced plans to terminate their contracts. Up and coming ork hip-hop artist Crimetime issued a statement saying that "I know better than to deal with a dragon. Frag that motherfragging wyrm." Digital sales of all Ceol material dipped briefly this afternoon, then saw a sharp spike in sales. Apparently you guys want to know more about any music that can soothe the savage beast, and I don't blame you!

//End File

- The rest of the article is the typical blather, with a couple interviews thrown in. Crimetime almost cut his career short with that move, as few labels wanted to be the ones to poach from a dragon. Fortunately for him the following year Or'zet and the so-called "orxploitation" movement hit, and he was able to climb on and ride that to fame and fortune. Perianwyr was quick to utilize his newfound fame to further bolster his company, and for every musician that bailed, two more signed on.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- So why did the dragon hide his identity in the first place? A dragon running a company is almost commonplace these days, scary as that is.
- Glitch
- Perianwyr was worried about how both the talent he was trying to recruit as well as his target market would react. On the one hand, he lost acts due to the announcement, and his sales took a little bit of a hit. On the other hand, he more than made up for those losses quickly, so it seems he was worried about nothing.
- Dr. Spin



PERIANWYR.....

- That's only part of it, and I suspect not the main point for him. Everything I've seen and read about Perianwyr is that he absolutely loves music. He's referred to music as being pure, and the act of creating music to be "freedom." While he capitalized on his dragon status initially, it's something he's since downplayed quite a bit. He rarely references or mentions it, and he never goes anywhere in his dragon form, preferring to operate as "Evan Perry" instead.

I think that's because he doesn't want his draconic nature to be the reason the music is successful, the gimmick that lures in an audience. He wants listeners to approach it in an unbiased manner. He also doesn't want to appear to be taking advantage of his musicians or his competitors. Most dragons are ruthless when they lose an asset, whether it's money, property, information, or personnel. Consider how Lofwyr would react in a situation similar to Crimetime's, where a major talent of his jumps ship and breaks his contract. Perianwyr not only didn't retaliate, he was the first to congratulate Crimetime when he hit it big with *Djoto*.

- Kat o' Nine Tales
- Lofwyr would have gone ballistic. Crimetime would have been captured and returned with prejudice, or more likely would simply have vanished without a trace. Lofwyr hates to lose his toys. Of course, the megacorps aren't any better, but Lofwyr is both corp and dragon, so he doubles down.
- Pistons
- And that's the crux of the current situation we find ourselves in. Most dragons see people as property, as a toy. And now that a few are expressing a different viewpoint, the older dragons aren't happy having their rules challenged.
- Cerberus
- Yeah. I'm not touching that one, especially considering the source. 'Jack, has Cerberus received permanent guest status here or something?
- Slamm-O!
- I could have sworn I locked him out three different times. Either he's incredibly stubborn or I'm slipping.
- FastJack

HOARDING MUSIC

- When Fastjack was first asking around about "dragon hoards," of course the first thing that everyone thinks of is material wealth; a cave with a pile of gold coins, huge collections of fine art, etc. If you go more modern, it's land, corporate holdings, and nuyen. But for some dragons a hoard is less well defined, and Perianwyr is one of those.

Perianwyr hoards music, in all its forms. Since he founded Ceol Productions, his company has become a silent partner in dozens of nightclubs around the world, including the Weekday Eclipse in Denver, Underworld 93 in Seattle, Mambo #6 in Miami, the Wilting Flower in Portland, the Red Dog in Hong Kong, and Johan's Place in Berlin. He utilizes these clubs to farm talent and to showcase his current acts. There are also nearly one thousand music acts signed to contracts to Ceol Productions, with the artist retaining an unheard of amount of creative control and freedom.

Not to mention his personal music collection, built upon the foundation he inherited from Dunklezahn.

- Kat o' Nine Tales
- What's the big deal with Ceol's contracts?
- Slamm-O!
- Most agencies these days are corporate controlled. Musical acts are a "process" now, and everything from the type of music you perform, to how you dress, down to who you're seen with in public is strictly controlled. It's all flash and image, but sadly there is often very little substance. There's a reason there were less than two-dozen acts listed in the *Attitude* dossier we compiled last year. Few musicians are able to rise above the cookie-cutter music factory that the corp agencies run and are able to last more than a year or two in the spotlight. Remember The Dells? The Apple Suckers? Trish Martin? Amy & Bobby? 2 Kool Troll? One or two albums, a couple top 40 songs, and fifteen minutes in the spotlight. Then they were chewed up and spit out by the machine and left broken wrecks. The performers have almost no say in what they do, where they go, etc. And management takes a huge chunk of the profits to boot. Ceol's contracts, on the other hand, allow the artists a lot more freedom as well as the right to veto anything they don't feel like doing. They work less, but keep more of what they earn.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- What's so bad about being a star that these guys all burn out like that? Seems like corp sponsorship would make it even easier to live the good life. I considered a music career at one time—I play a mean guitar. If I didn't like blowing things up so much, sounds like it would have been a good career choice.
- Kane
- Plus this doesn't gibe with what I'd heard before about the dragon augmenting his performers to get as much as he could out of them.
- Aufheben
- Yeah, I looked into that last year, as I thought it was interesting. Turned out to be little more than spin that Pathfinder was putting out to discredit Ceol and discourage new clients from signing with him.
- Slamm-O!
- What most people don't realize is that music sales these days, frankly, suck. Once upon a time a band could spend a year or two putting a studio album together, spend a few months touring and making some appearances to promote the new album, and then relax as money came rolling in. Some bands were more prolific than others, but album sales were the majority of a performer's income. Your popularity dictated how hard you had to work. The novastars of the 20th century could spend years between albums and tours, while the less popular bands were forced to constantly tour and produce new music.



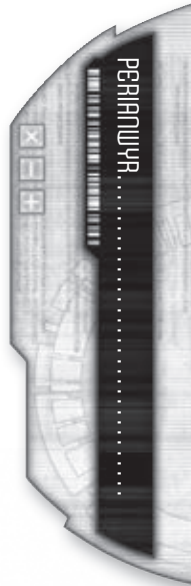
music industry was hurting then, and it's just gotten worse with the rise of the Matrix. These days, actual music sales for major stars are a relatively small part of their earnings, and generally not enough to allow them to live the fabled rock and roll lifestyle. Independent and underground musicians fare a little better, because our fans are more willing to buy our stuff. But we also have a fraction of the fanbase that the megastars have, so it's all relative.

So where does the money come from? Live performances and promotion. These days, instead of going on tour to promote an album, musicians do it the other way around. A band will take a few months off to generate some new material, then release it in preparation for touring and appearances in movies and trid shows. Last year Tim "Baby Tim" Tanaka, winner of Best New Artist of 2073 and Album of the Year for *Baby Tim Takes Seattle*, performed 278 live shows starting in March when he made his debut, made 206 public appearances, was a guest on talk shows 46 times, guest-starred on twenty trid show episodes, and had minor roles in four major films. That's how a musician these days earns their money.

- Kat o' Nine Tales
- So why don't more stars sign on with the wyrm, if he offers such a good deal?
- Beaker
- Perianwyr may be a wealthy dragon, and he's obviously a skilled businessman. But at the end of the day, he doesn't have the machine that the major studios do. Nor does he want it, because it brings a lot of baggage to the table that he feels would "infect" the music and hinder its freedom. Blitzkrieg is still Perianwyr's biggest success, but even with the exposure they got, the publicity, and a contract that was head and shoulders above anything a corporate studio would have given them, they still never made near as much money as they could have with studio backing. Perianwyr owns all those clubs because it's nearly impossible to get his clients into the bigger venues. The studios have them locked up tight. You don't play the Seattle Center, the Rock Hall of Fame Coliseum, the SuperDome, or really any venue that holds more than a couple hundred fans without corp backing these days.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- I think I see where this is all going, and it ain't good. Peri set up shop in Denver for a reason. Same reason he rarely leaves—Aztechnology. As far as I know, they still have a kill order out on him. But with Ghostwalker running the town and offering Peri protection, the Azzies have decided that he isn't worth the effort it would take to bring him down.
- Bull
- Wow. What did he do to them to piss them off so bad?
- /dev/grll
- It's not what he did, it's what he didn't do. Peri was partners for decades with a human named Kyle Morgan. Rumor has it that Peri first woke up in the 21st century and emerged in the Welsh countryside. Hungry, he devoured an entire flock of sheep and was subsequently set upon by a horde of terrified and angry villagers. Since Peri was still groggy from his millennia-long nap, the villagers might well have killed him had they not been talked down by a young, charismatic Kyle Morgan. The two became close friends,

and it was rumored they even had an empathic bond. They started doing specialized work as mercenaries in the early '30s—proto-shadowrunners as it were. Eventually they came under exclusive contract to Aztechnology, where they were AZT's number-one specialists for many years. Aztechnology doesn't tolerate failure, though, and after several botched jobs the pair went on the run, with a bounty on their heads. Kyle was killed in 2060, and Peri eventually turned to Ghostwalker for protection after seeing him kick the Azzies to the curb during the Year of the Comet.

- Bull
- Wait—partners? Or "partners"?
- /dev/grll
- No idea. Don't know, don't want to know, and not willing to ask. I will say this though, my buddy Johnny 99 thought Peri was female for the first couple years we were running from the duo.
- Bull
- With the dragons choosing sides now, the question becomes, what does Perianwyr do? He's not interested in politics or the games dragons normally play, but it looks like he's going to get caught up in them anyway. He sought refuge from Ghostwalker, so he owes some allegiance to him, and Ghostwalker seems to be leaning the opposite direction from Hestaby, which is no surprise given how he took over and continues to rule his city. Meanwhile, Perianwyr has a very direct connection with metahumanity through music and art, and it's clear that he loves both, which fits in with Hestaby's side of the conflict.
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- Perianwyr owes Ghostwalker an allegiance, and this ties them in ways we can barely comprehend. Where Ghostwalker goes, Perianwyr is obliged to follow.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- Drek. That ain't good for Peri. If Ghostwalker really does oppose Hestaby, he may decide that Perianwyr needs to shut his operation down. And I don't think Peri would do that.
- Bull
- What happens then?
- Slamm-0!
- Good question. How vindictive is Ghostwalker?
- Bull
- Do you have to ask? For all that he's adapted to the modern world, he treats Denver and its people like they are his property. He's a feudal lord, and his lands are both his responsibility and his to do with as he wills. Even Lofwyr at least puts on a front of etiquette, an air of civility. As ruthless as he can be, he's still a businessman at the end of the day. You can almost forget that he's a dragon, and Lofwyr encourages that. Ghostwalker never lets you forget what he is or that you are lower on the food chain than him.
- Pistons
- This whole mess isn't really public yet, but it's interesting to note that those musicians with ties to the shadows who work with Perianwyr have been watching the brewing dragon conflict very



closely, and most have been saving up cash and stockpiling supplies. The smart ones have, anyway. They know that if things go south between Ghostwalker and Perianwyr, they could well be targets.

- Kat o' Nine Tales
- After all, dragons like to play games, right? Why go after the dragon when you can attack it's assets? Dammit. I have some calls to make. This could get ugly. Kat, I know you have a stake in this too. Meet me for lunch later this week? I'll send you the time and place off the boards.
- Bull
- Sounds like a plan.
- Kat o' Nine Tales

//File Soothes the Savage Beast closed 02.10.74 by FastJack
//File Soothes the Savage Beast opened 3.24.74 by FastJack

- Holy crap. So looks like the drek has hit the fan. Big time. And not in the way we were expecting. I had 'Jack open this file back up for me, because damn, shit just went wizbang real quick. Anyone have any idea what just happened?
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- Peri just saved some Azzie hoops from Ghotswalker? Am I imagining things? That makes no sense.
- Bull
- Who says he was saving them? Ghostwalker just gave them a look. He's a dragon, so impossible to tell if that was a dirty look, or if he was checking them out, or what.
- Kane
- No, he was saving them. I've seen that look in Ghostwalker's eyes once before, just before he ate someone. He was pissed, big time.
- Pistons
- Please? "Ate someone." Melodramatic much? Dragons just don't do that. People aren't food.
- Haze
- You're an idiot, Haze. Ghostwalker certainly does. I can think of at least three accounts of it so far, including one recounted just last year by that FBI agent in an interview with KSAF. And "People aren't food?" You need to stop posting while high. There's a lot of things out there that consider metahumanity food.
- Sticks
- So that begs the question, why? Why would Peri save some Azzies? Last I knew, the kill order on him hadn't been lifted.
- Bull
- Maybe he was hoping to cut a deal, get that rescinded?
- /dev/grrl
- There was something else at play. It is difficult to determine over a trideo feed, but I suspect that there was magic in play. The Aztechnology contingent wanted Ghostwalker to kill them. They were a Sacrifice.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- A sacrifice? What, are they trying to trigger a war?
- /dev/grrl
- If magic was involved, it wasn't that kind of sacrifice.
- Winterhawk
- Then what would ... Oh, frag me. You think?
- Bull
- And there it is folks. Something weird happens, and Bull immediately jumps to "Bugs, Blood Magic, or Harlequin," his three top conspiracies. You're getting to be as bad as Plan 9.
- Snopes
- That doesn't make him wrong though.
- Plan 9
- Speculation—unproven, and highly unlikely. The person performing the magic has to be the one to spill the blood, or it doesn't work.
- Snopes
- The other question is how he transported the Aztlan contingent out before Ghostwalker could stop him. It was fast, however it was done.
- Pistons
- We don't entirely know what dragons are capable of. They are ancient, and they often know magics that predate civilization.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- If it was a levitate spell, it had to be a custom version. The most common variants of the spell only effect a single target, and I doubt even a dragon could cast one powerful enough to move that fast.
- Winterhawk
- There are a number of possible explanations. Unique spells, multiple spells working on conjunction with each other, and even the possibility of spirit help. Some spirits have the ability to step between dimensions and take passengers with them.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- Here's a frightening thought: dragon ritual magic. As powerful as they are on their own, imagine what they could do as a group.
- Lyran
- I think a trip to Denver may be in order. I suspect that Ghostwalker may be looking to hire some runners to retrieve Perianwyr, and I bet he'll be paying quite well.
- Clockwork
- Good point. Bull?
- Kat o' Nine Tales
- Already on it, Kat. Drek. You're still in Atlanta, right? Meet me at Virtual Underworld 93, 21:00 PST? I've rounded up a few others that are interested. I was hoping it wouldn't come to this. What a fraggin' mess.
- Bull
- A mission to forcibly retrieve a dragon? You couldn't pay me enough.
- Riser





THE SEA DRAGON

- This showed up in my inbox. At first glance I thought it belonged with the conspiracy theories but after a solid once-over and a little fact checking I decided to share it with you. Enough of the little pieces fit that the big picture could very well be true. If anyone else has any input feel free to pipe up. I sent out a little request to Kane for some supplemental info. He was kind enough to jot down some thoughts between boardings. I'll throw those in at the end.
- FastJack

A TREATISE OF TRUTH ON THE SEA DRAGON

By Aqua Elf

Introduction

You don't know me. And you never will. If this little piece is headed for publication, my hoop is in a sling, or a coma, or a coffin, or—most likely—I'm dragon drek. This file will only reach the public if I fail to send the monthly order. You reading this means that about thirty days ago (give or take publication speed) I suffered an unfortunate event that ended my ability to communicate with my storage node. So here you go: my final farewell to the world. And one more reminder to obey the wisdom of the street: "Never deal with a dragon."

- How about "Never trust an elf?" Seriously. I'm on my second read; the first time through I couldn't believe the fragging nuts on this chick. Just keep reading and you'll understand. Talk about catty.
- Slamm-0!

I worked for the Sea Dragon. Her real name is impossible to say with a metahuman mouth, even one with an elven tongue well practiced in Sperethiel, so she gets to keep the lame moniker until she decides she wants to make up a shorter version. The likelihood of that is slim, though; she's a bit of a snob. But this file isn't about insulting her majesty, the queen of the sea—it's about getting the word out about her lurkings and her lairs. Yes, that's "lair," plural, and the number has been growing in recent years.

About a decade ago, not long after I came into her employ, the Sea Dragon got royally pissed by a Shadowland post. It didn't give the exact location of her lair, but the post made it pretty clear that it's somewhere off the western coast of Wales. Just enough detail to start runners probing along the Welsh coast for her treasure. Most of them forged documents showing they were salvagers or archaeologists to help them get by the authorities; some just snuck in. The Sea Dragon was extremely annoyed by the unwanted and unwelcome visitors—particularly when they had the bad manners to kill the merrow, her most loyal minions. For a while it was almost a routine: Runners would find the right general area by luck or skill, some of those would manage to shoot their way through the merrow, a few were able to find the cave, a handful of those managed to make it through the maze of underwater tunnels alive, and every one of that elect group met the full wrath of a great leviathan. Lot of hard work to commit suicide. After a while they stopped coming.

- I dug up a chunk of the old file she's referring to. Some guy named Edwin Carrington's journal got posted by the Cap'n. Looks like it gives a healthy concept of where to find the entrance, but it definitely tells a cautionary tale.
- FastJack

So here's what you might need when or if you decide to take on this particular risk. The entrance to the Sea Dragon's Welsh lair is located at a N 52 degrees, 8 minutes, 36.9 seconds, W 4 degrees, 45 minutes, 55.1 seconds, in the depths of Cardigan Bay, west of the town of Cardigan. The entrance is an unassuming opening that leads to a large, air-filled cavern. The cavern has a decent-sized patch of terra firma that the Sea Dragon has begun to use as a warning. She has been leaving the remains of intruders who get that far. Last time I saw it, the patch had four sets of thoroughly chewed diving gear, six bags of spelunking equipment, and one large pile of mushy brown stuff. Don't touch the brown stuff. Yes, it's exactly what you think it is.

- Ewwwww.
- Netcat

- Seriously? Only four sets? I killed four people in the last month. I'm not impressed.
- Riser
- She said it's from the ones that got that far. And too many corpses makes things look cluttered. For me the biggest deterrent is the pile of dragon dung. That statement leaves no doubt about the fate of uninvited guests.
- Winterhawk

Past this little reminder of your unwelcomeness is a confusing array of underwater tunnels. Some of these are dead ends, some loop back on themselves, and others branch into mazes. Two of them follow separate routes to an underwater city. Now don't go thinking you found Atlantis, because unless the history books really messed it up, the Atlanteans were not merrow. The city—okay, large village—is built for swimming inhabitants. The structures follow no pattern or logic I can discover, as likely to be built down from the ceiling or out from a wall as up from the floor. Some do all three. The doors are placed at apparent random, allowing swimmers access with no real concern for up and down. If you haven't figured it out, the merrow live here. There are a lot of them, and they are everywhere. They do not like surface folk at all—so if you're not a guest of their master, they want you dead.

If you make it through the merrow village you'll find a rounded pyramid—think Aztec ziggurat, but with each terrace rounded to a quarter circle instead of a square step. If you squint, it looks a little like a beehive, but it's a hornets' nest you do not want to step in. This is the Sea Dragon's lair. Inside the pyramid is a series of chambers and levels that goes down into the sea floor, and every one of them is filled to overflowing with the Sea Dragon's treasures. Ever wonder why so little is recovered from sunken ships? A big part of the answer is this place. The Sea Dragon and her merrow minions have been scouring the ocean's depth for valuables since before the Awakening. Gold, silver, and other rare metals (including orichalcum), precious gems, statues, even common things like coal and iron can be found in her treasure chambers. If it was transported on a ship that sank, she got her claws on it. Did you notice I said "since before the Awakening"? This operation has been going on since man first risked sailing the open seas. The Sea Dragon claims to have rested only a short time during magic's downcycle and is smug about owning treasures that went down during the last age of magic.

- Okay. Let's step off the crazy train for a second. This woman is claiming the Sea Dragon didn't sleep or hibernate or go to another plane during the downcycle of magic. That would mean one hell of an advantage over the other dragons. If this is the case, why isn't the Sea Dragon the queen of the dragons or the most powerful dragon in the world?
- Lyran
- Who says she's not? We only pay attention on the dragons up here on dry land. If any part of this report is true, this one dragon controls all of earth's oceans. That means a hundred or so dragons share thirty percent of the planet, while the Sea Dragon has uncontested ownership of the other seventy percent. Seems pretty powerful to me.
- Picador

Mind boggling as this immense treasure trove might be, it is only a fraction of her wealth. The Sea Dragon has three major lairs of which I am aware, and a "large number"—she was not specific—of smaller holdings scattered around the globe. These are evidently way stations for treasures bound for one of her troves, and they also serve as sites for meetings or other business purposes; I think a few are just places where she likes to relax.

But before I get too far ahead of myself, let me tell you more about the security layout at her primary lair. As you might expect in an ancient installation this far under water, there are no electronics. Nothing. No cameras, no electronic doors, no sensors—nothing with an electric current (with the exception of the occasional eel). This means dead-zone for any of you tech heads. And seawater is not good for radio signals. If you plan on operating a drone, you'll need to be swimming right behind it. Or dropping signal boosters every hundred meters or so. And your team's network needs to be boosted to the max, or all that fancy tacnet software will only pull in data feeds from you and yourself.

- R&D on underwater signals has been getting a lot of attention recently. Lot of steam behind finding alternate forms of transmission. Word is Aquatech has had some success with underwater security drone networks. Their facilities off the coast of the Ethiomalian Territories have been targeted in a number of runs lately. They must be on to something hot.
- Rigger X

So how do you have security without electronics? Easy. First thing you need is the entire indigenous population on your side. Every merrow this side of the isles, and most of them anywhere else, work with the Sea Dragon. She's a great boss. Really. I'm only writing this report because of my long-standing need to feel insured. And because I'm spiteful. I've done a lot for her highness over the last ten-plus years, but I've started to feel a little under appreciated. Also I'm pretty sure some of her other pets are plotting against me. Maybe I'm just a bit paranoid. On the other hand, since you're reading this, there's a good chance I wasn't paranoid enough. At this point, who cares?.

The Sea Dragon has more than those thousands of merrow for her security. She has a powerful series of wards, watchers, and spirits protecting her lair as well. Not every ward is maintained by the Sea Dragon; some of the merrow are shamans, and from the mojo I've seen them sling, they must be initiates. They're also responsible for some of the spirits that patrol the waters. They summon primarily water spirits (Surprised? Didn't think so), which are pretty much impossible to detect or affect in their native environment.

From everything I've seen over the last decade, Cardigan Bay is the Sea Dragon's primary base of operations. She spends something like a third of her time there. The other two hundred or so days a year she's touring her other lairs or cruising the oceans looking for sailors to terrorize.

Tropical Paradise

Her second major lair is located west of Hawai'i—I suppose it's her tropical getaway when she wants to escape the dreary cold of Wales. Now this lair is a bit more public, at least as public as the land-purchase records in the nation of Hawai'i.



Shortly after Crash 2.0, the Sea Dragon went through the motions to gain official ownership of an undersea mountain in the Hawai'i chain—and a good hunk of sea floor around it. Only the official part of her ownership is new; this lair is almost as old as the one off Wales. Not that the owner of record is the Sea Dragon; on record it belongs to Island Divers, a deep-sea exploration company that earns its way through wreck recovery and mining the seafloor. Though no one would ever be able to locate the mining sites, at least not without a small army and some really nice diving equipment. But that's not what's important right now; let me get back on track. Maybe I'll cover that other stuff later.

The Sea Dragon has recently been letting humanity know this part of the sea is hers. Maybe she's just gotten tired of chasing them off or sinking their ships. Which would be new; she doesn't actually care that much about what metahumans do. But her mood has changed lately—one of the reasons I'm making this recording now. I have my theories on what's up, but I'll save those for later as well.

- She sure saves a lot for later.
- /dev/grrl

This tropical lair of hers is about 150 kilometers northwest of Ni'ihau, the forbidden isle. The lair itself is in the Nihoa seamount, but her claim includes about 10,000 square kilometers of surrounding real estate. Nihoa was terra firma in the not-too-distant past; an island that sank when volcanic activity reshaped the local landscape. Seascape. At any rate, you can't see it on scans or satellite surveys these days, but on the flank of Nihoa seamount, née island, are the ruins of a smallish but perplexing ancient city. They were never properly excavated, and practical access was lost when the island sank. It all belongs to the Sea Dragon now. Those early excavators never found much—and they never came near the truth. Those ruins are just the entrance to an underground city that was carved out of the living rock of Nihoa. Not sure how big it is, but it's big. Much of it feels like caves and tunnels, but there are open places where you can't see the walls or ceiling; it's spacious. Closest thing I've ever seen is the Ork Underground in Seattle.

This city doesn't have the same sapient residents as the one off the coast of Wales. It's swarming with trained seadrakons. Or maybe impressed seadrakons; I'm not sure about the whys and hows, but they're loyal to the Sea Dragon—they constantly patrol the city, the seamount, and probably a good chunk of the surrounding area, ready to repel any intruders. Not that there are many—Hawai'ian fishermen and guides avoid the waters around Nihoa. Seems a large pod of storm dolphins took up residence shortly after the Awakening. That lost city is the stuff of local legends, and according to the legends the dolphins are the transformed inhabitants protecting their sunken home. No one has ever found the lost city—at least no one has returned to tell the tale—but the stories got a lot of the details about its layout and appearance right. Maybe they're right about the transformed dolphins, too. Who knows?

- Seriously? Aren't we close enough to the 22nd century to have outgrown the legends and superstitions? If the storm dolphins were the city's original inhabitants then maybe they could be



THE SEA DRAGON.....



weredolphins or something. But all the hokey legend stuff just makes people sound stupid.

- Haze

What makes the Nihoa lair so valuable to the Sea Dragon, why she has hundreds of deadly creatures on constant patrol, is not her horde—or not just her horde. The real treasure of Nihoa is dragon eggs. I saw four delivered, each the size of a small motorcycle. The runner team used a commercial fishing boat, just cruised slowly above the seamount and slid the eggs into the water under cover of pretending to untangle nets. Needn't have bothered—the storm dolphins made sure there were no eyes within a hundred clicks of the drop. When the last egg was safely under the waves, four spirits rose from the water with the runners' payment: twelve fist-sized chunks of orichalcum. And death. The runners were so focused on their new wealth they never saw it coming—the water spirits drowned them on the deck of the ship before they could move. Before you go getting pissed at the Sea Dragon for screwing the runners, it was the other way around. I'd found out the runners had gotten a tracking device of some sort into one of the eggs. I was planning to warn the Sea Dragon about it, but evidently she already knew. I don't know what the runners had to do to get those eggs, but I have no doubt they earned both their payments. The important factoid in all of this is there are dragon eggs somewhere inside Nihoa.

- I'd bet the Sea Dragon uses her agents like spies with an eyes of the pack spell or something similar.
- Netcat
- Doesn't work on people.
- Ecotope
- This is a great dragon we're talking about here. We have very little understanding of their magic. They could have all sorts of different spells that work on willing volunteers. Or maybe she has some way to force them. For all we know this Sea Dragon could have mind control or mind-reading powers. Though if that's true, this little document turning up has a whole different flavor.
- Winterhawk
- Are you saying the Sea Dragon wanted this to come out? Maybe spread through the shadows as a slick intro or brag sheet—soften us up before she goes public? Interesting theory. Or she could want this little treatise to go viral because it's all bull-drek. Disinformation. Of course we could speculate all we want and never get close to an answer. We need more sources. I miss the Shadowland days. Even though the crazy filter had to always be cranked to the max. Cap should be granted sainthood for dealing with all that.
- Bull

The Sea Dragon has been spending more time at her Nihoa lair than anywhere else since the eggs arrived. Maybe to protect them, maybe to hatch them, or maybe it's just coincidence; whatever the reason, this is the most likely place to find her highness these days.

Of course Nihoa is more than a hatchery. It's the Sea Dragon's main cache for the minerals her minions mine from

the floor of the Pacific. All of that ore, and a lot of goods her creatures scrounge from wrecks can be found inside the seamount or scattered across its slopes. I think that's why she went the official route and got ownership of the land/sea floor. Keep anyone from getting too close and helping themselves. One side note, if you don't mind dying to see it, the south side of the seamount is a wondrous sight at noon. It's where the Sea Dragon stores her less-valuable precious metals and gems; even in the faint light that penetrates this deep the slope looks like it's on fire with iridescent rivers of gold and silver. An uninvited guest might live just long enough to appreciate it.

Indonesian Complex

What I think is her third major lair—I say "think" because it's a sure bet the Sea Dragon has secrets I'll never know—is in Indonesia. It's a twisting network of underwater tunnels and caverns honeycombing the sea floor under a nameless cluster of uninteresting and uninhabited isles and atolls. Even so, it's the one lair daring runners are most likely to see: it's the only one with an above-water entrance and it's one of the few places the Sea Dragon spends any time above water. It is also the only place I know where the Sea Dragon has met with another dragon.

Unlike the other two, this lair doesn't have any ancient ruins or other constructions attached. The above-water entrance is through a slit cave just out of reach of the surf on an island just like all the others. Almost literally, because every island in the group has more than its share of caves and tunnels and caverns—I think every one of them was designed to get intrepid spelunkers lost. The one cave you want takes a few twists and turns, then opens up into a huge cavern that must have been some kind of volcanic bubble—light gets in though some chimneys placed high up. The floor of the cavern is a beach of volcanic sand surrounding a briny pool that takes up most of the space. No surprise that's the entrance to the lair. It leads down to an immense maze of twisting underwater tunnels and irregular caverns. From what little I saw—or didn't see—on the way to one of the undersea air pockets there are no markers, no signs, and no light. If you don't live there, you're lost.

The cavern with the pool is where the Sea Dragon spends time out of water. It's where she and Masaru met. I was only a guide for Masaru, I didn't hear what was discussed, but my impression was the two struck a deal they both liked. I've brought others to the cavern since—all metahumans. They'd arrive empty handed and leave with sacks of varying size and weight. I never asked and they never told, but I'm pretty sure payments were being made for services rendered.

The Indonesian lair is where the Sea Dragon brings all of her changelings for testing and training. Ever since the comet rolled through in '61, she's been collecting aquatic changelings. She's had every air breather she can find who's developed gills or webbed limbs brought to the cavern to see what they can do. If she's not impressed, she eats them. If she is impressed, she offers them a job: work for her for the rest of their lives in exchange for learning to maximize their abilities and receiving some tiny fraction of a percent of her wealth. Of course everyone says yes, but she has a way of telling who's sincere and who's holding out on her. The ones she doesn't trust, she eats. The ones she deems honest train with her and the changelings who work for her in Indonesia before being sent for advanced training with the merrow in Wales. Once



training is complete, they're on their own, free to do what they want with their talents and abilities until she calls on them. She gives each an earring that acts as a communications focus of some sort. It allows the Sea Dragon to give them orders without a snout-to-nose meeting.

- Interesting. A focus for mundanes. The stuff of rumors, but never seen. Where else to find one but in the claws of a dragon with thousands of years worth of magical goodies? Of course the item wouldn't need to be a true focus. I could just be an object with a quickened or anchored spell. Or even just a focus to help the Sea Dragon locate her people so she can communicate with them astrally. Maybe not that earth-shattering after all.
- Winterhawk
- I think I know the cave system she's talking about. If I'm right, there's another worry to deal with: the natives. A tribe of metavariant trolls with a tough, rocky skin almost like a stone exoskeleton. They call those caves home and get pretty violent when it comes to keeping invaders out.
- Plan 9
- Okay. Not the stone men theory again. Stop posting this drek all over the place. There are no stone men!
- Kane
- And don't use the term exoskeleton either. Makes me think bugs. And they're bad enough on the surface; we don't need someone talking about lobster and crab shamans and their secret plot to take over the oceans.
- Bull
- Nope. No need for him to say it when you'll say it for him.
- /dev/grrl

Okay. I've been holding back a bit, not spilling everything because some of this is bigger than I like to think about. But you know what? If you're reading this, I'm dead. What do I care?

Remember those four dragon eggs I saw delivered to the Sea Dragon? Those aren't the only eggs she has. Over the past two years the Sea Dragon has collected twenty-four dragon eggs; twelve in the last six months. Those last eggs were given to her for safekeeping. Not surprising given the current troubles brewing among the dragons on the surface; leviathans have a long-standing reputation for being neutral in most dragon conflicts. But the dozen eggs she acquired before being entrusted with these last twelve? She stole them. Through me and other surface servants she hired shadowrunners to locate and steal eggs. I know how well she paid, I know runners who retired off what they got for delivering an egg. Not that those payments even scratched the surface of her vast wealth.

"What is one dragon going to do with the eggs of twenty-four other dragons?" you ask. I used to wonder the same thing. Until one night, flush from the victory of delivering two eggs and seeing she was in an exceptionally good mood, I did one of the bravest (and/or stupidest) things I've ever done—I asked her. In a moment of motherly nurturing I would not have believed if I hadn't been there, the Sea Dragon told me something about

dragon procreation I don't think anyone had heard before. Did you know the gender of an alligator hatchling is determined by the egg's temperature during incubation? It's true. Over thirty-two you get a male; under that you get a female. There are no genetics involved in that part of the process. The Sea Dragon didn't tell me that—it's something I already knew—but it helped me understand what she told me. Dragon eggs are a little like alligator eggs, except it's a lot more complex and goes way beyond boy or girl. A newly laid dragon egg is pretty much a blank slate. The form of the dragon that's born from the egg is created by the aura of the dragon that nurtures the egg. Dragon type is determined by an aura imprint of the dragon that 'sits' on the egg through development. And this is the really important part: no development occurs without a dragon nurturing the egg. It doesn't die; it stays on hold until a nurturing aura gives it what it needs to develop. A dragon can keep an egg for a long time until she—or he—has the time to nurture it through development. How much time is needed? She told me producing a dragon requires three hundred and sixty days for the proper aura to completely imprint, and then another forty days for the newborn's body to be strong enough to break out of the shell.

- Interesting timespan for imprinting. 360 days is one Mayan tun. And 40 days is equal to 2 uinal. With all the other Mayan-related references to magic cycles and dragons, it's not surprising.
- Lyran
- Nor is it conclusive. Just more creativity on the part of the author. Reminds me of an author from the beginning of the century who combined fact with fiction and had all sorts of people believing the bloodline of Christ was still around.
- Slamm-0!
- Always the cynic. And since when do you read?
- Netcat

If you are wondering why this is important, take a moment to think of all the great dragons you can name from among the western dragons, eastern dragons, feathered serpents, and leviathans. I came up with ten, five, and five for the first three dracoforms almost instantly. But there is only one great dragon among the leviathans, the Sea Dragon. And I don't mean just one I can name, I mean one. I've been with her for over a decade and I know she rules all the world's oceans like she is their one and only queen. No one has even hinted there's another. I'd never ask (or maybe I did and that's why you're reading this), but I think she's spent so much time and energy these last ten years developing lairs all around the globe because she's preparing the oceans for more of her kind. Think about it: If the Sea Dragon has a secure space big enough for all twelve of the eggs she collected on her own and can organize her operations to be run by minions for the four hundred days she'll need for nurturing, she can hatch a dozen little great dragon leviathans into the world all at once.

The thought of twelve adolescent great dragon leviathans going through their teenage rebellion stage at once is enough to make me want to move to the high desert.

Almost forgot one of my "put in later" promises. It's not much, but it'll give me something to type up while I consider my endgame.



So, other than the three big lairs I described and the smaller lairs I know about, the Sea Dragon has storage caches all over the oceans. Way stations where salvaged goods and mined minerals are held while she decides what to put where. Since the caches don't have the security of lairs, they're all registered as private parcels owned by duly registered offshore drilling, seafloor mining, or deep-sea salvage companies, none of which has any connection to her, of course. The Sea Dragon uses her "legitimate" operations to keep strangers away from her property and they produce enough plausible income from her collections to remain marginally profitable. Occasionally they bring up exceptional items for sale on the grey or black markets. She needs the charade to generate untraceable funds. Can't pay everyone in orichalcum, ancient artifacts, and Spanish doubloons without calling attention to yourself.

- Since she didn't include a list of the Sea Dragon's shell companies, I've added a list of suspects. Here's what popped up when I plugged in "aquatic operations with no megacorporate ties, and a narrow but consistent profit margin": Noble Salvage (Wales), Noble Salvage (Sydney, Australia), Noble Salvage (Cape Town, South Africa), Reclaiming the Deep (Miami, Carib League), Your Wreck, My Check (Seattle, UCAS), Igbo's Bigboats (Lagos), Siren's Sea Services (Los Angeles, PCC), Lakeshore Recovery (Chicago, UCAS), Lung's Longboats (Okinawa, Japanese Imperial State), Corsair Mining (Vladivostok, Russia), Incan Mining (Lima, Peru), Island Divers (Kapea, Hawai'ian Nation) No doubt there's more, but if you're going to do the legwork it's a start.
- Kay St. Irregular

That's about it. Except for one last thing: The Sea Dragon or one of her surface pets has killed me. I'm not letting her off with just this tell-all document. My apartment is on the 27th floor of the Medrona Park apartment building. In the apartment is a safe. In the safe are valuables. The safe code and address specifics are going to the person who gets this file. I'm counting on that person to find folks eager to make some money and willing to get a little revenge for me.

Good luck and Godspeed.

- So. Is it true? Any of it?
- Butch
- That's why I posted this. The info that I could check on panned out. The safe was there, the valuables were very—and some of them are old and unique enough to make me even more curious. If you plan on hitting the Medrona Park apartments to check things out on your own, remember that you're in Kalanyr's territory. If you're interested, hit me privately. We'll need to be careful, of course, but there's a chance to make some money and get some revenge in the meantime.
- FastJack
- Y'all are fraggin' batty if you're even considering getting involved in this. Know the reason you've never heard the old saying "Never Cross a Dragon"? Nobody lived long enough to say it. Remember me in your wills before you head out.
- Riser

- I'll ruin FastJack's surprise. The mysterious "interesting resident" at Mendrona Park is a western dragon named Kalanyr. He owns the top few floors of the building. Including the 27th. Play on kiddos.
- Slamm-0!

AQUACOLOGY INTERRUPTUS

Posted by: Kane

I got the first look at that little piece, and though I don't know how to take it, I can tell you that everything she said is "pirate" truth. That means the rumors of the sea verify everything she says, and all the knowledgeable folks who sail the seas know these stories and the areas to avoid. Problem is, as she stated, very few people survive to tell the tales of the Sea Dragon. From my singular experience with her, at about a kilometer away while watching from my boat, I can only verify she is by far the scariest of the dragons. Maybe it's because I'm a man of the sea and sea legends are lethal, but there is something to be said about a creature that survives with all the other monsters of the deep.

I got tapped because after reading that little piece I made a comment about the recent activity in and around the world's aquacologies. So here I am to give a little glimpse of the latest great naval battle—the battle between the corporations looking to pillage, pollute, and populate the seas and the Sea Dragon looking to solidify control of her realm. I'll speculate on the different motives in this battle later, but let me run down the troubles happening to this point.

In the past twelve months, two aquacologies—Horizon's People's Plunge and Evo's Aquaticus—have been irreparably damaged. The PP, an exclusive pleasure stop for visitors in southern California, suffered a cracked support pillar that caused the aquatic platform to sink an extra 150 meters. Not far on an oceanic scale, but between the structural damage from the collapse and the added pressure, the egg-shaped entertainment center got scrambled. Forty-three guests died, along with an unreported number of staff. Horizon blamed the event on seismic activity and construction flaws (Saeder-Krupp did the bulk of the construction) but I have reason to believe it was a focused C12 earthquake that took advantage of knowledge gleaned from construction plans stolen from the S-K office in Seattle a few weeks before.

Evo's Aquaticus, a research station on the edge of the Marianas Trench, was a different story. When their little underwater laboratory went down, the last message received from the security staff was screaming about an attack by sea serpents. Now I'm no parabiologist, but I know sea serpents are occasionally sapient. And if you are a sapient sea serpent (say that ten times fast) you might become a subject of a being that others call the Queen of the Sea, and when she tells you to toss a well-known location for genetic testing on aquatic wildlife, you might push said location off its precarious perch and down into an abyssal trench. Speculation on my part, but I've seen a lot, heard even more, and spent my lifetime working out fact from fiction when it comes to whale tales. This one just rings true with me.

Now beyond just those two that were lost completely, a number of others around the world have suffered an inordinate number of attacks, malfunctions, lawsuits, and construction problems recently. The interesting thing about all of these is they don't seem to be the result of corp-on-corp violence or intrigue. Back



when Dunkelzahn's will sent everyone scrambling to get their facilities self-sufficient to gain his bequest, the jobs had a certain flavor. Sabotage plus recon all at once. Stop them, but tell us what they are up to at the same time. This current work, though, has no recon aspect, and the jobs just feel like warnings. Like the lion's roar. No real damage, lots of fear, and hopefully a message that is clearly conveyed: "Get gone. You are not welcome."

The Sea Dragon's biggest opponent at the moment is Proteus AG. After the recent events at all the aquagologies, most of which were theirs, Proteus has declared her a terrorist—never mind having no hard evidence she's behind the attacks. They have issued a bounty on the Queen of the Sea, a bounty big enough to attract a certain class of hunter.

Megacorporations don't like getting pushed around, so it's no surprise they aren't rushing to get out of the water. They're digging in, increasing their security, and working to improve their underwater defenses. An interesting side-effect, or maybe the effect intended by the Machiavellian Sea Dragon, is an increase in runs by corps trying to see what the other facilities are using for defenses. That puts more targets in the water, which means more of her enemies watching each other instead of her. No matter what the corps come up with, there's a good chance everyone's defenses are going to get tested sooner than they expect. If the Sea Dragon thinks they're too slow in heeding her warning roar, she's likely to make a few more devastating examples to ensure surface dwellers understand the sea is her domain.

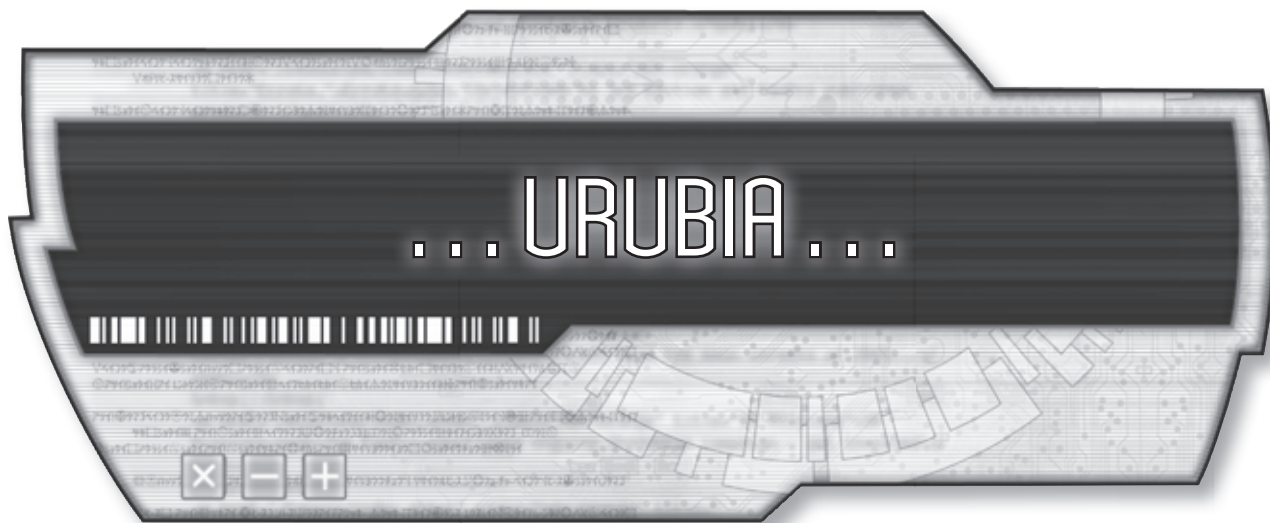
The only mystery has been why the Sea Dragon began this campaign—nothing specific that anyone knew about has changed. Aqua Elf's story of the eggs goes a long way toward clearing that up. She's been targeting specific arkoblocks and aquacologies. I keep my sonar listening, and every installation she's hit (including Evo's party egg) was involved in one or more of the following:

aquatic genetic research, underwater defense systems, aquatic arcanoarchaeology, and/or toxic dumping. Aquatech's Marianas facility was rumored to be the hottest new place to dump your dirty laundry—they were even testing how that dumped shit affected deep-sea life forms. It looks like the Sea Dragon is making things safe for her coming brood—and consolidating her control of the oceans. She's shutting down anyone trying to develop a defensible foothold in her realm, protecting the creatures of her domain, protecting her hidden assets from greedy explorers, and keeping her nursery from being used as a cesspool. If she was as awake during the last century and a half as Aqua Elf says she was, it must have pissed her off no end to see what folks were dumping in her oceans and not be able to do anything about it.

If I were a psychic (instead of psychotic) I would foresee a number of long-term shadow ops involving protecting a particular site or sites associated with the Sea Dragon. I can also see a security contract being signed with one of the Big Ten for these spots, and then shadow ops going the other way. Either way, it would be in the best interest of those reading this to brush up on your backstroke.

- It's not going to just be the corps against the Sea Dragon, either. Lofwyr, Hestaby, and the other dragons are well aware of both the Sea Dragon's power and her anger at metahumans for their pollution of her waters. Lofwyr is going to recruit her if he can figure out a way to break her long-held isolationism, while Hestaby will want to know more about the Sea Dragon's assets so she can know what she might be up against. Either way, there will likely be plenty of recon missions available for those brave enough to take dragon money.
- Wyrm Watcher





- All right. A chummer came across this file while digging for dirt on Brackhaven's system. No dirt on the guv, but the report gives a nice heads-up about a resident of the Barrens whom we should probably keep a few eyes on.
- FastJack

URUBIA: WHAT IS THE DRAGON UP TO?

Report: KESS-Sea-AH2124760-04042074-Urubia-PID
Subject: Adult Western dragon, "Urubia"

Past Activity

The dragon calling herself Urubia was first sighted by the citizens of Forks, Salish-Shidhe Nation, on 12-03-2045; it was memorable because of her vibrant crimson coloration and spiked tail. It was the first of two sightings in the Olympic Peninsula region that day, both of previously unknown dragons. The two apparently paired up (if they weren't a pair already) and disappeared into a wooded region of the peninsula. Urubia's name is now known because on January 2, 2046 the Salish-Shidhe Citizen Registration Bureau issued SIN 0U9D-S4S6-9Z1X to Urubia, an adult female western dragon of crimson coloration. On the same day a significant deposit of gold, silver, copper, orichalcum, and precious gems was made with the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank under the same SIN, originating from an office in Olympia. The exact value of the deposit is sealed, but eyewitness accounts mention a four-trailer Conestoga Bergen making the delivery. Urubia has been an official resident of the Pacific Northwest ever since.

Very few records for SIN 0U9D-S4S6-9Z1X survived the Crash of '64. What was available shows no criminal activity, three property purchases, several travel visa requests for Seattle, and a dual Salish-Shidhe/UCAS citizenship request in 2057. All the property purchases were in the Redmond District of the Seattle Metroplex and all in the same vicinity.

Reports from sources within the Redmond area are sketchy at best, as the matter was policed by our predecessors and a number of Redmond and Puyallup precincts suffered severe damage and file loss during the hand over. From the little that remains, we have

found references to a dragon matching Urubia's description linked to several gang-related incidents and a number of kidnapping cases. The kidnapping cases, two dozen total, range from "the dragon ate my baby" lunatics, to sales of children to the "Crimson Queen," with a healthy smattering of more run-of-the-mill snatch-and-grabs where the dragon was named as a suspect due more to proximity than evidence. The arcane investigation division determined that all victims had a seventy-five-percent or higher probability of being Awakened, but no other common factor was found.

- Colleague of mine did some pro bono work back in the day chasing down a "Crimson Queen" sale that the mother eventually regretted. He got as far as this dragon but no farther. Most of the evidence pointed her way, but when the dragon herself pointed out the potential consequences of continuing his quest, he did some serious reconsideration. There was no doubt in his mind she was behind the whole thing, but he decided to give it a rest.
- Pistons
- He didn't tell the dragon he was working pro bono did he?
- Kane
- As a matter of fact he did. The way he tells it, he was well rewarded for his honesty. Happily blew the whole sum in the Funhouse before going to tell the regretful mom she'd have to keep all the nuyen she'd made selling her kid.
- Pistons

Files on gang-related activities during the Lone Star days are sketchy and/or damaged, likely due to the rampant corruption in their precincts. From what I was able to piece together, Urubia held or attempted to hold a series of meetings with gang leaders on her property in Redmond. It's not clear that every meeting went the way she wanted, but it appears she's had some success, and her efforts continue. Outside the UCAS, our sources identify Urubia as a suspect in several Salish kidnappings, and efforts to "coordinate subcultural influences" on the Olympic Peninsula and a similar pattern of meetings in Seattle, though those involved disgruntled tribals rather than gangs.





INCOMING FEED.....



Urubia holds several pieces of property on the peninsula. Most are in her name alone, but she's co-owner of the largest; something like a thousand square kilometers of valuable land. The parcel covers what was once part of the Olympic National Park and includes part of the western slope of Mt. Olympus, the Hoh Rainforest, the Sol Duc Hot Springs, and the town of Forks. Her co-owners of record are the dragon Kalanyr—who, we know from his SIN, is the dragon she was spotted with in 2045—and “The Spirit of the Quileute People.” There is no SIN or other identifiers for the Spirit. I've forwarded a request to the legal department to see what this means exactly, as I'm not fully versed on Salish property laws. There is no evidence of activity in this region other than subcultural unification efforts. The dragons have apparently not visited since purchasing the tract; whether or not the Spirit has been or is currently present can't be determined until we identify what this Spirit is. It would take at least one month to thoroughly recon and investigate the region, with one week lead time required for prep and insertion.

- Saying there's no activity in the area is a bit small-minded. Since 2052, the Olympus Marathon has been running across this stretch of nature. The marathon is a grueling test of *real* endurance. The runners don't run on roads and, unless the participants can fly, everyone covers more than a marathon from start to finish. The starting point is Keelaunaw Cave and the end is the Forks police station.
- Mika

Cross-linking military and civilian databases yields plenty of fodder for speculation about Urubia's activities prior to 2045, but little in the way of hard, verifiable evidence. For example, there are reports of two western dragons, one of them crimson with a spiked tail, supporting T'ir Tairngire against the California National Guard at the Battle of Redding in 2036. There is, however, no official information available from the T'ir military or government to confirm those reports. There are no known dragons that closely resemble Urubia, so if there was a crimson dragon at the battle, it was almost certainly her, making it likely that the second, nondescript dragon was her real-estate partner Kalanyr. If Urubia took part in this battle, it could indicate a propensity for violence, which is something to bear in mind when considering the need to apprehend her.

Current Activity

If Urubia did indeed support the T'ir in their conflict with California, she has had a significant change of heart in the years since. Our Gang Division has an extensive collection of reports alleging altercations between Urubia and the Ancients, members of Rinelle ke'Tesrae, and numerous unaffiliated elves. There's no known reason for this pattern of contempt and hostility toward elves, but there is speculation about a possible falling out during the development of T'ir Tairngire. She has formed alliances with the Spikes and the Crimson Crush, but the scope and nature of these alliances has not been determined.

Urubia has taken up residence in a low-income housing complex in Redmond that contains four sixteen-story tenement towers and two other buildings set a little apart from other



residential complexes in their area. The complex was all but abandoned before she took an interest. The locals refer to the tower she has renovated for her own use as “the Funhouse.” The top four floors of the Funhouse have been gutted and rebuilt into what’s described as a sprawling living space for the dragon. The two floors directly below have been converted into an entertainment space rumored to be the site of numerous unspecified illegal activities. The lower ten floors have smaller entertainment spaces—the exact nature of which is subject to debate and speculation—and upscale apartments for Urubia’s followers. It should be noted that Urubia might object to calling the people who share her building “followers.” She does not claim to lead anything, and what appears to be her organization has no formal name. But there are at least one hundred metahumans, almost all Awakened, living in the floors below her and each and every one of them has the air of a soldier willing to do whatever she commands.

The other three towers in her complex are in various stages of renovation. Plans filed with the city indicate pretty standard urban renewal upgrades for the first twelve floors of each building: retail spaces on the ground floors, a couple of floors of offices above, and apartments of various sizes and quality above that. The roof of each building has been removed, however, and top three floors of each building have been converted into one large, open space. What was the floor of the fourteenth floor/ceiling of the thirteenth floor was reinforced to be weatherproof and to support a lot of weight. What, if anything, the thirteenth floors are being used for isn’t clear. Searching the databases of several service and delivery companies in the district indicates a surprising quantity of flowering plants, bushes, and even trees have been ordered for all three buildings.

The complex is evidently neutral ground for gangs. As noted above, members of the Crimson Crush and the Spikes are frequently present. Recent visitors to the Funhouse include Nightmare, current leader of the Halloweeners; three known lieutenants in the First Nations; Chomper, current leader of the 162’s; and a half-dozen Rusted Stilettos. The six Stilettos nearly emptied the Funhouse when they showed up. Not even the toughest tough guy wants to rub shoulders with glowing mutant psychopaths. Our CIs in the gangs have been unable to find out why the gang leaders are meeting with Urubia, but there is remarkably little friction among the rank and file while their leaders are in conference, mostly because Urubia does not tolerate violence in her complex. On three verified occasions she physically removed battling gang members—just picked them up and carried them out. Rumor has it she gave each brawler a choice between execution and combat with her. Whatever happened to them, the gangers’ gear was always returned to their respective leaders—usually severely damaged.

In addition to gangs, members of every known criminal organization in the region have been seen at the Funhouse over the past few weeks. No leaders or upper-echelon lieutenants, but enough envoys and go-betweens to indicate something is in the works. A representative of the *Kanaga-gumi* was reportedly lost as the result of either a fight or assassination attempt ordered by Ryumyo; rumors conflict. That was three weeks ago and tensions have been high between the yakuza and the Seattle gangs since—especially the Crimson Crush. CIs connected with the Ciarnello family say Urubia extended an invitation to the Don and he

countered with an invite to meet on his turf. No meetings have occurred yet.

We’ve no reports of activity in Salish territory. But three times in the last year Urubia has triggered scrambles by Salish air-defense squadrons by crossing the border without clearance. No similar events were reported on her return to the Metroplex.

- Probably because the Metroplex has piss-poor air defenses while the Salish, by contrast, focuses on that around Seattle.
- 2XL

As nearly as we can tell, without an inside source or a direct meeting, Urubia seems to be aligned with Hestaby and the pro-metahuman camp in the current division among the dragons. This can’t be confirmed, of course, and is not one hundred percent certain. CIs who have access to the Funhouse report what looks like a near-addiction-level attachment to metahuman company. We have independent accounts of Urubia inviting everyone in the dance club to climb and dance on her as she writhes on the dance floor.

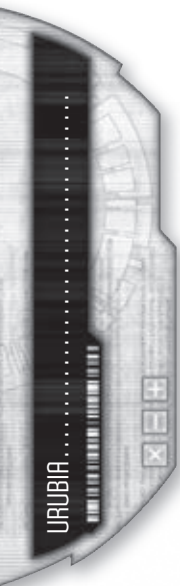
- I think I need an invite to play this place. Sounds awesome!!!
- Kat o’ Nine Tales

Surveillance Information

The property in the Redmond District is a six-building planned tenement complex made up of four sixteen-story apartment towers, an education and community center, and a maintenance facility. The complex is laid out in a triangle with apartment towers at each corner: North, Southeast, and Southwest. The fourth tower—called the Funhouse by local residents but officially designated Central Tower—is located just north of the center of the triangle. The education and community center, designated High School, is between the Central Tower and the Southwest Tower. The maintenance facility, designated Shed, is between the Central Tower and the Southeast Tower. Each of the four apartment towers has three levels of subterranean parking, but the lowest level of the North Tower garage recently suffered structural and flood damage when a water main burst.

The roofs of each of the outer towers have been removed, and their upper three floors gutted. Large quantities of earth, river stone, and other materials as well as plants ranging from grasses to small trees have been delivered to the towers. Much of this material has been installed in the open upper areas. It seems evident some form of rooftop farms, gardens, or parks are planned, but there is too little information to say what is being built with any certainty. The lower floors of the three towers are being converted to retail and office spaces, while the remaining floors are being renovated for residential use. There are as yet no residents in any building other than the Central Tower/Funhouse, but Urubia’s people routinely patrol the entire complex to prevent squatters from staking claims. (Note: Squatters found in any of the outer buildings are brought to Central Tower, fed, and given temporary shelter until they can find more permanent residences outside the complex.)

The Central Tower is completely renovated. The first floor has a social center for guests and residents with trids, private meeting rooms, sim arcades, and a variety of other amenities. Floors two through ten have posh residences for Urubia’s followers. These



are multi-bedroom apartments, some arranged vertically through several floors. Also on these floors are a variety of entertainment spaces including theatres, casinos, BTL dens, and sports centers with a wide variety of sport courts. The eleventh and twelfth floors are taken up by the maze of casinos, private gambling rooms, bars, drug dens and brothels that give the Funhouse its name. The Funhouse has its own node with a satellite link. The rest of the facilities' nodes are linked to a separate satellite for outside access, but they are connected to the Funhouse through the building's security node.

All buildings in the complex are linked through underground hardwires, with the exception of the North Tower—flood damage has not yet been repaired, and it must rely on a wireless link. Though nominally secure, the wireless link to the North Tower can be exploited to gain access to the system.

Close astral assensing of the complex has not been possible due to high levels of hostile spirit activities; extensive warding was encountered. Attempts to assense the hostile spirits were inconclusive, which is to say we have no clear idea whether the spirits are free or were summoned to protect the complex or if there is a mixed population of both free and bound spirits. Astral reconnaissance from a distance has revealed the “background count” in the region surrounding Urubia's complex is significantly different from the surrounding barrens. Astral recon teams indicate a “cleaner” astral space on the grounds and an “aspected” space in the Funhouse.

Known Asset Analysis

The financial investigation division looked into Urubia's assets and income streams. This was a preliminary “grey ops” search; information was not thoroughly vetted and is not admissible in court. The intent was to map out the general shape of any illegal activities preliminary to an in-depth investigation.

Olympic Logging, Olympic Nursery, and Olympic Woodcraft are all wholly owned by the three-way partnership. Olympic Logging sells all their wood to high-end furniture and flooring manufacturers, including Olympic Woodcraft. Olympic Woodcraft produces extremely expensive furniture handcrafted from one hundred percent natural wood. Olympic Nursery sells trees, shrubs, and other plants (including a few Awakened species) native to the temperate rainforests of the Olympic Peninsula.

Property in Redmond was purchased by Crimson Wings, LLC, an investment firm with assets held by a number of Swiss banks. Groundwork for discovering the nature and extent of those assets is in place should we need to know those details. Crimson Wings also owns tracts of undeveloped land around Redmond, two condominiums downtown, an apartment building in Renton, and a stretch of Puyallup lava fields. The condos are rented to identified shadowrunners, and most residents of the apartment building have falsified SINS. They all have clean records otherwise, however, which limits our leverage. The stretch of lava fields is undeveloped, and any information on how the area was formerly used was lost in the Crash.

- Anyone know where this lava field is? I know a few old-timers who are great sources for old Seattle info.
- Bull
- I know the apartments in Renton they are referring to. The landlord is great for taking weak SINS if the nuyen's good.
- Sounder

Crimson Wings' diverse investments include a varied but profitable stock portfolio. They hold a notable number of shares in our parent company. Also in Manadyne, Proteus AG, Lone Star, Aztechnology, MCT, and Evo. The remainder of their portfolio consists of moderate investments in dozens of AA and A rated corps. There have been a fairly large number of stock transfers to the SINS of known and suspected criminals; investigators suspect these were payments for various illicit operations.

- Interesting. If payments are being made in corp stock, runners digging into finding their real employer are going to suspect the corp. I wonder what game the dragon is playing by paying in corp stock.
- Mr. Bonds

Crimson Wings also has a number of rare art pieces, all heavily insured. The insurance policies state they are “securely stored,” but CIs have reported seeing them in public view at the Funhouse. The collection includes six of the eight pieces in the “Stone Cold Killer” collection. I'm sure you remember the Stone Cold Killer case back in the teens—he was the first killer to use petrification spells. It was in the early days of arcane forensics; the perpetrator was never identified or captured. The pieces were held by the Seattle PD until funding fell apart. The eight pieces were auctioned, sold to eight different collectors in the dying days of that institution; due to their nature they commanded ridiculous prices. How Crimson Wings—or, more specifically, Urubia—acquired three-fourths of the scattered collection is a mystery.

- I read up on those murders while researching a job to steal one of the statues for Aztechnology. At least I thought it was the Azzies because they paid in Azzie stock. But I can add two and two and now I think I may have been working “four” a dragon.
- Ma'Fan

Illicit operations within the Funhouse are difficult to assess. From CI reports we know everything from drugs to prostitutes are available at below street price, and we also know that Funhouse casinos pay out generously at a rate contrary to statistical probability. Speculation is the Funhouse operates as a loss-leader; attracting people to Urubia's turf and giving them lots of reasons to feel good about being there. Puts anyone she's negotiating with in a malleable mood.

Based on her known investments in our world, best estimates put Urubia's net worth in the fifty billion nuyen range. Obviously this doesn't include any unknown investments or objects of value she hasn't disclosed—and given her pattern of behavior she no doubt has both. Factoring in what we suspect but don't know, her true worth is probably double that.



Speculative Agenda

Analyzing intelligence is often a process of assigning relative values to conflicting rumors and looking for a pattern in pieces that don't fit. In this instance, even though we lack specifics on all the pieces, rumors indicate Urubia is working toward gang unification and/or political control of the Redmond District.

Unifying the gangs under her leadership would give Urubia an extensive power base among metahumans. Simply creating a large criminal organization for its own sake seems unlikely, given dragons' well-known fondness for convoluted hidden agendas. With the gangs splintered and working against each other, policing this area is already difficult. If a unified organization starts running things, it will become impossible. In the most extreme scenario, the district under Urubia's control could attempt secession from the Metroplex. Stopping her would be costly, if it were possible at all.

If secession is not the goal, Urubia's unified power bloc could move politically to gain power within the District. Many known gang members are registered citizens and able to vote, and they will no doubt wield considerable influence over the civilian population under their "protection." If the organized crime syndicates are on board, Urubia winning a seat on the City Council is a real possibility.

The rumored Crimson Queen metahuman trafficking should not be forgotten. The purchases and kidnappings of young people with a high probability of being Awakened occurred over a ten-year period, the last known case being five years ago. No evidence hinting at their fates has ever come to light. If these young people were in Urubia's possession, indoctrination and brainwashing are real possibilities. Many of Urubia's Awakened followers living in the Central Tower have questionable SINs and could be potential matches for the missing individuals. All of her followers display a level of devotion to Urubia usually associated with a cult rather than a criminal organization.

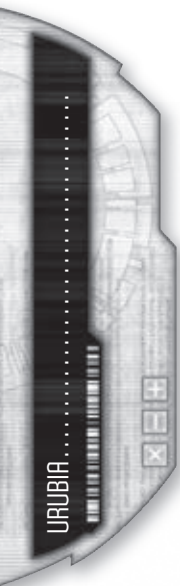
- One of the interesting things about the little pleasure dome Urubia has built for herself is that it's filled with people who, by and large, have heard the rumors about Crimson Queen metahuman trafficking and have decided they don't care. They figure she's such a good host, that if she abducts them it probably won't be too bad (keep in mind that a lot of these are people who have been living pretty hard lives). That's a good sign that her hearts-and-minds campaign has been successful.
- Pistons

Metroplex Impact

Even if Urubia does not pursue her own seat on the City Council, her powerful Awakened community and the sizeable voting bloc she controls would give her considerable power. In particular, many of the council members whose votes we depend on in the Ork Underground situation support us only because there is no viable alternative. Their loss due to her influence could make the resolution we seek impossible. Pro-Awakened groups throughout the Metroplex are already making overtures to Urubia. Only their reluctance to meet her at her Funhouse or align themselves with the more criminal elements has prevented their wholesale endorsements.

An important thing to consider in the secession option mentioned above is this: Urubia has strong ties to two foreign governments and an alliance of unknown depth to another powerful nearby dragon. She has the materiel resources to equip and arm a significant fighting force, and she has tracts of unmonitored land close to the Metroplex to use as staging areas. If she were a great dragon, and if potential political power did not offer similar rewards with less risk, Urubia would be considered a high risk. Taking all relevant factors in balance, Urubia is considered a medium threat to the Metroplex at this time.

- It's a real question where Urubia would stand in the dragon fight, because her ultimate ends are not clear. Even if we decide to buy in to the fact that she's trying to take over Redmond, we don't know what she plans to do with it. Will she be a tyrant or a beneficent ruler? Is she planning to work with metahumans or dominate them? It's hard to say.
- Thorn
- If she's really been kidnapping and selling metahumans, we have a clue at least.
- Aufheben



... THE WAR ROOM ...

Swiss Bank Corporation offices, Hong Kong, August 30, 2074

Sitting in the president's chair in the boardroom for the Swiss Bank Corporation's offices in Hong Kong, Lofwyr spoke firmly in his native tongue to the assembled dignitaries that gathered before him in the spacious conference room. The top-floor security blinds were all shut and sealed, veiling the corner office windows that normally presented onlookers with a majestic view of the frenzied harbor below and the hundreds of neighboring high rises. Almost no one outside of the attendees knew anything about this meeting or its agenda, much less where it was actually being held. All they knew was they had been summoned by Lofwyr while acting in the capacity as Loremaster, and they had answered. Even the board of the Swiss Bank Corporation was left in the dark as to Lofwyr's purpose in using their conference room, and they were equally ignorant about who was invited to this particular meeting. In preparation for the gathering, powerful warding had been meticulously constructed over the last several days to guard against the possibility of astral intrusion. Any trideo conferencing equipment, cameras, or other types of unauthorized electronic surveillance or recording devices found in the room had been removed prior to the meeting to protect its secrecy. Trusted guards and loyal drakes from all participating factions lined the corridors immediately outside the room, and they also stationed posts below the conference room and on the rooftop itself. Lofwyr had demanded the utmost security for this meeting, and the extensive network of individuals dedicated to the task of keeping Lofwyr happy had gone to work.

To Lofwyr's immediate right at the conference table sat the honored and revered Lung. To his left was the formidable female great dragon, Arleesh. The great sand-colored eastern dragon, Aden, was also in attendance, keeping a noticeable distance from the Loremaster. He sat at the opposite end of the table, directly opposite the head of Saeder-Krupp. The distance was mainly symbolic; a handful of meters would not prevent either dragon from doing what they wanted to the other if that's what it came to.

Down the sides of the conference table sat a number of adult dragons who had been invited to this meeting. Lofwyr knew that most of them maintained a strong allegiance to the ancient traditions and customs of their civilization and to the title of Loremaster. Many of these dragons were not yet at the correct age to become great dragons, but the three that sat closest to Arleesh and Lung were only a few years away from obtaining that esteemed rank for themselves. The remaining eighteen attendees were being granted their first opportunities to engage in dragon politics at this level, giving them the opportunity to arrange for themselves to become vassals for those of higher standing. Those dragons were carefully seated according to their rank in dragon society, with the younger and less affluent ones sitting closer to Aden. All those present had learned how to shift into a metahuman form, which made assembling together in this room possible.

There was little small talk among the dragons, and Lofwyr started the meeting by launching into the subject at hand without preamble. "Hestaby continues to be problematic for our ongoing interests," he

said. "Her actions threaten the very fabric of our heritage and our civilization. Not only has she betrayed us all by revealing sensitive and inflammatory information that was best left within the confines of our kind, but she also is placing more emphasis on building and maintaining relations with the younger races than she is on focusing on what is best for the growth and survival of her own race. What she crusades for in the public spotlight may be popular with certain metahumans, but is not a viable option for us. Hestaby desires us as a species to become beholden to the mortals' sense of morality and their laws in all matters of importance. It's true that many of our agendas and goals coincide with those of metahumanity, and in fact they require that we abide by many of those norms to successfully achieve our desired results. But there are certain facets of our existence that cannot simply be confined to the same rules the younger races follow. In those instances, dragon interests and rights must always take precedent. Our methods for feeding are such an instance. What we would deem to be part of the natural order, metahumanity might condemn as murder and barbaric. Dzitbalchen allowed himself to be subjected to metahuman standards, and he was executed for his lapse in judgment. If today what Sirurg does in Central America is considered war crimes by the metahuman population, tomorrow, what you did in Tehran, my dear Aden, might also be considered to be such a crime. A crime on which they may wish to collect. And then what Ghostwalker did in Denver might also be seen as a crime requiring punishment. Should Sirurg be held legally bound by metahuman treaties on war crimes, there is nothing to say metahuman governments may not try and place legal claims on the items that we hold in our respective hoards.

"Hestaby, in choosing her path, failed to provide an answer to the simple question of where this all ends. She has lost the vision to help her see that the way metahumanity views justice is quite different than the perceptions of our kind. The two views are simply irreconcilable.

"We must be allowed to act in ways that we see fit, as the strongest and the most dominant creatures on this planet. In the long term, it would be in the best interests for both our races if we remain free to exercise our wisdom, our judgment, and our power. This is not a matter of dragon superiority as others claim, but a matter of natural selection, allowing those who are naturally stronger and more capable to be free to lead. This has been true throughout our history, and nothing has changed this core fact. This is something Hestaby has yet to comprehend. In her recklessness, she is likely to get one of our kind killed by the metahumans, which would create dire consequences for us all in the future. This precedent she has set in Geneva must not be allowed stand. We must decide on how best to address this matter."

"We should just kill the race traitor and be done with it," interrupted a young female voice from the crowd. The interruption immediately drew frigid gazes from both Lofwyr and Lung, though the speaker finished her thought without flinching. "That will send the proper message to the rest of our kind to not follow her example."

"Mind your place, Aladyas," snapped Lung telepathically. "You must not interrupt the Loremaster. And even though you were invited here, this does not mean you may speak out of turn. Even if you



had achieved such status, you would still be the lowest ranked here. Furthermore, the 'race traitor' to whom you refer is a great dragon and has been since the Fourth World. You will show her your respect, even if she is not present, and even if she is currently at odds with the rest of us. Failure to do so would be unwise."

Aladyas, appearing as a Caucasian woman in her early twenties with a radiant blue-hair and multiple piercings in her ears and eyebrows, froze for a second before bowing her head deep. "My apologies, my Loremaster. My apologies, most revered Lung. I allowed my passions on this matter to get the better of me."

"You must learn restraint quickly, young one, or your place in our ranks will be short lived," said Lofwyr. "And to answer your insinuation in that ill-conceived remark, the reason I have not taken a more immediate visceral action against Hestaby is because two of our members, Rhonabwy and Masaru, are strongly allied with her. She recently opened up a dialogue with the Rain Queen, and those talks, despite my vigorous attempts to disrupt them, appear to be making some progress. The four of them are formidable group, one not easily overcome by raw strength alone. A frontal assault against them would do more harm than good. I admit Hestaby's betrayal of our traditions and our trust must not go unpunished, yet taking direct, violent action against her will result in unacceptable bloodshed amongst our kind. To allow such a loss to our society, which remains in such a fragile stage since the end of the Fifth World, would only entice our metahuman enemies to keep coming after us and our interests. And a significant loss in our population would likely result in power vacuums and in-fighting amongst our ranks the likes of which we have not seen in millennia. No, openly attacking Hestaby would risk us losing the culture and the civilization that we are fighting to preserve here today. As Loremaster, I must seek to ensure bloodshed amongst our kind is kept to a minimum. This matter must be handled with a delicacy and a precision that you have yet to master. At this moment, I am not inclined to take steps to have her killed, but merely severely punished. I desire your input on how best to punish Hestaby and to make sure that punishment happens quickly in metahuman terms, and that it becomes very visible for the world to take note."

"If we're talking about loss amongst our kind, in my humble opinion our culture has already lost too much from our ranks when Nachtmeister fell, *honorable Loremaster*," Aden said, his tone dripping with sarcasm.

Lung spoke in a mild tone before Lofwyr's anger could erupt. "Please, indulge me, Loremaster, but let us return our attention to the matter of Hestaby before we become sidetracked by our own personal squabbles. If I may be so bold, would it not be wise to consider calling upon the full council to consider even harsher punishments for her? Perhaps going beyond the boundaries you have previously set? We have been steadily attacking her financial interests; we have successfully agitated strife in the Northern Crescent region where she has prided herself on establishing a lasting peace between its inhabitants and the Tír government. We have exploited and manipulated information released from Horizon implying that she had a much larger role getting Horizon established in the Tír than she actually had. Her popularity in the court of public opinion has fallen significantly because of our efforts, and she has lost several of her trusted metahuman contacts in the region. It is my judgment, however, that she appears to be weathering the storm better than expected. She has suffered approximately one billion nuyen in losses in her revenue streams, but to her that is minor. I believe harsher methods must be employed before she really begins to

suffer any ill consequences. In my opinion, ostracizing her entirely from our culture or even the bringing up the possibility of imprisonment are punishments worth considering. As you are undoubtedly aware, Loremaster, these options can only be pursued by the full assembly. At the very least, we should put her on trial for her misconduct, similar to the way she would have the metahumans try Surrurg in their courts for the crimes they say he committed."

"Your counsel carries a certain wisdom, Lung. But I am not entirely certain calling for the full council is the appropriate move for the current circumstances. From what I have been hearing, many of our kind have decided that this is the right moment to settle old grudges. Three members of our ranks have been slain since last year by those among us seeking vengeance for past transgressions. I have heard of four other dragons fending off similar assassination attempts from those of our own blood. Others have had their hordes raided by their brethren. If we call an official council together, those looking to settle scores could turn a formal function into a bloodbath.

"With previous councils, I would have had no trouble trusting our members to uphold our customs of respect and civility while at a council meeting. Now, though, the old loyalties that originally bound us together appear to be crumbling. I feel that caution is warranted. Some measure of stability in our ranks needs to be achieved before a council meeting would be possible. Besides, Hestaby has been around for quite a while. A lot of great dragons on the council younger than her owe her a significant number favors. The influence she can amass and wield can delay any verdict by the assembly by decades, if not longer. I'm afraid this is a problem that must be dealt with in the present, by those who are here. We may have to consider stepping up our attacks not only against Hestaby and her interests, but also Rhonabwy, Mujaji, and Masaru. We need to convince our misguided brethren that supporting the Lady Hestaby during this time of unrest is not in their best long-term interests. I know this may not be the popular thing to do, as many of you here have a fondness for both Rhonabwy and Masaru. But this situation calls for it. They have made their choice, and they must live with it.

"I also must point out that Hestaby isn't the only problem we are forced to deal with here tonight. There is the growing and alarming problem of Alamaïs and his ilk in GeMiTo."

Lofwyr's face visibly contorted, revealing a flicker of disdain and searing anger before the golden western dragon quickly regained control of his emotions and returned his features to a neutral expression. "Not only has Alamaïs refused formal requests to talk with me about his activities in GeMiTo, but his followers are reflecting his disobedience and defiance toward our traditions. They also have spurned an invitation for an audience with me to discuss matters. I have asked that he and his followers cease the unabashed feeding frenzy they have so blatantly displayed within GeMiTo, where they have put on a public display for the world to witness and resent. I have asked that his group return the items taken from GeMiTo and then disband. He and his follower have not complied with any of these demands, and the outrage from metahumanity is only growing louder. Yesterday along my offices in Essen received another hundred calls from local business leaders and government officials calling for swift action to stop the violence that is being perpetrated on those metahuman citizens in GeMiTo. Alamaïs has nearly a dozen young adult dragons following him now. My intelligence assets that are monitoring this situation on a global level inform me that three more may his ranks soon. We must not allow him to corrupt and gather any more young followers to his





cause, who possess no desire to hold onto our traditions, and who would foolishly risk war within our own kind as well as full out war with metahumanity. While I do not support the killing of Hestaby at this point, I must put forth the notion to this assembled group that Alamaï must face our collective wrath for his sedition. He and his followers must be put to death.”

Immediately, Arleesh spoke up. “I respectfully disagree, Loremaster. I fail to see how the deaths of at least thirteen of our kind would be any less harmful and destructive to our future than the deaths of Hestaby and her allies. There has to be another way to enforce our laws without such a drastic action. Many of those dragons that foolishly follow Alamaï now are still early on in their lives and are continuing to develop. The loss of their potential would be a disheartening waste.”

Another adult dragon spoke up as well. “With respect to my elders and betters, I too would object the slaughter of the esteemed Alamaï and his followers, If we are to punish both Hestaby and Alamaï for their crimes, their punishments should be the same. Hestaby came after your holdings, honored Loremaster, and destroyed your complex in Dubai. This challenge to the sitting Loremaster has to be held at the same level of contempt as Alamaï’s defiance. So if Alamaï is executed, the same must be done to Hestaby. If Hestaby is spare, so much Alamaï and his followers.”

“That incident you refer to, young one, had nothing to do with me as Loremaster. That was ... personal, an act based on very complicated set of circumstances, including our rather complicated relationship. It is a fine distinction that you must learn to make when dealing with our politics. And I understand your concerns, Talidyr. Namely that your potential mate is currently among those following Alamaï.”

“She is, my lord,” replied the male dragon, whose metahuman form resembled a young elf.

“To address your concern that Alamaï and Hestaby must be dealt with in equal terms, you must understand that the circumstances in which they find themselves are in no way equal. Their punishments, therefore, must be treated in different measures. Hestaby has proven over the years to be an exceptionally skilled spellcaster. She has a talent rarely seen in our culture, and she likely knows secrets and techniques that many of us still have not discovered. Her loss of wisdom and experience would be a true tragedy for our kind. Alamaï has shown no similar talent that could make a substantial contribution to our race.

“We must also take into consideration the fact that Hestaby is still of an age where she is capable of providing viable eggs. Our numbers are such that losing someone with that capability would be a burden for our race. Alamaï, however, does not enjoy that same protection. And those he leads are far from being great dragons. They have made no significant contributions to our race. They have gained no important wisdom or knowledge that they can impart upon the rest of us. At this moment, I find more value in their deaths than I do in their continued existence.”

“Not to be disrespectful, my liege,” Talidyr said, “but I dispute the fact that the young dragons that are following Alamaï have yet to make contributions. I feel I must correct the record and state that Larnala and I have mated. I have learned just a few days ago that our union was successful, and it produced four fertilized eggs.”

“And if I’ll assume those eggs have been turned over to Alamaï, correct?”

“Unfortunately, Loremaster, it is. From what I have learned from Larnala, he may even be in possession of eggs from another one of his followers.”

Lofwyr did not shift in his chair, and expression did not change in any aspect but one—he blinked. That was enough to send a brief current of psychic murmur up and down the table.

“This concerns me greatly,” he finally said. “Those eggs are not worth much to us so long as Alamaï controls them. He will poison the minds of the young before they even hatch. I am glad you called this to my attention, Talidyr. This only provides further justification that Alamaï and the discord he is sowing must end now.”

Talidyr spoke again, this time with a note of urgency that made others glance at Lofwyr nervously, waiting for him to cut the younger dragon off. “It is my belief,” Talidyr said, “that those eggs as well as the dragons that follow Alamaï are not completely lost to us. Efforts must be made to help our allies see reason. I believe I can help Larnala shake off whatever chains are holding her back and free herself from Alamaï’s influence. Since we are of one race, I feel that we owe it to them to try. Once that happens, I believe she will remove the eggs from Alamaï’s care.” He paused. “If I succeed, might I indulge the Loremaster in showing leniency to her for her transgressions?”

“You do not know Alamaï like I do, child,” Lofwyr raised his voice in ire at the adult dragon. “if there are any attempts to leave his side, Alamaï will see them as a sign of weakness. He will kill her, along with any others who try to leave. And he will retain all the eggs that were put under his care. You need to accept this fact: One way or another, all of those dragons will end up dying.”

Lofwyr scanned the faces of all the young dragons present in the conference room, and immediately he became concerned. The young dragons were shifting in their seats and looking away from him. They did not have the look of resolve they would need. The resolve he needed them to have on his behalf.

He sighed, though only to himself. He knew what they were thinking. They were considering their options, thinking, even if only briefly, about the other side and what it might have to offer them. Thinking about a side that had no right to exist. A side that was going to push him to something he hated perhaps more than anything else in the world: a concession.

“Perhaps, though, their lives can be prolonged for a time. Your argument is not without merit. If you, or any of your young kind can reach these dragons and convince them to abandon Alamaï and his cause, they will be shown a degree of mercy. They will have to agree to have an audience with me, where I will instill in them draconic law and customs. They can then assume a probationary existence.

“I will stay my hand for sixty days. You or anyone present will have that long to convince your associates to do the right thing. Once those sixty days are over, we will act in accordance to our laws. Those who succeed in removing our young subjects from the clutch of Alamaï will enjoy the favor of the Loremaster. Those that participate in the inevitable altercation to end Alamaï’s treason will also have my favor.”

“This bears mentioning. Loremaster, because I am certain others will ask” Aden said. “You have been at odds with Alamaï for thousands of years. What kind of assurance can you give us that you are not manipulating us into taking care of an old rivalry that up to this point you have not taken care of for yourself, either by choice or by inability? Engaging in this proposed violence is, of course, warranted and proper when the outcome is in the best interests of our civilization. But if you are using your authority in a self-serving way, it can be argued that you would be abusing the authority of your position. Why not take out Alamaï on your own, as you have done before?”

“And to what end, Aden? How does that serve to unify our kind and preserve our culture? If I act alone in this matter—and make no mistake, I am more than able to take on that job if I choose to—others who are already taking their vengeance out on their individual enemies will continue to do so with impunity. They won’t look to me or anyone else for leadership or unity. The assembly, when called upon, will be looked upon with scorn and derision. Our revered position of Loremaster would no longer hold any sway. And our kind will act more and more like individuals, to the benefit of no one. We need to stand together on this, or we risk falling into anarchy.”

“I would like, for a moment, to return to the matter of Hestaby, Loremaster,” Lung said. “I must take exception to your logic in holding back against Hestaby because of her ability to produce offspring. She has shown no desire in this new age to take on a mate or reproduce. It could be decades before she moves in that direction. As Talidyr has mentioned, there are other female dragons willing to reproduce at this time, and they are doing so. If Hestaby is unwilling to utilize that choice, there is no reason to show her deference simply based on potential.”

Arleesh replied with force. “Lung, you know as well as I do that the assembly has never before set rules on my gender on when we must reproduce and how frequently. I have also not chosen to mate in this era. Do you plan to hold that against me as well? Just because Hestaby has yet to make that choice, that doesn’t mean we should not take into consideration her possible future offspring and the long-term benefits they could bring to our race. I believe the Loremaster is wise to anticipate future events and new participants in those events.”

“There are definitely issues that should be addressed by a new assembly,” Lung admitted. “Procreation certainly is one of them, especially if we are placing such a special value on those among us who can produce viable, fertilized eggs. It has been far too long since an assembly was called. I continue to assert that we need one soon, Loremaster. Much of this dissention has arisen because we have not gathered to work out our existing problems. One has to wonder how much of this conflict could have been avoided had Lady Hestaby sought your counsel first, instead of attacking your holdings, Loremaster.”

“I have taken your counsel under advisement. But right now I am more interested on how we as a group should to deal with the immediate problem of Hestaby.”

“I am surprised by your inquiry, Loremaster. For me, the solution seems obvious,” Aden said. “The Shasta Shamans are her backbone in North America. You can attack her Matrix assets, her spy networks, her financial assets, but if the Shamans remain intact as a group, she maintains her power base. And she will have a platform from which to rebuild. We need to attack the Shasta Shamans directly, and we need to shatter them. The lodge needs to be burned to the ground in a way the whole world will see. The individuals in the organization need to either be killed or forced to flee. Now, while the result of our actions must to be visible, we ourselves do not need to be seen attacking it directly. That is why we have metahuman agents. They can get their hands dirty on these sorts of matters. When the lodge is destroyed, Hestaby’s agenda will be set back by a least a decade, if not more. And more importantly, she gets the message that her agenda is something that we do not want forced upon the rest of us. Shattering the lodge will have a much more profound impact on Hestaby than just killing its leader, who seems to have been easily replaced.”

“I cannot condone such wanton violence,” Arleesh replied curtly. “This is something that Sirurg would do, something that Hestaby spoke out against to begin with. And Sirurg, by the way, is another matter we must address. I agreed to attend this meeting not only because the Loremaster asked me to be here, but because I wanted to be a voice of reason and warn those in attendance not to become overzealous in our responses against Hestaby and Alamais. I firmly believe that metahumanity needs to learn to respect our judgment and our wisdom, not just assume we have those qualities because we claim we do. Metahumanity will not learn that lesson if our members are slaying their kind on a regular basis. We are seeing a dramatic rise in anti-dragon sentiment around the world. We are seeing new anti-dragon groups that are forming each day and are vehemently pushing back against our efforts to seek revenge or justice against specific metahumans. And we are seeing old adversarial groups that we assumed were dead in the Fourth World that are now revealing themselves again. Slaughtering metahumans is likely to add fuel to this fire and perpetuate this violence. I would suggest avoiding any more metahuman casualties so that we can prevent this conflict from spiraling even further out of our control.”

“Unfortunately, that is Hestaby’s position,” Lofwyr said. “And I was under the assumption we were making a point not to choose Hestaby’s way of doing things. So, Arleesh, if we are not to touch the Shamans, what do you suggest?”

“Attack her hoard directly. Raid her nests and her lairs. Divide her treasures among our kind, the way Dunkelzahn’s hoard should have been divided in the first place. This would fit with our customs while also serving as a suitable punishment. Without her hoard, and with us attacking her other avenues, Hestaby could be pushed to the brink of destitution. She would have little power and little standing in our society without her hoard. We can isolate her and make her irrelevant without having to call the assembly. And furthermore, we would not need to shed any more dragon blood. As you have said, we can rely on our metahuman assets to do this. We have been using metahuman assets to raid Alamais’ hoards. We should be doing the same thing with Hestaby. But in both cases, we should consider stepping up the attacks on those hoards until we have utterly drained them. Both Hestaby and Alamais could suffer this same fate, and we could tell our critics that we were unbiased and dealt out the same judgment to both dragons.”

Lofwyr, for the first time in the meeting, stood. He walked away from the table and picked up a vase of flowers at the closest window. He looked at the vase and flowers without blinking. He stood in a silence that seemed to spread from him, enveloping everything for meters around. The silence was devouring, and it made the subsequent crack all the louder. The dragons, who pride themselves on being unflappable and not easily startled, jumped. The vase in Lofwyr’s hand was now broken. Water dripped from his hand to the ground.

“Arleesh and Aden, you give this group much to consider. With our tempers a bit enflamed from some of the rather blatant jabs we have received, perhaps this would be a good time to call a recess and digest some of the ideas that have been presented here.” Lofwyr’s gaze fell squarely on Aden. “Let us adjourn for half an hour. And when we return, we will discuss these ideas more in detail. And we will discuss the matter of Sirurg.”

... TOOLS OF THE OPPOSITION ...

Posted By: Beaker

Note: After FastJack opened this to public commentary, Picador made a pass adding a whole new layer of commentary on things from the military/political point of view, rather than the technical. It appears the same as all the other chatter, but nonetheless you should pay special attention to it. There's two basic kinds of people in this business, folks who view hardware and equipment as just a means to an end, innately less important than the hows and whys behind it, and gear queers like myself who drool over technical specifications. Now both countries have been heard from.

If you've been working in this business at all in the past six months, you've probably noticed that something is up, and you have stories to tell about it. Most nations and corporations with any military sector contracts or subsidiaries have been making big pushes forward in weapons R&D across a number of sub-sectors, with everyone in a big damn hurry. You have most likely noticed this in the form of a surfeit of work, with B&E smash-and-grabs and data-steals on hastily assembled R&D labs with substandard security being the latest trend. There's a bit of a micro-bubble forming for runners with the right kind of expertise, and since it probably won't last long, I won't try to convince you not to fill your pockets and/or your bank accounts while you've got the chance.

- Making a lot of assumptions about yer hypothetical second-person audience. I for one do not engage in criminal activities.
- Kane
- I sincerely hope you successfully dictated that with a straight face.
- Cosmo

What I will try to do is help you to see the forest for the trees, which can be difficult to do from the ground floor. Plenty of unwritten disclaimers on JackPoint articles could be safely assumed, but since I'm feeling nice, I'll speak them—this is speculation, and it's speculation about the motivations and tactics of some of the most powerful organizations in the world from

someone operating at a much lower level. When I have a good month, I make enough after overhead to pay the rent. I don't save the world.

That said, my interest in this started when I was hired to head way down south with a team performing a structure hit on an Aztechnology R&D facility just outside of Tijuana. The rules of engagement as Mr. Johnson laid them out for us were basically "break everything you can, kill whoever you have to," which made me feel a bit like a kid in a candy store.

- Don't you mean "a bull in a china shop"?
- Turbo Bunny
- Do you kiss and tell? Any idea who Mr. Johnson was in this case?
- Marcos
- Never you mind. I'd much rather keep it at just Mr. Johnson this time, though I have my suspicions.
- Beaker

They'd set up some medium-to-large scale nano-forges and were using them to churn out this prototype nano-bullshit. That seemed like factoring to me more than R&D, but maybe what they were testing out or experimenting with was their ability to mass-produce it. Anyway, in this case, "as much damage as possible" meant C4ing a few of their nano-forges, the wireless trunk for their network, and their offline servers, trying to kill all the on-site digital copies of their blueprints and schematics. Plus some "collateral damage." It wasn't a cake walk, but all in all their security was less than it should have been for SOTA nanotech. The entire thing felt like a rush job.

The hacker I was working with then—who I hadn't worked out before—managed to smuggle out some sample canisters of the nanotech, which was weaponized, but not like anything I'd seen before. To start with, our shaman said the stuff was magically active. Manatech, in other words. Additionally, the firmware seemed to be keyed to target and attack specific genetic structures. Specifically, non-metahuman genetic structures. Once we were back across the border to CalFree, I was curious, and I borrowed



INCOMING FEED.....



a canister from the hacker's pilfered stash and took it to a contact there with a bit more expertise in biotech than I had.

She said that the nanotech was specifically designed to target dragons while being harmless to humans. The genetic profile was a targeting system, and the microscopic quantities of Awakened biomaterial were a modified strain of FAB, acting as a kind of triggering mechanism. When they interface with dragon tissues, the nanites are supposed to essentially rip the dragon apart on the cellular level, dealing massive, massive damage. The doc that I showed it to said that it was nastier than anything she'd seen before, including shrikes or even surtr.

When I got back, I found out that "our" hacker had skipped town without so much as leaving a note, along with the rest of the canisters and some files he'd liberated from the facility in Tijuana. I found out later through channels that he was probably some kind of a spook working for the CAS.

So if you're having trouble connecting two and two, this is pretty much conclusive proof that Aztechnology is developing anti-dragon super-weapons; in fact, they're doing more than developing them—they're preparing to roll them into mass production. I'm pretty sure our hit just slowed them down and didn't come close to stopping them. And now the CAS has some of their prototype and their project specs. This shit is serious.

- That kind of tech should be at least three years off according to my intelligence. Are you sure it will even work? Sounds like Aztechnology might be getting desperate, pushing a volatile, half-finished prototype into production. That's a rash move. Are they really that worried about dragons?
- Cosmo

- What's interesting to me is that the dragons may just be as worried about them. Do you really doubt that when you trace back the procession of patsies, Beaker's run was sponsored by one of the greats?
- Plan 9
- Are you having an off day or something, Plan 9? That actually kind of made sense.
- Hard Exit
- All right, I didn't say anything when this came up in the *Conspiracy Theories* thread dump, because honestly it was pretty far from the thing there that made the *least* sense, but what is with this special snowflake anti-dragon weapon bullshit? I get it, dragons are big, strong, smart flying lizards that can breathe fire, and on top of that, they're powerful mages. Most shadowrunners are restricted to small-unit infantry tactics with no air or armor support, so that can seem really intimidating. Engaging them with small arms, with light drones, and with less powerful mages would obviously seem like a bad idea. But that doesn't mean that the weapons systems we've been perfecting to kill each other for the past several centuries are somehow entirely fucking inapplicable to dragons. What about main battle tanks, attack helicopters, and fighter-bomber VSTOLs? What about cruise missiles, high-orbit military drone strikes, and Thor shots? Hell, what about just big fucking guns? What is so fundamentally inadequate about heavy laser cannons, gauss weapons, assault cannons, HMGs, and so forth that are so heavy and so fundamentally overkill that they aren't good for much *but* killing dragons, that corporations are

TOOLS OF THE OPPOSITION

seriously shoveling millions and millions of nuyen into super special anti-dragon manatech nanoweaponry?

- Pistons
- Maybe some middle manager convinced them it was necessary, playing off the not-inconsiderable public fears and media scares of some kind of ultimate conflict between dragons and metahumans? *Shrug* I've heard tell of a runner team back in the early '50s that took down a wyrm with just a mini-gun gyro-mounted in the back of a GMC Bulldog and a few hundred HE/AP tracer rounds.
- Bull
- It is really not just an understatement but a complete misunderstanding of the facts to say that dragons are merely "powerful mages." Dragon magic works within paradigms and parameters that are scarcely recognizable to metahuman magicians. Simply put, the rules and the limitations are just different for them. Adult dragons can do everything we can do, and they can do it harder and more often. Great dragons can do all of those things, and on top of that they can do things we're decades or centuries away from having a working understanding of.
- Winterhawk
- I'm not sure about that, Winterhawk, but what I can do is look at what a metahuman mage might be doing and extrapolate that to the Nth power. That means that the "average" dragon has spells quickened on them that let them a) sense bullets coming and dodge them, b) magically deflect bullets that get close, and c) sheath them in magical armor that protects them from any bullets that actually somehow manage to arrive on target. And that's without going into situationally useful things, like turning completely invisible or surrounding themselves in an elemental aura powerful enough to evaporate anything they come into contact with. And keep in mind all of these spells are probably cast about three times harder than I could cast them and hope to survive. So it's kind of irrelevant how big your gun is, even for the three to five seconds (tops) you get to fire it before getting handily defenestrated from the mortal coil by "fiery breath," or maybe, who knows, a manabolt.
- Haze
- Is that *entire post* too long for a signature? Probably, right? Too bad, because I love it.
- /dev/grrl
- Seriously: Don't feed his fucking ego.
- Pistons
- On top of what Haze and Winterhawk already said, I have heard that some dragon magical traditions mimic the path of the *qabbalist* and the *houngan*, and can invoke very, very powerful spirits to possess themselves, using channeling. My own extremely limited understanding of draconic etiquette and culture seems to indicate that doing so—that ceding control in this way—would be an action of absolute last resort for any dragon worthy of the name, and almost unthinkable for a great dragon. But still,

the idea of a very powerful spirit possessing an equally powerful dragon is almost unthinkable frightening.

- Axis Mundi
- Especially considering what I saw on that Dzitbalchen autopsy video—dragons are damn close to impervious to conventional bullets and shells even without *any* spells or spirits.
- Nephrine
- Dragons tend to be too small and too fast moving to be ideal targets for cruise missiles, which are usually used on high-value targets like blue-water naval vessels, command bunkers, bridges, etcetera. Cruise missiles move *really fast* but they also tend to be launched from very, very far away, giving dragons time to take evasive maneuvers, relocate, and/or prepare magical defenses. Thor shots have almost none of these problems, granted—the issue with them is more of an issue of collateral damage. Using a Thor shot over even the most sparsely populated territory of a nation with any global influence at all is just begging for a PR nightmare, and the Corporate Court doesn't like it when orbital weapons platforms aren't used without majority consent, which even in a wireless age can be difficult to obtain in a tactical timeframe.
- Orbital DK
- But how does the fucking worm even know the cruise missile launched? Are they psychic, too?
- Kane
- High-altitude drone strikes tend to be very efficient against dragons, assuming that drone assets are in position in the right sector. Ground-effect laser bombardment seems to be the most efficient tactic, assuming you've got relatively clear skies to work with and blooming isn't too much of a problem. Obviously, data is limited. But that's the tactic I'd go with.
- Rigger X
- Rigger X, dragon slayer. I can see the trid marquee now.
- Slamm-0!
- All right, all right, all right. So if dragons are really *that* super special, why would they even care about these nanites? Can't they just inject blue-goo like everyone else, or invent some kind of anti-nanite spell? Apparently they can do everything else.
- Pistons
- Can't blame you for being jealous, Pistons. At least you've got this advantage on dragons: they don't react well to even benign/helpful nanotech. They have an unusually strong immune-response to it, essentially. So no blue goo for them.
- Butch
- To paraphrase your question, Pistons, "Why are corporations like Aztechnology spending millions on anti-dragon weapons development when they've got enough conventional ordnance lying around to level the civilized world fifteen times over?" The answer is actually very simple. All of that conventional ordinance—and manpower, and training, and tactics—has availed Aztlan not one whit in taking out even one dragon.



I'm talking, of course, about Sirurg, who has so far evaded their grasp. Sirurg committed one of the largest and most ruthless acts of terrorism in recorded history on the Azzie city of Cali, and the entire Aztlan military apparatus, widely considered one of the most powerful and modern in the world, has thus far been unable to kill him. Are you surprised to find them investing in the development of new weapons and tactics? And keep in mind that the average citizens of many nations and everyday wageslaves of many of the AAAs are terrified of dragons at this point in media's news cycle.

Other countries and megas are following in Aztlan's footsteps to appease a terrified constituency that is half-seriously expecting some kind of global draconic holocaust. "Lack of originality, everywhere, all over the world, from time immemorial, has always been considered the foremost quality and the recommendation of the active, efficient, and practical man." Never mind that in so doing, the powers that be are just increasing the tensions with the more radical elements of draconic society.

- Picador

The specialized anti-dragon weaponry under development would seem to indicate an imminent or at least credible threat of war posed by dragonkind to metahumanity. And a war between dragons and humans is absolutely batshit crazy. It's like a bad trid, or something that Plan 9 would post about. It couldn't possibly be real. I was really freaked out by the entire incident, and I tried to dig deeper into the idea of anti-dragon weapons, hopefully I'd find some alternative explanation or a way to prove my initial assumptions wrong.

I found out about at least two anti-dragon weapons projects. One of them, right here in the UCAS, was pretty far from top-secret. In fact, it's gotten some media coverage, apparently based on information leaked to act as a deterrent to make dragons cautious about trying anything. It's not quite that the UCAS military is sending a "come at me" message to dragons, but they're not shying away from the conflict either. The brand new, high-profile aerial hunter-killer drone the UCAS is developing is being marketed as "capable of defensively engaging traditional and non-traditional threat sectors with aggressive air defense." I read between the lines and came up with "built to shoot down dragons."

- It's arguable whether the idea of an all-out war between dragons and metahumanity is more or less scary than the old nightmare of a nuclear war between nations or AAAs. It's certainly different. Megacorporations aren't conveniently located in one geographic area like nations, and dragons are even more scattered and distributed. The battle lines and super weapons of such a war might look unlike anything we've ever seen before.
- Red Anya

I'm not an expert on drones (and I wouldn't be surprised if one of our drone experts were to chime in) but here's what I've been able to dig up on the prototype drone, which is currently called the RQ-47 "Black Arrow." The first prototypes produced are currently in flight testing at Scotts Air Force Base in southwestern Illinois. While it's been heavily publicized that Ares is working in full partnership with the UCAS government in developing the new drone, the actual location where the drone

prototypes are being manufactured or where R&D is taking place is a closely guarded secret. Some of the people I talked to in order to get this much info were looking for that piece of information. My guess would be that they've either been hired by pro-dragon interests to stop the development, or by other corps or nations looking to play catch-up on their own anti-dragon weapons programs.

The Black Arrow design is a high-speed interceptor that supposedly has great maneuverability at supersonic and subsonic speeds. It is equipped to mount both conventional weapons and drone-racks that are supposed to contain deployable hunter-killer minidrones, which presumably will be fitted with chemical, biological, or nanotech weapons like the kind Aztechnology is developing.

One last interesting point about the Black Arrow. It's being developed with something highly technical called "Redundant Processing Manufacturing." That sounds like the type of buzzwords corporate types love to throw around, but I'm not sure what it means. It doesn't seem to imply anything good enough to be a actual feature of a weapon.

- Natural objects are very easy to affect with magic. They are part of the natural flow, so to speak. Heavily manufactured objects, created from synthetic materials by robots, have some resistance to magic—the more complicated, the more resistant. Guns and drones are classic examples—it's easy to hit the guy holding the gun with a spell than the gun itself, usually, and with drones you might be completely hosed. Redundant Processing Manufacturing takes this process to its logical extreme, and then some, exposing the design to more soulless manufacturing, refining, and toxic chemicals than strictly necessary. It throws the old laws of efficiency out the window and creates a distressing amount of pollutants, but in the process it makes something stubbornly resistant to magic. Considering that all dragons are accomplished magicians, it makes sense.
- Ecotope
- Beaker, you rang? The Black Arrow is closely based on the airframe and avionics package of the RQ-39 "War Eagle," the UCAS's current front-line military interceptor drone, with some tweaks. The "War Eagle" in turn shares many design features with the Saeder-Krupp Blitz drone, which is the most recognizable modern drone of its type. It doesn't—fortunately—share an avionics package or any other delicate firmware with the Blitz, which is a good thing if it's really designed to fight dragons, since that would mean at least one dragon (and the largest megacorporation in the world, which is his personal bitch) would know all of its weaknesses. Interceptors generally speaking are extremely fast-moving fighters designed with anti-air applications in mind. In the old days, they shot down bombers over friendly airspace, and bombers were frequently protected by their own complements of interceptors. Interceptors are now designed to eliminate unmanned first-strike drones and other (usually unmanned) intrusions. This one, compared to most interceptors, is a lot slower, a lot more heavily armored, and actually a little bit more maneuverable, with VTOL hover-capabilities and vector-assisted jet turning. Which makes sense, if it's designed to keep up with something big and slow moving, but capable of maneuvering



in extremely unorthodox and unpredictable ways, like a dragon. The minidrones it's loaded with are modified Cyberspace Designs Dragonfly hunter-killers that are heavily modified to hunt and kill dragons rather than lightly armored drones. The minidrones aren't fast enough to catch a dragon on their own. The "Black Arrow" needs to close to knife-fight ranges without getting destroyed and launch the drones like any other projectile.

- Rigger X
- Similar designs are being developed independently by (at least) the Allied German States, the Italian Confederation, Russia, and several Middle Eastern nations. The same goes for every major megacorporation except for NeoNET and Saeder-Krupp (for obvious reasons). One notable exception among the First World nations is the Japanese Imperial State (as well as all of the Japanacorps). Perhaps their shared cultural reverence for dragons—both in general, and Ryumyo in particular—has kept the Japanese from identifying themselves with the side of humanity in this growing conflict. Does that mean that they would be on the other side?
- Icarus
- The Native American Nations also don't seem to be drinking the dragon war Kool-Aid. Either that or they're already quite confident in their current military readiness.
- Kay St. Irregular
- I guess we should be relieved that dragon-owned/dragon-backed corps like Saeder-Krupp and NeoNET are staying out of the anti-dragon weapon business. And not building those weapons specifically to fail. Yet.
- Slamm-0!

Meanwhile, I've heard through shadow channels that the CAS is developing a similar aircraft, although they're keeping it a bit more under wraps. The big difference is that they expect a couple of crazy SOB's to get in the thing and actually fly it, right at the face of a giant, pissed off flying magical lizard. Presumably costing a lot more per unit than the "Black Arrow," the Lockheed Skyknight is a SOTA t-bird that clearly prioritizes individual unit survivability. The CAS military and Lockheed are both intent on protecting the prototype design from industrial espionage attempts as the first models are rolling into production. The attitude seems to be that if other nations want to benefit from the anti-dragon weapons designed in the CAS, they're damn well going to pay for them.

The ironic thing about this is that from what I hear, crucial elements of the design for the Skyknight were actually stolen from a deep black airbase in the heart of Aztlan. The Diez de Octubre airbase in Durango has been rumored to be the base for the testing of "magical fighter jets" for years, and (as outlandish as the idea sounds) the CAS has apparently taken this wild concept and run by it. Instead of a standard pilot program or agent, the Skyknight incorporates a *spirit* as a sort of co-pilot. The idea is that some dragons can ostensibly commandeer vehicles and drones by summoning spirits to possess them. The "spirit-piloted" T-Bird gets around that problem while conferring some other advantages.

- Certainly not all dragons follow "possession tradition" magical paths, but a fair number of them have demonstrated the ability to summon both spirits that possess and spirits that materialize, something no metahuman tradition has been able to duplicate. Ordinarily, a spirit that possesses something like a firearm or a vehicle has a limited degree of control over it, and fine manipulation of electronics and digital controls is out of the question. If the spirits in question are really fused with the systems of the Skyknight, that would be quite an accomplishment. Magic and technology don't like it when you try and push them together, you see, and you often get nasty complications. Like with cybermancy.
- Jimmy No
- I've heard that the spirits in question are being summoned and authoritatively bound by high-ranking officers of the UCAS Thaumaturgic core. Specifically, a special forces unit organized under a Colonel Ethan Levy. Levy is a cabbalist by tradition, and as far as I can tell the entire special unit works with the same paradigm. My insight into military affairs stops there. I'm not sure where these guys are based—they seem pretty nomadic.
- Haze

For those of you keeping track, that's the second time in this posting that the CAS has successfully stolen proprietary tech out from under the nose of the Aztlan/Aztechnology "partnership" (if you even want to call it that). Even in the business that we're in, where intellectual property and prototypes tend to change hands fairly often, that seems pretty brazen. Most likely the CAS is counting on the Azzies being too busy between the still-ongoing war with Amazonia and now hunting down Sirurg to aim any serious reprisals at their northern borders. Interestingly, while Aztlan was developing their own version of the Lockheed Skyknight for many years, they don't appear to be in any great hurry to bring it to market now.

- Perhaps they know something that their counterparts in the CAS don't.
- Man-of-Many-Names
- I did a little digging, and even besides the fancy spirit-autopilot (and no I have no idea how a rigger sharing the reins with a spirit would play out in real life), the Skyknight is a very capable vehicle. It's a current generation LAV, with capabilities similar to the GMC Banshee or Dassault Paynal (not cheap, but nothing to sneeze at) and comparable firepower to a Lockheed A-3100 or an Aztechnology Halcon. It's also being constructed with manufacturing redundancy and extra armor (including passenger protection cocoons), but it seems to be more suited to general-purpose use than the drone. Of course, it also lacks the deployable hunter-killer drone racks of the Black Arrow.
- Rigger X
- My guess would be that certain elements—namely, hawks—within the CAS and the UCAS are using the entire dragon scare as an excuse to increase their military spending. This goes beyond boys and their toys. There are elements in CAS politics that have seriously been looking to take back parts of Texas from the Azzies

INCOMING FEED.....



for years, and having a next generation VTOL fighter/bomber that puts the latest Aztechnology hardware to shame puts them in a great position to do just that. It's the same as all of the CAS bluster about how if Sirurg strikes north of the border, it will mean certain war with Aztechnology. As if Aztechnology had anyway of controlling Sirurg's movements. And the UCAS, of course, has to keep up with the CAS.

- Picador
- Makes sense. It's not like the dragon-killer drones and planes can't kill other things too.
- Kane
- Actually, I think it's safe to say that Aztlan, at least, is pretty damn worried about Sirurg. General Rodrigo Estrada—Aztlan regular army—is the man personally charged with the elimination of Sirurg, as quickly and efficiently as possible. Estrada comes from Medellin and has ties to the ghost cartels that go back generations. He and his lackeys have traveled all over Aztlan and its neighbors, hiring mercenaries up and down the peninsula. He has recruitment stations in Roswell, Tucson, San Antonio, Guadalajara, Technocitlán, Acapulco, Panama Bogota, and what's left of Cali. They seem to be taking an "expendable assets" approach and are even willing to equip and organize mercenaries and runners with minimal training and weak brag sheets. Of course, the real payout will only go to the group "lucky" enough to tangle with the Destroyer and win. But I've heard that Aztlan has even loosened its northern borders; word is they're accepting any immigrants, regardless of background, as long as they're coming south to do a little dragon hunting.
- Black Mamba
- All of that is true, actually. Having this many people out looking for him certainly makes me wonder where Sirurg is hiding. And where he's getting his support from. Nothing that big disappears that completely without serious magical and technological backing. Aztechnology is a large, modern nation, and its tech assets and troop strength are bleeding edge. You don't hide from them without help, no matter who you are.
- Picador

So, to recap, anti-dragon weapons are being developed by Aztechnology, the UCAS, and the CAS. We've got anti-dragon bioweapons, chemtech, and nanotech. Anti-dragon drones—big ones designed to shoot out littler ones—and anti-dragon VTOLs. Besides the three powers I just mentioned, everyone else wants a piece. That's not everything, either. I've heard rumors about new Awakened compounds designed to increase the chance of soldiers surviving taking on dragons, and I've heard rumors about new rotorcraft and new and expensive biodrones built along the same lines for the same reasons.

- I think a lot of the insights into new dragon-killing technology and tactics probably resulted from the data gathered from Dzitbalchen's autopsy. Of course, how effective it will prove in the field remains to be seen.
- Nephrite

TOOLS OF THE OPPOSITION.....



- Actually, I need to rescind some of what was said earlier about Japanacorp staying neutral. Renraku just purchased Amenohoakari, an “urban planning” satellite in geosynchronous orbit over Neo-Tokyo, for an undisclosed sum probably in the hundreds of billions of nuyen. I’ve also heard that another of the old power satellites also thought lost in the Crash has recently been “discovered” in orbit (don’t ask me how they could have lost it in the first place). I’ve heard that a Meisho-san—maybe Renraku, maybe not—has been looking for a team of space-ready runners to help retake the satellite. Retake it from what, though?
- Plan 9
- Connect the dots for me, please. What does an urban planning satellite have to do with dragons? That just looks like an irrelevant factoid from here.
- Kat o’ Nine Tales
- Amenohoakari has an on-board laser platform. That means that this satellite also has the power structure to support one. I believe orbital weapons platforms were mentioned earlier as one of the few currently existing options for taking out a dragon.
- Orbital DK

- I’ve noticed a definite increase in money changing hands from corporations looking to upgrade their satellite targeting and telemetry packages, as well. Both legally and otherwise.
- Mr. Bonds

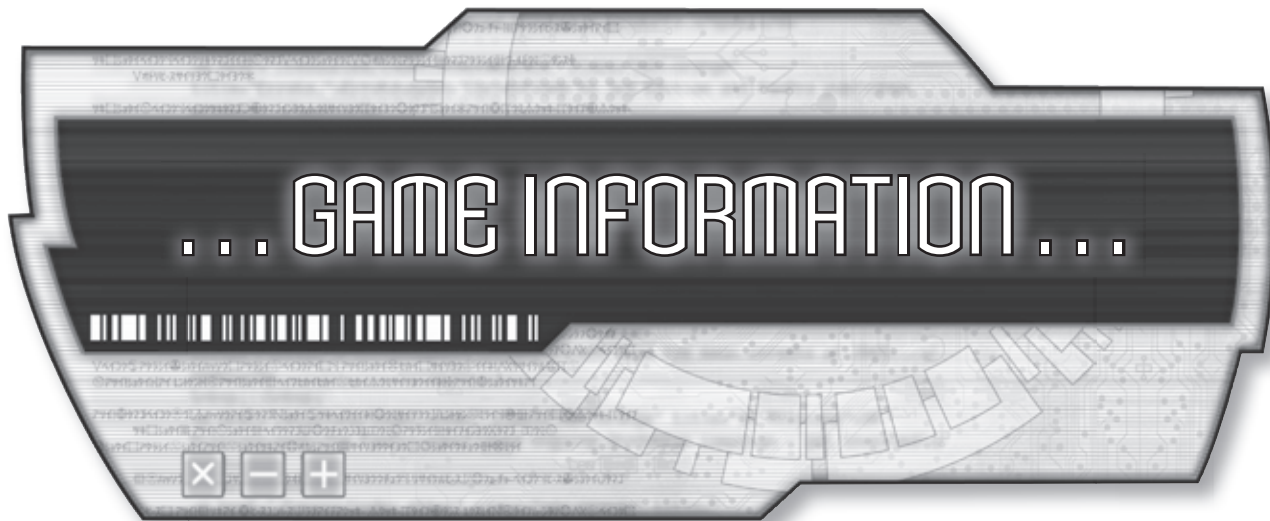
I’ve heard stories from people hired by most of the AAAs—and a few of the smaller players—who were tasked with stealing data or making structure hits that would let them play catch up. And then there are draconic interests that want all of these projects shut down. In the short term, that means more work for us.

But what does it mean in the long term?

Are countries and megacorp really gearing up for war with the great dragons? Are the great dragons gearing up for war with each other? Which dragons will be on our side in this war? Which organizations—staffed by metahumans but owned by dragons—will be on the side of the wyrms? What is this war going to look like when it hits, and how close is it?

Unfortunately, I can’t answer any of that, and can only state the obvious—the safest thing to do for us is to grab everything we can while the grabbing is good.





Note that the information in this section is for gamemasters only. It contains behind-the-scenes details as well as game statistics and other data that will make it easier to incorporate material from *The Clutch of Dragons* into their game. Note that there is not game information for every section of the book; in some cases, no information is needed beyond that which is presented in the in-character sections.

DRAGON STATISTICS

Generally speaking, if the players have gotten themselves into a situation where they are making a variety of opposed tests against a dragon, they might want to rethink their approach to shadowrunning and employ methods that carry somewhat less of a risk of having them be devoured. While the activities of dragons have an effect on shadowrunning in many ways, for the most part runners will not be going directly against dragons. For that reason, few dragon game statistics are included in this section; instead, the game stats presented focus more on individuals runners might be likely to encounter. If dragon statistics are needed, though, those of generic adult dragons on p. 303 of *Shadowrun Twentieth Anniversary Edition*; Perianwyr (p. 104) or Kalanyr (p. 96) below; or Lofwyr and Hestaby from *Street Legends* can provide guidelines.

DRAGON SCHEMES

WAR AT 10,000 METERS

Zebulon

When Ghostwalker returned he brought Zebulon, the Spirit of Denver, back with him. She was first fragmented in 2017 when two magicians summoned her simultaneously. Zebulon is now greater than the whole of her fragments, and she is even more powerful than she was before her fragmentation. She has been reunited with the rest of the spirit of Ghostwalker's deceased mate, which had been fragmented when Lofwyr tried and failed to destroy her several thousand years ago. In addition, she has

gained the experience and power each fragment accumulated on its own over the last six decades.

In effect, Zebulon is a unique spirit that combines a great dragon's astral form with the Spirit of Denver. While Zebulon's physical body ceased to exist long ago, science and magic can do strange things in the Sixth World. It may be that she will assume a permanent physical presence once more—something that would greatly transform dragon society forever. For now, though, she remains a spirit, and she follows the rules for free spirits unless otherwise noted.

Zebulon's trauma from being fragmented into multiple spirits that operated unchecked for decades has not yet been healed, which sometimes causes fluctuations in her mood that alters the local background count around the Front Range Free Zone. The general trauma she has experienced has caused even the most benign spirits to become hostile or at least indifferent to metahumans, and those are the ones with whom Zebulon's sympathies lie. Those who are not are few and far between, and their intransigent nature tends to be such that it would earn the wrath of Zebulon.

The Treaty of Denver

As is the case in any political wrangling, there is enough minutiae involved in the Treaty of Denver negotiations to choke a whole tribe of sasquatches. Everything from air rights to sales taxes to zoning codes is up for debate, and armies of lobbyists are regularly haranguing anyone they can find in order to squeeze out any available advantage. The return of Ghostwalker has lent an air of desperation to the proceedings, as many parties are worried about losing ground they thought they had gained during his absence. If they thought about it logically, the various parties involved might realize the futility of taking on Ghostwalker on his home turf, but the thing about desperation is that it crowds out logic. Any tool available to desperate individuals is on the table, including bribery, blackmail, and even assassination. This means that runners can find work in Denver as these people throw whatever they've got into the fray, but

gamemasters should be clear about the very real possibility of raising the ire of Ghostwalker if they throw in with these people.

Setting aside the smaller details, the broader strokes of the debate are easier to understand. Major points include the following:

- **Border changes.** As neighborhoods shift and develop in the city, certain areas improve while others decline. The different sectors of the city regularly quarrel about the exact placement of boundaries, trying to argue why a newly lucrative neighborhood should be placed in their borders, while a deteriorating area should perhaps be pushed elsewhere. Often, of course, the games involved are subtler than simple wrangling over poor and well-off neighborhoods. One activity that happens with some regularity is that investors from one nation buy up depressed properties near a sector border, then they actively lobby for that territory to switch sectors. The old sector is often happy to get rid of the underperforming land, so the deal is approved. Once the land is in a new sector, the owners work out an agreement with the sector government to bring healthy amounts of development subsidies to the land. The owners get rich off the development money, while the government administrators receive a healthy kickback. From a runner's perspective, this presents a number of jobs, including convincing recalcitrant property owners to sell, looking into who owns what plot of land, and digging up evidence of government corruption in the kickbacks (assuming they can find anyone in the Sixth World who is shocked by such things).
- **Defense Force composition:** All the sectors in Denver have one common desire: They want an effective Zone Defense Force that is mainly staffed by someone else. The math is simple—the more manpower you commit to the ZDF, the less you have for your own internal security. Still, while nations would prefer not to have their troops in the ZDF, it's only a preference, and it's something they're willing to use as a bargaining chip if it will get them a concession they really want. If one nation will give another a piece of land in return for the first nation putting extra troops into the ZDF, for example, that's the type of deal most sector governments will make. Unless the land was toxic.
- **Aztechnology access:** The confusing thing about the issue of Aztechnology attempting to regain a foothold in Denver is that it's difficult to figure out who's pushing for it. It's not the CAS, that's for sure, and now that the Ute faction within the PCC has been contained (though the October vote of confidence is a wild card, and the shadows will be teeming with activity surrounding that issue), it's likely not them. Sioux and UCAS relations with Aztechnology are less frosty, but neither one has an overly compelling reason to carry the Big A's water. And Ghostwalker, of course, wants no part of anything to do with the megacorp to the south. Yet the issue comes up time and time again, a testament to the lobbying and public relations power of Aztechnology. Given the public sentiment starting to build in their favor, the Azzies might yet find a way back into the city. Or they might make Ghostwalker take definitive action against them.
- **Revenue distribution:** As is the case anywhere, money can

be the solution to a lot of the problems sector governments face in Denver, because it's so versatile. Need more troops? Money will buy them. Want to clear out one of your slums? A little extra money will go a long way toward making that happen. So naturally, the distribution of cash is a major point of discussion in the negotiations.

- The major sources of government revenue in the treaty city are income tax and VAT—other taxes and tariffs are illegal (though governments can charge fees, much to their delight). Both of those taxes are collected centrally, then distributed out to the sectors based on population and “demonstrated economic need.” It's that last one that makes things interesting. There are some shadowrun possibilities related to population numbers—for example, making funding sources for a new residential development disappear, or simply blowing up the new building can keep numbers down in a targeted sector—but in the end, population is a hard fact, one that doesn't change even with a lot of argument. Economic need, on the other hand, is a much more subjective matter, and is therefore subject to all sorts of wrangling. Most of the arguments involved are about economics, community development, and other things that don't involve runners, but there are still chances for shadowruns. Some are simple, such as the ever-popular bribery and blackmail of people in decision-making positions, but other runs are more creative. Organizing gang attacks in a neighborhood to abruptly make it more destitute, bringing a pack of devil rats to infest a formerly decent neighborhood, and forging electronic property records to make land appear less or more valuable are all possible runs.

Talons (Professional Rating 4)

The Talons network is Ghostwalker's most loyal and secret cadre of spies, and it was unknown to virtually anyone outside of the dragon's already limited inner circle until Fianchetto accidentally uncovered its existence. All of the Talons are drakes or free spirits who have sworn magical oaths of loyalty and service to do Ghostwalker's bidding by collecting intelligence and performing covert actions. Each Talon runs their own smaller, compartmentalized spy ring comprising mostly metahumans and spirits. Some also employ paranimals and non-metahuman sapients, and at least one Talon runs a synthetic intelligence (AI or free sprite) operative. They often use members of the larger Watcher network (a known entity in the intelligence world) and the Zone Defense Force as pawns in their machinations.

Talon (common drake)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
3	4	4(5)	4	3	5	3	4	2	6.0	5	9(10)	1(2)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/10

Armor (B/I): 7/5

Active Skills: Automatics 3, Blades 3, Climbing 3, Etiquette 3, Infiltration 4, Intimidation (Interrogation) 3 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft 3, Perception 3, Pistols 4, Running 3, Shadowing 3

Qualities: Adept, Drake

Powers: Shift (drake)

Dracoform Powers: Elemental Attack (Fire), Enhance Senses





INCOMING FEED.....

(Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell, Thermographic Sense), Hardened Armor 4, Mystic Armor 4, Natural Weapons (Bite/Claws, DV 4P, AP —)

Adept Powers: Astral Perception (1), Critical Strike 2 (0.5), Elemental Strike (fire, 0.5), Improved Reflexes 1 (1.5), Iron Will 2 (0.5), Killing Hands (0.5), Mystic Armor 1 (0.5)

Draciform: Reach +1, Body 7, Strength 9 (other stats remain the same).

Gear: Armor vest, 5 x plasteel restraints

Weapons:

Colt Manhunter [Heavy Pistol, DV 6P, AP -1, SA, RC —, 16 (c), w/ laser sight, explosive ammo]

AK-97 Carbine [SMG, DV 5P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC (1), 30 (c), w/ detachable stock]

Ghostwalker and the Nexus

Ghostwalker has often seemed disengaged from metahumanity and the Matrix, allowing the PCC to run the Denver Matrix and giving the Nexus a free hand to operate within grasp of his own realm. Using his node's direct connection to the Heap as well as other assets, Ghostwalker has become knowledgeable of the Matrix, and he has also studied what his fellow great dragons and the Draco Foundation know of this and what they have or intend to do with the Matrix and phenomena such as technomancers and artificial intelligence. It is unknown what capabilities are at his personal discretion, or what if anything he plans to do with them. While he has learned a significant amount about the workings of the Matrix, he is never going to approach Eliohann's level of involvement with it.

ECHOING THE ROAR

The Man Who Laughs

As a result of the magic used during the closure of the Watergate Rift, all of the elves involved in the ritual to prevent the release of mana from destroying Washington are now connected to each other as sympathetic links, much like the connection between the four artifacts sought in the *Dawn of the Artifacts* adventures. They also now share mild telepathic links that unconsciously allow them to share memories and thoughts, often through their dreams. This is particularly true with regards to Harlequin, who now possesses information Aina had kept from him, but also has been the subject of more of these visions and insights than anyone else present at the Watergate Incident. He is recognizing information and patterns that he had no reason to be aware of before that night.

Harlequin can be a wild card in any game. He is immensely powerful, but unlike many other powers in the Sixth World, he keeps a broad range of contacts and takes a hands-on approach to his affairs. While someone like Lofwyr or Richard Villiers would almost never condescend to directly meet with shadowrunners, let alone act as Mr. Johnson, Harlequin is more than willing to play any role he wants in his ongoing activities, if only because it keeps him entertained.

Harlequin's motives are unpredictable—occasionally he himself is not entirely sure why he is doing the things he does. This means that he could appear on any side of a conflict with the runners, either helping or hindering them. He should not,

GAME INFORMATION

however, become involved in a pitched battle with them, both because he would be a fearsome opponent, but also because fighting with runners really isn't his style. While his activities are varied, he is rather focused on the Watergate Incident and the fallout, especially in regards to what happened to Aina. He is beginning to suspect that she may be something beside dead, but he is not yet clear on what that might be. He very much wants to know, though.

Harlequin (male elf)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4(9)	7(10)	6(9)	4(9)	8(12)	7(10)	5(9)	6(9)	30	7	6	13	1

Condition Monitor Boxes: 10/11

Armor (B/I): 14/12

Active Skills: Astral Combat 6, Arcana (Ally Spirit Formula) 6 (+2), Archery 5, Artisan (Steel Guitar) 6 (+2), Assensing (Astral Signatures) 6 (+2), Blades (Swords) 7 (+2), Climbing 3, Conjuring skill group 6, Counterspelling (Combat Spells) 6 (+2), Dodge (Ranged) 6 (+2), Electronics skill group 3, Enchanting 6, Escape Artist 5, First Aid 5, Forgery 5, Gymnastics (Tumbling) 6 (+2), Influence skill group 6, Instruction (Magical) 5 (+2), Intimidation (Mental) 6 (+2), Longarms 3, Medicine 5, Outdoors skill group 4, Perception (Scent) 6 (+2), Pilot Aircraft 4, Pilot Groundcraft 4, Pilot Watercraft 4, Pistols 3, Ritual Spellcasting 6, Running 6, Stealth skill group 6, Spellcasting (Illusion Spells) 6 (+2), Swimming 3, Throwing Weapons 5, Unarmed Combat 6.

Knowledge Skills (Not An Exhaustive List): Beer 4, Biology 4, Bluegrass Music 4, Botany 4, Carpentry 1, Classical Art 4, Classical Music 4, Classic Rock 6, Chess 6, Combat Biking 4, Comic Books 6, Conspiracy Theories 6, Contemporary Literature 4, Cooking 1, Cults 4, Fast Food 4, Flatvid Movies 6, Gangster Rap 4, Gardening 1, History 6, Insect Spirits 6, Late 20th Century Video Games 4, Linguistics 4, Literature 4, Magic Theory 6, Matrix Games 4, Matrix Chatrooms 4, Painting 4, Parazoology 4, Philosophy 4, Poetry 6, Punk Rock 4, Security Design (Magical) 4 (+2), Spells 6, Spirits 6, Theology 4, Tir Politics 4, Toxic Hazards 6, Trash Trid Shows 4, Urban Brawl 4, Wines 4.

Languages: Cantonese 6, English 6, French 6, German 6, Italian 6, Japanese 6, Latin 6, Mandarin 6, Or'zet 6, Russian 6, Spanish 6, Sperethiel N

Qualities: Aptitude (Blades), Bad Luck, Exceptional Attribute (Intuition), Geas (Incantation), Immunity (Age, Disease, Pathogens, Toxins), Lucky, Magician, Murky Link, Photographic Memory, Quick Healer.

Initiate Grade: 24+

Metamagics: Absorption, ally conjuration, anchoring, centering, cleansing, divining, extended masking, filtering, flexible signature, flux, geomancy, great ritual, invoking, masking, psychometry, quickening, reflecting, sensing, shielding, sympathetic linking

Spells: Harlequin has any spell available to him when needed.

Preferred Spells: Analyze Magic, Area Thought Recognition, Armor, Astral Armor, Awaken, Borrow Sense, Catalog, Catfall, Chaotic World, Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Combat Sense, Control Emotions, Deflection, Demolish Gun, Demolish Pants, Detect Dragons (Extended), Detect Magic, Heal, Hot Potato, Improved Invisibility, Increase Agility, Increase Body, Increase



Charisma, Increase Intuition, Increase Logic, Increase Strength, Increase Reaction, Increase Willpower, Increase Reflexes, Influence, Levitate, Magic Fingers, Mana Barrier, Manabolt, Mind Link, Mob Control, Mob Mood, Net, Orgy, Petrify, Physical Barrier, Physical Double Image, Physical Mask, Poltergeist, Punch, Shape Air, Shape Earth, Shape Fire, Shape Water, Shapechange, Shattershield, Slay Dragon, Stabilize, Stench, Stunball, Swarm, Trid Phantasm, Turn to Goo, Translate Bound Spirits: Great form spirit of air (Force 20, 6 services, invoked with 14 successes; all great form advantages plus Body 19, Agility 24, Reaction 25, Strength 18, Charisma 21, Intuition 21, Logic 21, Willpower 22 when materialized)

Gear: Ares Predator I (no ammo), certified credstick (1,000,000¥ balance), clown makeup, nanopaste disguise (large), leather jacket, random assorted buttons/pins (12+2d6 of them) apparently grabbed from the bargain bin (each button is a Force 1d6 + 4 sustaining focus), Sony Emperor w/ Redcap Nix OS [Response 2, Signal 3, Firewall 1, System 2]

Weapons:

Rapier [Blade, Reach 1, DV 7P, AP -1, Force 16 weapon focus w/ personalized grip]

Notes: Harlequin's magical tradition superficially resembles that of a hermetic mage and shares the same spirits and associations, although in truth it is far older, more personal, and more esoteric. An argument could be made that he is the only living practitioner of his tradition. In any case, he resists drain with Intuition + Willpower. The initiate grade and Magic attribute given here do not necessarily represent the upper limits of Harlequin's magical capacity, merely the upper limits of what the Sixth World is likely to require of him. Harlequin has the following nine spells sustained on his person at all times using some of his buttons/pins: Increase Body (Force 6, 5 hits), Increase Agility (Force 7, 3 hits), Increase Reaction (Force 6, 3 hits), Increase Strength (Force 5, 5 hits), Increase Charisma (Force 10, 4 hits), Increase Intuition (Force 7, 3 Hits), Increase Logic (Force 6, 4 hits), Increase Willpower (Force 6, 3 hits), Increase Reflexes (Force 10, 4 hits). He has the following spells quickened: Armor (Force 20, 12 hits), Combat Sense (Force 20, 16 hits). Harlequin has the following spells anchored: Heal (Force 30 with 12 hits, triggered by extensive physical damage on self), Oxygenate (Force 30 with 12 hits, triggered by the absence of breathable air), Improved Invisibility (Force 20 with 10 hits, triggered by physical damage on self). Finally, Harlequin has at least 250 unspent karma free to use for anything he may need it for.

Drake Hunt

While drakes, even true drakes (see below) possess free will, this does not mean that the great dragons of the Sixth World gladly sit by and watch any action that does not benefit their interests. Drakes are seen as being more intrinsically linked to the greats than any other creatures, so the dragons feel quite justified in keeping an eye on their activities and lashing out with a controlling claw when necessary. While the Draco Foundation continues to maintain a sanctuary for drakes, the great dragons and even some adults have sought to manipulate, threaten, or otherwise coerce those drakes and others they may encounter into becoming lifelong servants.

True Drake (125-150 BP)

Unlike the drake metahuman character in *Runner's Companion*, true drakes are dracoforms created by great dragons through a difficult and complicated magical ritual that imbues them with abilities, knowledge, skills, and a metahuman form. Only a very few have been created in the Sixth World, though stories persist among the dragons that one or more of the greats kept their true drake servant(s) alive in hibernation during the magical down cycle, and these drake(s) still serves their master(s). Yet other rumors insist that one or more exercised their free will and have ventured off on their own.

True drakes possess all of the modifiers from Drake Quality (p. 65, *Runner's Companion*) with the following changes: True drakes may add the following Powers (by either extending their list of Powers or replacing existing Powers; for each added power, add 5 BP to the base 125 BP cost): Astral Armor 6, Dragonspeech, Hardened Armor 6, Magical Guard, and Regeneration. True drakes begin with Essence 8, and have a maximum Edge Attribute of 8 regardless of their metahuman form. True drakes cannot accept any augmentations that cost Essence, nor can they be infected by any strain of HMMHV. True drakes can never possess the Resonance Attribute.

True Drakes must take the Magician, Mystic Adept, or Adept Quality.

This Quality is incompatible with Technomancer Qualities, Infected Qualities, Changeling or Metagenetic Qualities, Positive Augmentation Qualities (p. 20, *Augmentation*), Lucky, Latent Dracomorphosis, Latent Awakening, or Latent Technomancer.

Operation: GOLDEN NAVIGATOR

GOLDEN NAVIGATOR is one of the most restricted special-access programs in the UCAS military. It is the program the UCAS Army Thaumaturgical Corps initiated to study the participants of the Watergate Incident after they were rescued from the rubble of the Watergate Rift Bunker. While Lugh Surehand and Jonathon Reed escaped, the Army recovered seven elves, one human, and Hestaby and Aden in their metahuman forms alive but unconscious from the bunker debris. The Army collected biological samples and conducted interrogations and magical analysis of the participants before it became clear that it was not possible to secretly detain two great dragons and several powerful metahuman magicians indefinitely. They also realized that it would not be possible to keep either Saeder-Krupp or Aztechnology from attempting to secure the Army's detainees without causing a much greater conflict.

The compromise President Colloton made with the Corporate Court through Justice Marushige of Renraku and Jean-Claude Priault of Saeder-Krupp was that copies of the gathered data would be sequestered in isolated optical media aboard Zurich-Orbital for a period of seven years, after which time the Court will determine the dispensation of the information. The UCAS, however, has the data at the current time. As Puck mentioned, those secrets were compromised from the very beginning when a White House spy delivered the information to Ghostwalker. There is, however, another spy unknown to anyone (even their handler does not know the spy's identity) cleared to access GOLDEN NAVIGATOR that provided the data to their handler in a dead drop.



Patriot Games

President Colloton and Secretary Despain are moving the military to prepare for a possible engagement with Ghostwalker in Denver, even if that means driving the 1st Armored Division through the Sioux Nation to enter the Front Range Free Zone. This is not exactly a secret movement; they're not waving flags or issuing press releases, but they know both the Sioux and Ghostwalker will notice the movements before long and will be pushed to react in some way. Causing that reaction and then building a strategy based on it is the major part of Colloton's plan. She is not eager for this to end in direct military engagement, but she won't back down from that option if pushed there.

This provides significant espionage activities, as parties on all sides try to get information on troop position and composition, and they also try to use the shadows to feel out the parties involved and learn just what their bargaining position may be. Note that many of the special operations troops are busy either with military maneuvers or with keeping an eye on each other, meaning resources are stretched. Important tasks still need to be performed, such as preparation of orbital assets and other jobs to prepare for fighting. Teams that aren't known for their outer space prowess, including those that are more like SWAT teams than anything else, are finding their way into space and into other operations outside the normal scope of their duties. Runners with experience in these areas, including those who have been into space, may draw interest from the UCAS to perform some of these jobs, as they might be more suited to the operations that the people currently carrying them out.

The White House Spy

The White House spy is in a precarious position, as the Shades tend to be quite good at their job. This presents opportunities for runners. The spy is not going to want to call on his handler too much for help, as that would reveal too much about who is behind his operation. Deniable assets are the way to go. Any mission he puts them on is likely to be non-violent, as killing one of the Shades would draw even more heat to him. Instead, the spy needs help creating a false trail, either framing someone else in the White House as the spy or helping the spy fake his own death (a less preferable solution, as the spy could not continue his activities after that).

The spy is Timothy Colloton's chief of staff, a man currently going by the name of Hector Trina. While President Colloton trusts only her husband with certain critical information, Timothy has not been as circumspect, which means Trina has been getting a wealth of actionable intelligence.

Shade (Soldier; Professional Rating 4)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
7	6	8	6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	12	2

Astral Initiative/IP: 8/3

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 12/10

Armor (B/I): 8/6

Active Skills: Assensing 4, Astral Combat 4, Automatics 3, Dodge 4, Perception 4, Pistols 3, Shadowing 3, Tracking 3, Unarmed Combat 4

Powers: Astral Form, Aura Masking, Compulsion, Deathly Aura, Energy Drain (Karma, Touch range, Physical damage), Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Paralyzing Touch, Possession (Dead or Abandoned Vessels), Sapience, Search, Silence

Gear: Armor jacket, earbuds [Rating 2, w/ audio enhancement 2, select sound filter 2], glasses [Rating 3, w/ low-light vision, smartlink, vision enhancement 3], jammer (area, Rating 4), 5 x plasteel restraints

Weapons:

Ares Predator IV [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -5, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartlink, APDS ammo]

Ingram Smartgun X [SMG, DV 5P, AP —, BF/FA, RC 2(3), 32 (c), w/ detachable folding stock, gas-vent 2, smartlink, sound suppressor]

Shade (Leader; Professional Rating 5)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
8	7	8	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	13	2

Astral Initiative/IP: 10/3

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 12/11

Armor (B/I): 10/5

Active Skills: Assensing 5, Astral Combat 5, Automatics 4, Dodge 5, Leadership 3, Perception 5, Pistols 5, Shadowing 3, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 5

Powers: Astral Form, Aura Masking, Compulsion, Deathly Aura, Energy Drain (Karma, Touch range, Physical damage), Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Paralyzing Touch, Possession (Dead or Abandoned Vessels), Regeneration, Sapience, Search, Silence

Gear: Earbuds [Rating 2, w/ audio enhancement 3, select sound filter 3], form-fitting body armor (half-body suit), glasses [Rating 3, w/ low-light vision, smartlink, vision enhancement 3], jammer (area, Rating 4), lined coat, 5 x plasteel restraints

Weapons:

Ares Predator IV [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -5, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartlink, APDS ammo]

Ingram Smartgun X [SMG, DV 5P, AP —, BF/FA, RC 2(3), 32 (c), w/ detachable folding stock, gas-vent 2, smartlink, sound suppressor]

Hector Trina (human male)

Trina has lived several lives with several identities, somehow ascending to positions that it takes most individuals lifetimes to attain. He does this with the help of a tremendous support network, one that is able to produce credentials, references, and other necessary paperwork for him on alarmingly short notice. He is very capable, working long hours while remaining perpetually good-natured and even-keeled. He knows how to anticipate what Timothy Colloton wants, and as a result Colloton has come to rely more and more on him.

Trina has a long and distinguished biography, including a Princeton education, leadership of a Boston-area public policy think tank, and involvement in several successful political campaigns. In interviews, Colloton has claimed to have known Trina for nearly twenty years, though if he is closely questioned, his memories of anything having to do with Trina from more

than three or four years ago are rather hazy. In fact, if runners dig into Trina's résumé, they'll find almost no one who has any solid memories of dealing with Trina more than a few years ago (the ones they do find with a longer memory are in fact members of Trina's organization posing as old friends).

B **A** **R** **S** **C** **I** **L** **W** **Edg** **Ess** **M** **Init** **IP**
 3 4 5 3 6 5 5 5 5 6 9 (4/5) 10 1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/11

Armor (B/I): 5/3

Active Skills: Computer 3, Con 6, Counterspelling 4, Etiquette (Government) 5 (+2), Intimidation (Verbal) 3 (+2), Leadership 4, Negotiation 5, Pistols (Tasers) 5 (+2), Ritual Spellcasting 3, Spellcasting 5, Stealth skill group 5

Knowledge Skills: Architecture 2, DeeCee Geography 3, UCAS Government Personnel 4, UCAS Government Structure 4, UCAS History 3

Language skills: English N, French 2, Spanish 3, Sperethiel 1

Qualities: Mystic Adept

Initiate Grade: 3

Metamagics: Centering, Masking, Quickening

Spells: Alter Memory, Analyze Truth, Confusion, Control Actions, Control Emotions, Control Thoughts, Increase Charisma, Influence, Mindlink, Stealth, Stunbolt

Adept Powers: Improved Reflexes 1 (1.5), Kinesics 4 (2.0), Voice Control (0.5)

Gear: Actioneer business clothing, glasses [Rating 2, w/ thermographic vision, vision enhancement 3], 3 fake SINs (Rating 5), 3 fake weapons licenses (Rating 5), flag lapel pin (Power Focus, Rating 3), jammer (area, Rating 4), 2 x doses laés, nanopaste disguise (3 uses, Rating 4), 2 x doses Neuro-Stun

Weapons:

Defiance Protector [Taser, 6S(e), AP -half, SA, —, 3 (m), w/ gecko grip, laser sight]

Thais

Aina Dupree has a son named Thais. Thais' father is not anything close to a conventional human, and Thais is often described as half-human, half-naga (he has a human head, arms, and torso sitting on a long, thick snake tail). He has broad experience as an arcanoarcheologist, and that, along with his family relationship, has helped him get a position on the Draco Foundation's Board of Visitors. His position is not publicized at all, and he does not use his real name in any official materials. He is listed as "Robert Brown," a name deliberately chosen to give no clues whatsoever to his real identity. No other board members have any recollection of meeting Brown, though they have received correspondence from him. Some of them are beginning to be curious about this mysterious individual and might fund efforts to track him down, though such an effort would of course lead runners into a hornet's nest of power and intrigue.

Artifacts on the Loose

As the chapter mentions, several items that had been in the Draco Foundation's possession have been stolen, which means there's always a chance they will pop up in the shadows.

The Arrow of Red Dragon Slaying: As its name suggests, this is an arrow meant for killing dragons. Any dragon would be interested in getting their claws on this thing, though interest is someone higher in the younger dragons, as they are the ones more threatened by its power (though some dragons suspect there is more to this arrow than its currently known attributes). Should the runners be fortunate enough to use the arrow, it should function like a normal arrow in almost every circumstance, and it can be used by anyone. If it hits a dragon, treat it as if it were coated with a poison with the following statistics: Vector: Contact, Injection; Speed: Immediate; Penetration: -3; Power: 10; Effect: Damage.

First Key of Power: This item is used in ritual spellcasting; when it is present, it acts like an additional member of the team casting the ritual, with Ritual Spellcasting 3 and Magic 3. It acts as if it knows the same spells as the group leader, and it must be bound to the group leader in order to function; it requires 12 Karma for bonding.

The Spirit Flute: The text describes the ability many mages hope the Spirit Flute has, which is the ability to reach out to any plane and summon a spirit from it. As of yet, though, no one has been able to make it actually perform that function—at least, not anyone in this age.

Wand of Ages: While many people are anxiously seeking this item, upon inspection (both visual and astral) the item appears to be nothing more than a slightly crooked stick. For the time being, the reason this item is so sought after is a mystery.

Spinning Webs

The Eastern dragons, Lung and Ryumyo, have been something of a mystery in the brewing dragon conflict. Lung ostensibly seems to be on the traditionalists' side with Lofwyr, but relations between the two are not exactly close. Ryumyo, of course, is naturally inclined to do the opposite of what Lung is doing. There's also the matter of the new dragon, Fucanglong, who is rumored to have appeared in Shaanxi. Fucanglong is not a great, and his exact power is unknown, but a dragon is a dragon, which means he has power.

Johnny Spinrad has other reasons to be in Asia, but working with these dragons is high on his list. He wants to build his allies to either A) Gain Ryumyo as an ally; B) Increase the division between Lung and Lofwyr; C) Learn how to exploit Fucanglong to his advantage; or D) All three.

The Furies

The Furies is a group of three female shadowrunners, especially skilled in infiltration and deception, though they are also capable of bringing the hurt to people when they need to.

Alecto (female elf)

B **A** **R** **S** **C** **I** **L** **W** **Edg** **Ess** **Init** **IP**
 2 6 (8) 5 (7) 3 6 5 4 4 5 4.2 10 (12) 1 (2)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 9/10

Armor (B/I): 6/4

Active Skills: Blades 4, Con 5, Dodge 4, Disguise 5, Escape Artist 4, Etiquette 4, First Aid 3, Forgery 4, Gymnastics 4, Infiltration 6, Intimidation (Verbal) 2 (+2), Palming 3, Perception 5, Pilot



Aircraft 4, Pilot Ground Craft 4, Pistols 5, Running 3, Shadowing 5, Tracking 4

Knowledge Skills: Greek Mythology 3, Personal Aircraft 3

Qualities: Catlike, First Impression

Augmentations: Cyberears [Rating 3, w/ audio enhancement 3, balance augments, ear recording unit, select sound filter 3, sound link, spatial recognizer], cybereyes [Rating 3, w/ eye recording unit, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, vision enhancement 3, vision magnification], muscle toner 2, synaptic booster 2

Gear: 3x Fake SINS (Rating 5), 3 x fake licenses (Rating 5), jammer (directional, Rating 5), lined coat, medkit (Rating 5), micro-transceiver, nanopaste disguise (4 uses, Rating 5), subvocal microphone

Weapons:

- Hammerli 620S [Light Pistol, DV 4P, AP —, SA, RC 1, 6 (c), w/ gas-vent 1, smartlink]
- SA Puzzler [Light Pistol, DV 4P, AP -4, SA, RC —, 12 (c), w/ APDS ammo]
- Vibro knife [Blade, DV 4P, AP -2]

Megaera (female human)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
2	4	5	3	4	5	6	4	4	2.25	10	1

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 9/10

Armor (B/I): 6/4

Active Skills: Automatics 3, Automotive Mechanic 3, Computer 4, Cybercombat 5, Data Search 4, Electronic Warfare 5, Gunnery 4, Hacking 6, Hardware 4, Perception 3, Pilot Aircraft 4, Pilot Ground Craft 6, Pilot Watercraft 4, Pistols 4, Software 4

Knowledge Skills: Matrix Security Procedures 4, Matrix Systems Design 4, Matrix Urban Legends 4

Qualities: Codeslinger (Hacking on the Fly), Speed Reading

Augmentations: Attention coprocessor 2, commlink (implanted, Device Rating 5), control rig, cybereyes [Rating 4, w/ eye recording unit, image link, ocular drone, smartlink, thermographic vision, vision enhancement 3], datajack, encephalon 2, math SPU, sim module

Programs: Armor 4, Attack 5, Browse 5, Decrypt 5, Edit 4, ECCM 5, Encrypt 5, Exploit 5, Scan 4, Spoof 5, Stealth 4, Track 5

Gear: Armor vest, fake SIN (Rating 3), jammer (directional, Rating 4), 20 x stealth RFID tags, micro-transceiver, Shiawase Kanmushi [w/ Clearsight 3], MCT Fly-Spy, MCT-Nissan Roto-Drone [w/ Targeting 3, AK-97 Carbine], Renraku Stormcloud, subvocal microphone

Weapons:

- Ares Crusader [Machine Pistol, DV 4P, AP —, SA/BF, RC 2, 40 (c), w/ gas-vent 2]
- Fichetti Security 600 [Light Pistol, DV 4P, AP —, SA, RC (1), 30 (c), w/ detachable folding stock, laser sight]

Tisiphone (female dwarf)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
5	5	4(7)	6(9)	3	4	3	5	5	0.3	8(11)	1(4)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 11/11

Armor (B/I): 11/6

Active Skills: Blades 5, Clubs 4, Dodge 4, Heavy Weapons 5, Intimidation 4, Perception 4, Pistols 4, Running 4, Survival 3, Throwing Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 5

Knowledge Skills: Martial Arts Techniques 3

Qualities: Guts, Martial Arts (Arnis de Mano, 10 BP; advantages: +1 on Called Shots to disarm, +1 DV on Blades attacks), Toughness

Maneuvers: Full Offense, Riposte

Augmentations: Cybereyes [Rating 3, w/ eye recording unit, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, vision enhancement 3], muscle augmentation 3, wired reflexes 3

Gear: Armor jacket, form-fitting body armor (shirt)

Weapons:

- Cougar Fineblade (long blade) [Blade, Reach —, DV 5P (7P), AP -1]
- Panther XXL [Assault Cannon, DV 10P, AP -5, SS, RC (1), 15 (c), w/ smartlink]
- Rattan stick [Club, Reach 1, DV 3P (5P), AP +2]
- Remington Roomsweeper [DV 6P, AP -1, SA, RC —, 8 (m), w/ explosive ammo]

THE TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT

Fallen Seraphim

The Seraphim are skilled and experienced, making them difficult opponents. They tend to operate in groups of three to five individuals. They have a strong anti-Ares agenda, and are hoping to keep the megacorp reeling after the Excalibur disaster. They are remorseless and pitiless

Seraphim (human, Professional Rating 4)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
5	6(8)	5(7)	5(8)	4(6)	5	4	5	5	2.7	10(12)	1(3)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 11/11

Armor (B/I): 10/6

Active Skills: Automatics 5, Dodge 3, Etiquette (Corporate) 4 (+2), Intimidation 5, Longarms 4, Perception (Visual) 5 (+2), Pilot Ground Craft 4, Pistols 5, Shadowing 6, Tracking 5

Knowledge Skills: Ares Corporate Structure 4, Ares Personnel 4, Corporate Politics 4

Qualities: Guts, Will to Live 2

Augmentations: Aluminum bone lacing, cybereyes [Rating 3, w/ eye recording unit, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, vision enhancement 3], muscle augmentation 3, muscle toner 2, synaptic booster 2, tailored pheromones 2

Gear: Armor vest, commlink (Device Rating 4), form-fitting body armor (half-body suit), jammer (area, Rating 4)

Weapons:

- Ares Predator IV [Heavy Pistol, DV 6P, AP -2, SA, RC —, 15 (c), w/ smartlink, EX-explosive ammo]
- Franchi SPAS-22 [Shotgun, DV 7P, AP -1, SA/BF, RC (1), 10 (m), w/ folding stock with shock pad, smartlink]
- Steyr TMP [Machine Pistol, DV 4P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC —, 30 (c), w/ smartlink]

Keeping Up Your Rep

Gamemasters can reflect the paranoia hitting the streets, especially among corporate types, by having fixers and Mr. Johnsons pay extra-close attention to the team's reputation. Notoriety and street cred should be applied to any tests where runners are trying to convince a fixer or Mr. Johnson that they should be hired (see p. 265, *SR4A*). Additionally, if runners have a combined Street Cred minus Notoriety that is below 2, consider having Mr. Johnson ask them to take less pay for any runs related to the plot lines in this book (alternately, they could have them perform side runs as a test before giving them a larger task).

Miles Lanier

Normally a dour man, Miles Lanier has been changed by his recent time in exile. Oddly enough, his time on the run, cut off from his network of support, seems to have made him more jovial and light-hearted. When meeting with players, he is friendly and chatty, perfectly willing to exchange jokes and small talk with them. There should come a moment in any conversation, though, where his personality changes, and he becomes terse, sullen, and angry. His anger should be directed at himself more than anything else, as if he is upset at the personality traits he has been displaying and angry that he cannot control himself better. This should be brief, and then he returns to being chatty. Ideally, runners will be left with the impression that there is more than one personality residing in his brain.

Lanier demonstrates a particular interest in Celedyr's activities in Albuquerque. He would also be interested in information about the persona of Corporate Court Chief Justice Hino that was created by a faction with Evo (see the last four chapters of *Corporate Intrigue*), if runners have any information of interest in that to pass on.

Male human

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
5(9)	5(9)	5(8)	5(9)	3	6	7	6	7	2	11(14)	1(4)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 11 (13)/11

Armor (B/I): 14/10

Skills: Architecture 3, Armorer 4, Athletics skill group 4 (7), Automatics (Assault Rifles) 3 (+2), Blades (Knives) 3 (+2), Clubs (Batons) 3 (+2), Cracking Skill group 5, Demolitions 4, Dodge (Ranged) 4 (+2), Electronics skill group 5, Escape Artist 3, First Aid (Combat Wounds) 4 (+2), Gunnery 3, Heavy Weapons 3, Influence skill group 3, Intimidation 6, Locksmith 3, Longarms (Sniper Rifles) 7 (+2), Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 6 (9), Pilot Aircraft 3, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Pistols (Semi-Automatics) 6 (+2), Stealth skill group 6, Throwing Weapons 3, Unarmed Combat (Boxing) 5 (+2)

Knowledge Skills: Baseball 5, Business 3, Economics 3, Engineering 3, Law 3, Magic Theory 6, Matrix Theory 6, Military Tactics 6, NeoNET 6, Parazoology 4, Poison Antidotes 3, Renraku 3, Security Design 6, Security Procedures 6, Security Theory 6
Languages: English N, Japanese 6

Qualities: Aptitude (Longarms), Guts, Exceptional Attribute (Logic), Magic Resistance (Rating 2), Martial Arts (Boxing, +2 DV on Unarmed Combat attacks), Toughness, Will to Live (Rating 2).

Augmentations: (all deltaware) Bone density augmentation 4, damage compensators 6, datajack, genewipe, low-light vision retinal modification, muscle replacement 4, orthoskin 2, platelet factories, smartlink retinal modification, synaptic booster 3, syn-thacardium 3, toxin extractor 6

Gear: Area jammer (Rating 10), B&E bag [with autopicker (Rating 6), chisel, electronics toolkit, grapple gun (with 100m stealth rope and catalyst stick), maglock passkey (Rating 6), maglock sequencer, miniwelder, thermite burning bar, and wire clippers], contacts [Rating 3, w/ flare compensation, image link, and vision enhancement 3], commlink (Device Rating 6, w/ biometric reader, satellite link, skinlink, and subdermal microphone), directional jammer (Rating 10), FFBA full suit, gas mask, goggles [Rating 6, w/ flare compensation, thermographic vision, ultrasound, vision enhancement 3, and vision magnification], handheld sensor [Signal 3, w/ Cyberware Scanner (Rating 6), MAD scanner (Rating 6), and olfactory sensor (Rating 6)], medkit (Rating 6), microphone [Rating 6, w/ audio enhancement (Rating 3), select sound filter 2, and spatial recognizer], micro-transceiver (Rating 6), plasteel restraints, rappelling gloves, Red Sox 1916 World Series ring, slap patches [five Stimulant Patches (Rating 6), five Tranq Patches (Rating 10), one Trauma Patch], SecureTech PPP system (forearm guards, leg and arm casings, shin guards, and vitals protector), 20 security tags, 20 stealth tags, survival kit, Synergist Business Line longcoat (with chemical protection (Rating 6), fire resistance, insulation, nonconductivity, and thermal damping)

Programs: Analyze 9, Browse 9, Command 9, Edit 9, Encrypt 9, Scan 9, Biofeedback Filter 9, Decrypt 9, ECCM 9, Sniffer 9, Offensive Agent [Rating 9, with Armor 9, Attack 9, Exploit 9, Decrypt 9, Spoof 9, Stealth 9], IC Agent [Rating 9, with Armor 9, Attack 9, Blackout 9, Medic 9, Stealth 9, Track 9]

Maneuvers: Finishing Move, Set Up

Weapons:

Punch [Reach —, DV 10P, AP —]

Ares Predator IV [Heavy Pistol, DV 5P, AP -5, SA, RC 1, 19(c), w/ advanced safety (electro shocker), extended clip, melee hardening, personalized grip, silencer, skinlink, smartgun, concealable holster, and APDS ammo]

Ares Desert Strike [Sniper Rifle, DV 8P, AP -9, SA, RC 1(2), 14(c) w/ easy breakdown, electronic firing, imaging scope, improved range finder, silencer, skinlink, shock pad, ext. smartgun, and anti-tank rounds]

HK G12A4m [Assault Rifle, DV 8P, AP -2, SA/BF/FA, RC 2(3), 32(c), w/ gas vent 2, electronic firing, high power chambering, skinlink, sound suppressor, ext. smartgun, underbarrel shotgun and high power rounds]

Underbarrel Shotgun [Shotgun, DV 9P(f), AP +5, SA, RC (1), 5(m), flechette ammo]

Counterspellers (Professional Rating 3)

There is an increased demand in various security circles for counterspelling specialists; stats for a sample specialist are below.

Elf

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
2	3	5	3	4	4	3	4	2	6	6	9	1



Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/11

Armor (B/I): 6/4

Active Skills: Assensing 5, Conjuring skill group 4, Counterspelling 7, Dodge 3, Perception 4, Pistols (Tasers) 2 (+2), Running 2, Spellcasting 4

Qualities: Aptitude (Counterspelling), Focused Concentration, Magician

Spells: Clairvoyance, Control Emotions, Detect Magic (Extended), Heal, Improved Invisibility, Mana Barrier, Mana Bind, Mass Confusion, Mindlink, Powerball, Stunball

Gear: Lined coat, mage sight goggles

Weapons:

Defiance EX Shocker [Taser, DV 8S(e), AP -half, SS, RC —, 4 (m)]

NESTS, CAVES, AND HOARDS

ALBUQUERQUE

There are groups in the Sixth World very interested in understanding consciousness, especially in how it might be transferred to different states. Some interest has been shown in the relationship between spirits and human consciousness, but Celedyr is only interested in this area if it can provide information about the nature of metahuman consciousness and how it transfers between different locations. His larger interest is technological, looking at ways consciousness can move between biological and technological containers. The research has shown some promising leads, but there are also issues that will be developed more in future *Shadowrun* books. For the time being, keep the focus on Celedyr's research into consciousness, and perhaps provide hints of some disturbed people who have been experimental subjects (see description of Miles Lanier, p. 141).

HENEQUEN

Henequen stands at a crossroads—side with the pro-metahuman faction of the dragons and be on the same side as Aztechnology, or turn on both the Big A and metahumanity? Sinopa, director of the Office of Military Intelligence, is positioned to play an important role in where Henequen ends up, and there is a lot of shadow activity connected to this. Sinopa wants Henequen to be powerful—he's a better ally if he's got some heft—without eclipsing him. She's very interested in keeping tabs on Henequen, especially in regards to his relationship with Aztechnology, Aztlan, and the other dragons, which means there is a good quantity of espionage runs out there, provided you're willing to attempt to keep tabs on a dragon. There are also runs based on the information Henequen feeds Sinopa—Sinopa doesn't want to just sit on anything, since she doesn't want the dragon to have anything to hold over her head, so she makes sure every bit of info is quickly sent out to people who can act on it. That often outstrips the resources she has immediately available, meaning she is forced to call on outside assets.

While Sinopa has no great affection for Aztechnology, she's willing to temporarily partner with them if it hurts Henequen. She doesn't plan on making partnerships long-term, though. Ideally, she'd assign some deniable assets to work with the Azzies in damaging Henequen, then, once the dragon's profile has receded,

take evidence from those assets and expose the criminal activities Aztechnology has been involved in, which she hopes would result in sanctions against the megacorporation. If she can do damage to both of these enemies, she would be a very happy operative.

Sinopa (human female)

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Edg	Ess	M	Init	IP
3	5	5(6)	3	7	5	4	6	4	X	9	10(11)	1(2)

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 10/11

Armor (B/I): 10/7

Active Skills: Archery 5, Armorer 4, Automatics 4, Blades 5 (7), Computer 4, Con 5, Data Search 4, Etiquette (Government) 4 (+2), First Aid 4, Forgery 4, Infiltration 3, Negotiation 5, Palming 3, Perception 5, Pistols 6, Shadowing (Tailing) 5 (+2), Tracking 7

Knowledge Skills: Espionage Techniques 5, Professional Lacrosse Teams 4, Sioux Culture 4, Surveillance Technology 5

Language skills: English 5, Lakota N, Spanish 5

Qualities: Aptitude (Tracking), Exceptional Attribute (Charisma), Perceptive (5 BP)

Initiate Grade: 3

Metamagics: Adept centering, attunement (vibro knife), somatic control

Adept Powers: Analytics 3 (0.75), Commanding Voice (0.25), Cool Resolve 2 (0.5), Enhanced Perception 2 (0.5) Improved Ability (Blades) 2 (1.0) Improved Reflexes 1 (1.5), Kinesics 4 (1.0), Missile Parry 2 (0.5), Mystic Armor 3 (1.5), Spell Resistance 2 (1.0) Voice Control (0.5)

Gear: Commlink (Device Rating 5), fake SIN (Rating 6), form-fitting body armor (half-body suit), jammer (area, Rating 6), Vashon Island Aces High Jacket, white noise generator (Rating 6)

Weapons:

Colt Government 2066 [DV 5P, AP -1, SA, RC 1, 14 (c), w/ laser sight]

Vibro knife [Blade, Reach —, DV 4P, AP -2]

KALANYR

In the dragon conflict, the side Kalanyr is most interested in is his own. To him, the conflict only really has meaning insofar as it helps him in his agenda. Though they once fought side-by-side, he is not happy that Urubia has moved into what he considers his territory. It is especially galling that Urubia is working to build allies in poorer areas and among the criminal element, as that overlaps with some of Kalanyr's own tactics. Kalanyr will play nice with whatever side he needs to (though by nature his inclination is pro-dragon) if it will help him gain ground in Seattle.

His research into radiation started out focused on helping Kaltenstein, his father, get into the SOX, but it has changed over time into his own way of developing a domain free from anyone else's influence. This means shadowruns from Kaltenstein to get his claws on the radiation research that he initially funded. Possibly messy runs if he wants to make a statement to his ungrateful son.

Most of Kalanyr's followers, the Isotopes, are toxic shamans worshipping Radiation. They are cleansed by Kalanyr occasionally, and they also cleanse themselves and each other quite frequently. If they did not they would be dead. The area in which they live would kill most people within a day.

Kalanyr has a deep natural instinct to hunt, and he will stalk prey in the Barrens when he feels the desire. Sometimes he eats them, sometimes he tells them how close they came to being eaten, and sometimes he does nothing but push them over after sneaking up on them.

In his natural draconic form, Kalanyr is a bit of a mess. A variation of SURGE hit him with adaptive coloration that he has played off by using a physical mask spell for slow changes (poor Serrin didn't penetrate his masking). His natural draconic skin is now a sickly yellow-brown and glows slightly from the radiation he has been bathed in. The other details of his description in the chapter are accurate. His preferred metahuman form (gained via spellcasting not a draconic power) is a massive, smooth-skinned troll with black hair and glowing yellow eyes.

Adult western dragon

B A R S C I L W Edg Ess M Init IP
16 5 9 32 10 9 8 9 6 8 14 18 2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 16/13

Armor (B/I): 8/8

Active Skills: Arcana 8, Assensing 9, Blades (Swords) 6 (+2), Computer 3, Conjuring skill group 6, Counterspelling 8, Data Search 4, Etiquette (Street) 4 (+2), Exotic Ranged Weapon 6, Flight 5, Intimidation 8, Negotiation (Bargaining) 8 (10), Perception 8, Pilot Ground Craft (Bike) 4 (+2), Pistols (Revolvers) 1 (+2), Ritual Spellcasting 8, Spellcasting (Combat Spells) 10 (+2), Stealth skill group 10, Swimming 4, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 8

Knowledge Skills: Architecture 5, Biology (Physiology) 3 (+2), Business (Finance) 5 (+2), Economics 4, Environmentalism (Radiation Disasters) 3 (+2), History (Pacific Northwest) 2 (+2), Nightclubs (Seattle) 4 (+2), Physics (Nuclear) 3 (+2), Redmond Geography (Border Areas) 5 (+2), Seattle Street Gangs (Redmond) 4 (+2), Seattle Organized Crime (Smugglers) 3 (+2)

Languages: English 6, German 6, Lakota 4, Latin 2, Or'zet 6, Salish Language 4, Sperthiel 6

Movement: 15/30

Powers: Adaptive Coloration, Anaphylaxis, Dragonspeech, Dual Natured, Elemental Attack (Electricity), Energy Aura (Radiation), Enhanced Senses (Enhanced Smell, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Hardened Armor 8, Increase Initiative, Mystic Armor 8, Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 9P, AP -2), Sapience

Initiate Grade: 8

Metamagics: Cleansing, extended masking, filtering, invoking, masking, quickening, reflection, shielding

Spells: Armor, Chaotic World, Decontamination, Detect Life, Detect Radiation, Detox, Disrupt Power Focus, Heal, Improved Invisibility, Inverted Radiation Shield*, Mana Bolt, Mind Probe, Mob Mood, Physical Mask, Shapechange, Stunball, Stunbolt, Troll Form, Wreck Guns, Wreck Armor

Gear: Commlink (Device Rating 5), Power Focus (Force 6), Sustaining Focus (Health Spells, Rating 6), Sustaining Focus (Manipulation Spells, Rating 8), Sustaining Focus (Manipulation Spells, Rating 10), Weapon Focus (Nodachi, Force 8)

*Inverted Radiation Shield is a personal derivative Kalanyr uses to shield others from his damaging aura. It is anchored with a Detect Life spell to activate if living things come near.

PERIANWYR

Perianwyr is in a very difficult situation. Denver is his home, and he has no desire to change that. His activities in saving the Aztlan delegation during Ghostwalker's return have put him on thin ice, and many observers are shocked that the White Wyrm hasn't taken action against his more mild-mannered cousin yet. Getting Perianwyr out of Denver could be lucrative (though dangerous) work, but that's not the only job Perianwyr may need done. Just because he can't spend as much time in Denver as he would like doesn't mean he's going to slow down his music activities. He will need people on the ground listening to acts, conducting contract negotiations, and making concert arrangements. It could be a fun diversion for shadowrunners—as long as Ghostwalker doesn't catch on to what they are doing in his city. He may not be ready to take his revenge directly on Perianwyr, but it's always possible he'll take a quick, satisfying swipe at one of the dragon's compatriots when he has a chance.

In his draconic form, Perianwyr is a majestic black-scaled dragon, with blue underscales and highlights. He is smaller than the average adult western dragon, measuring only eighteen meters in length. His preferred human form is a handsome, distinguished, middle-aged man with dark hair and a goatee.

Adult western dragon

B A R S C I L W Edg Ess M Init IP
13 5 9 35 8 9 9 9 6 8 12 18 2

Condition Monitor Boxes (P/S): 15/13

Armor (B/I): 8/8

Active Skills: Assensing 9, Conjuring skill group 6, Counterspelling 8, Etiquette (Business) 5 (+2), Exotic Ranged Weapon 6, Flight 6, Intimidation 7, Negotiation (Bargaining) 8 (10), Perception 8, Ritual Spellcasting 8, Spellcasting (Manipulation Spells) 12 (+2), Stealth skill group 6, Unarmed Combat 6,

Knowledge Skills: Booze 4, Cutting Edge Bands 6, Gaelic 6, Latin 5, Music Industry 6, Night Clubs (Denver) 5 (+2), Prediction 6, Rock and Roll History 6, Welsh 6

Movement: 15/30

Powers: Animal Control (Reptiles), Dragonspeech, Dual Natured, Elemental Attack, (usually Fire), Enhanced Senses (Enhanced Smell, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Hardened Armor 8, Mystic Armor 8, Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 10P, AP -2), Sapience

Gear: Power Focus (Rating 4), Spellcasting Focus (Manipulation Spells, Rating 6), Spellcasting Focus (Illusion Spells, Rating 4), Sustaining Focus (Illusion Spells, Rating 8)

Initiate Grade: 4

Metamagics: Centering, masking, reflecting, shielding

Spells: Detect Life, Detox, Heal, Invisibility, Levitate*, Magic Fingers, Mana Bolt, Mind Probe, Mob Mood, Shapechange, Stunball, Trid Phantasm

*Perianwyr knows a custom form of Levitate that can effect multiple targets within an area. It is identical to the normal



Levitate spell (p. 210, *SR4A*), but has a range of **LOS (A)** and a Drain Value of **(F÷2)+3**.

THE SEA DRAGON

If there's an area where open conflict between dragons is going to break out besides the Lofwyr/Hestaby divide, it's in the Sea Dragon's rumored possession of a whole slew of dragon eggs. No one is certain of where the Sea Dragon's allegiance will ultimately lie, but the fact that she seems to be determinedly focus on growing a large new brood has dragon and non-dragon observers quite concerned. For the time being most of the runs will focus on recon work—how many eggs does the Sea Dragon really have? Where are they?—but there could soon come a time when various Mr. Johnsons will want the eggs stolen or outright destroyed. The Sea Dragon would not take kindly to that, of course, and her response might not be delivered with the subtlety dragons customarily display.

URUBIA

The speculation about Urubia is correct—she sees the gangs of Seattle as a vast, unorganized power base, and she believes he is the one to organize it. Seattle Assistant District Attorney Dana Oaks is well aware of what Urubia is doing, and she has several informants among the regular attendees at Urubia's gatherings. Right now, she doesn't have enough evidence to accuse her of anything—after all, most of his activities have involved feeding and entertaining the underprivileged youth of Seattle—but she's watching carefully to make a case against the dragon. She is also carefully planning the day of her arrest, should it ever come, since taking a dragon into custody is no easy feat.

Urubia is no fool, and she is aware she is being watched. She'd be happy for help in rooting out the spies in her midst. This means that runners may have the chance to work either side of this brewing conflict.

TOOLS OF THE OPPOSITION

Most of the materials described in this chapter are in the development stage. They are not available on the market; at present, the only way runners (or anyone else) is going to have access to them is stealing materials from corporate research labs, or from thieves who already stole them.

The manatech being worked on by Aztechnology is not finished, and it's not clear to anyone involved with it that it will ever live up to the hopes people have for it. But Aztechnology seems committed to the project, and they have enough research heft to make dragons want to keep an eye on the latest developments. Datasteals targeting the lab where the manateech is being worked on will be a regular occurrence.

The Black Arrow, by contrast, has reached the prototype stage. While early tests seem promising, it faces two obstacles—keeping control over the expenses involved in the manufacturing process, and ensuring it is reliable over the long haul. As a prototype, it is subject to breaking down at any time. Its stats are as follows:

Black Arrow (large drone)

Handl	Accel	Speed	Pilot	Bod	Arm	Sens	Avail	Cost
+4	50/250	1,200	5	9	14	4	—	—

Std. Upgrades: Additional Fuel Tank, 6 x Drone Racks (small landing), Satellite Communications, Signature Masking (Rating 5), 4 x Weapon Mounts (Reinforced, External, Turret, Remote), 2 x Weapon Mounts (Reinforced, Internal, Fixed, Remote)

The Black Arrow should be treated as if it possesses two levels of the Magic Resistance Quality (p. 91, *SR4A*).

At the moment, the information about the Skyknight is more hype than reality. It's a solid craft, but it does not yet have the spirit-fused capabilities the rumors suggest. Instead, Aztechnology and Aztlán have been working on training a cadre of mystic adept pilots; they use their adept abilities in piloting the craft, and their magic abilities in summoning spirits to help them in the air. The craft is designed to comfortably house the spirits, at least insofar as they need any physical comforts, and allow them to function as part of the craft's weaponry. As with the Black Arrow, it is not yet on the market.

Aztechnology adaptation of Lockheed Skyknight

Handl	Accel	Speed	Pilot	Body	Arm	Sens	Avail	Cost
+1	50/200	1,000	3	20	17	2	N/A	N/A

Std. Upgrades: Ejection Seats, Improved Takeoff and Landing (Rating 1), ECCM 3, ECM 3, Personal Armor (Rating 4), 2 Weapon Mounts (external, fixed, remote)



... THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE ...

PART TWO

Friend, Harlequin thought, *is the word we use to describe our very oldest enemies*. He made a mental note to write that down, although he later forgot.

He had to actually look at the commlink screen to read the text message; the kind of anachronistic mannerism that caused onlookers under the age of twenty to discretely point and snicker. He didn't care. He hated the various AR goggles and contacts he'd accumulated over the past decade nearly as much as he hated the augmented reality they enabled. It was hard enough, without superficial distractions and spam advertisements, to see every detail of everything that was really there.

What was really there, at the moment, was a sumptuously appointed corner room on the fifth floor of the hotel La Tremoille, a stone's throw from the Champs-Élysées, in Paris, the city of lights (and shadows) that he had once loved so dearly. Half-finished on the room service tray beside him on the night stand was something expensive, served with toast points, and a local dwarven microbrew. The city's nighttime lights were muted and airy through the silk curtains, which were drawn.

The text message was from noted elven politico, author, and general blowhard Ehran the Scribe. Decrypting the message revealed that it was written in English. The two of them knew languages the rest of the world had largely forgotten, which would have allowed perfectly secure communication, but Ehran seemed to feel that those languages should not be sullied through use in mundane correspondence, so he relied on technology instead of esoterica to provide privacy.

"Please reconsider what you're doing," Ehran's text read, conveying some panicked urgency in spite of the mundane medium. "They're not prepared for this yet. It's too soon. They're not ready for this war."

"War?" Harlequin said, his commlink flawlessly transcribing it to text. "Who said anything about starting a war?" He added a winking smiley face, and then sent it.

A knock came at the door. Harlequin sleepily slipped out of his body and flew through the wall, quickly recognizing the astral signature waiting in the corridor as familiar, expected, and alone. The black spots, the negative space where cyberware had replaced natural flesh, were all in the right place. He opened his physical eyes, rolled lithely off of the bed, and unlatched the door.

At first, looking up, he was confused at the look on the troll's face, and then he realized he was wearing his pajamas. The troll's cybereyes were animated with a minutely detailed pattern of electric 1s and 0s, and he wore an armored suit of heavy white fabric, specially tailored to his enormous frame. Harlequin's gaze shifted from those outlandish eyes to the large armored briefcase that hung in the troll's meaty right fist. The manacase was specially designed and outfitted to baffle astral tracking and tampering, a nice touch.

"Is that it?" Harlequin asked, nonchalantly, in French.

"It is," Le Chifre said. "As promised, Mr. Harlech."

"I trust the acquisition wasn't too difficult for the team you used?" Le Chifre only grunted, clearly and wisely unwilling to discuss

particulars in a hotel corridor.

Harlequin went inside, leaving the door wide open, and retrieved a paper envelope from his nightstand, and handed it to the troll, who made it vanish, quick as any magic trick.

"There's the rest of the payment for you and your operatives that we agreed upon," Harlequin said.

"Thank you," Le Chifre said, and smiled broadly. There was an awkward pause.

"The case?" Harlequin asked, raising an eyebrow.

The troll handed it to him somewhat reluctantly. "Of course. And if you ever are in town again ..."

"I'll keep you in mind," Harlequin said, recognizing the euphemism. He didn't believe that Le Chifre or any of the assets he'd tapped were necessarily from Paris. He went into his room and shut the door, dropping the manacase on the bed. He flipped open the latches and opened it, and let the darkness within wash over his features. Satisfied, he shut it again, and went into the bathroom, the bright fluorescents overhead automatically flickering on.

He turned to the vanity mirror. Without the motley on his face, with his hair dyed and muddy brown and combed back straight, he could almost imagine that he saw lines.

"You look like shit, old man," he told his reflection. Odd. It seemed to be saying the same thing to him.



The Arab arms dealer regarded Harlequin with the cool, measured disdain he found comfortingly familiar, since he received it from so many. The fixer, named Bel, was short, handsome, and serenely unselfconscious in his handsomeness. He was dark skinned, and his hair, mustache, and beard were all trimmed neat and short. His eyes were alarmingly blue for his complexion, perhaps cosmetically altered. He wore a tan canvas Aces High jacket—the Ace of Clubs model—over a desert-camouflage suit. Between the two layers, Harlequin saw a heavily customized Remington Roomsweeper in a shoulder holster.

"You paint your face, like clown," Bel said. "Why is this?" His English was not terrible, but heavily accented and idiomatic. Above the mosques and the glistening corporate skyscrapers that made up Constantinople's skyline, a fire-colored sunset burned in a haze. Harlequin imagined the dust coloring the sky had been kicked up by the border skirmish between East Turkish forces and the Kurdish Autonomous Zone's Peshmerga militia that he'd heard about in the news, but he knew that it would be impossible to see anything that far

north from here in Sultan Ahmet Square, formerly the Hippodrome. It was marginally more likely that a sandstorm was on the way.

"You're not impressed with me, are you?" Harlequin said, in flawless Arabic.

"He's meeting you in person," Bel replied in kind, unfazed. He cracked his neck. "He never meets anyone in person." The runners and fixers that had delivered Harlequin here had briefed him on this man, and he'd nodded, sagely, as though he knew all about it. In truth, he hadn't, but it didn't matter. Bel, real name unknown, probably Iraqi or Iranian in nationality, was wanted, badly, by Mossad, and by nearly every other spy agency with an eye on the Middle East. He'd avoided them all for decades, while organizing legendary runs under the noses of the IUM and the NIJ.

Looking in any direction from the center of the public square, Harlequin could see half a dozen 10,000 Daggers mercenaries. They were responsible for the free city of Constantinople's security. Bel—even with the quartet of rather conspicuous bodyguards that surrounded him, all of them most likely PKK—seemed unconcerned with them, as if he didn't notice them at all. Most likely, he had his own arrangements made with them, allowing him to do business as easily in Constantinople as he did in the rest of the Middle East. Harlequin's own people were just outside the park, waiting. He had told them he was fine entering alone, but they'd insisted on setting up a perimeter. Protective of him—or more likely, of their investment.

"He just likes me, that's all," Harlequin finally said, lamely, in English. "Everybody likes me."

Suddenly, a warm wind passed over them from north to south, pushing forward, bending the palm trees and stirring his hair and the lawn's grass with its passage. It was accompanied by a not completely unpleasant reptile smell. Harlequin smiled and turned to face south, where he saw a tall Persian woman entering the square. She was not just tall, but statuesque, voluptuously built, with long blue-black hair that fell, pin-straight, to her mid-back. She wore a dark gray pantsuit, velour, the cut too antiquated to qualify even as retro. Her eyes, when she opened them, were nearly all whites.

"Aden," Bel announced, rather unnecessarily.

Harlequin felt suddenly self-conscious in his torn, "Ayatollah of Rock'n'Rolla" T-Shirt and mustard-stained jeans. He shifted the manacase from one hand to the other. Whatever. Shit was vintage.

"You know, if I was a hardboiled private dick, I'd have trouble knowing which pronoun to use to refer to you in my ongoing first person narrative," Harlequin said.

"*What do you want?*" Aden's voice thundered telepathically, *basso profundo* and distinctly male, in Harlequin's mind. Thoughts took the form of language in metahuman minds, and in this case, that language was Aramaic, of all things. No accident. Harlequin nearly smiled—to think he'd believed Aden had no sense of humor.

"No one has time for pleasantries these days," Harlequin said in Aramaic, and then tossed the briefcase contemptuously at Aden's feet. It landed with a loud clatter, and slid forward until it was stopped by Aden's boot heel. Harlequin saw with some satisfaction that Bel flinched out of the way from where he was standing behind him, then blinked in surprise that Harlequin hadn't been obliterated in a blast of killing fire.

"*What is it?*" Aden asked, staring at the case.

"Elaishón," Harlequin said. Sperethiel.

Aden rolled his (her?) eyes and picked up the case, flipping it open. His frown deepened when he saw what was inside. He handed the case to one of Bel's bodyguards, who in turn handed it to Bel.

"*If this is your gift, raé, it is a poor one indeed. You must know I never wanted this.*"

"The humans have a saying, about power. Something to the effect of the one most desirous of it being the least qualified to wield it? Or maybe the reverse. I forget." English.

"*The mortals have many sayings,*" Aden said dismissively. "*You are entirely too fond of all of them. What do you expect from me in exchange for this gift?*"

"Nothing," Harlequin said, smiling innocently. Or as close to innocent as he could manage. "I'm not bartering. I wouldn't presume." His grin widened. "I just want you to give the Shroud of Shadows back to Ghostwalker."

Aden paused, considering. He turned towards the walled obelisk, and placed a hand—fingers like graceful snakes, with long, white, manicured nails—on the stone, closing his (her?) eyes in thought. *Torn*, Harlequin thought, surprised. *He's really torn, isn't he?*

"*For this I left my studies?*" Aden said, finally, turning his attention back to Harlequin. "*I want no part of your plots, rinellé.*"

"Really? The Orange Queen thought you'd want every part of it. She thought you'd be furious, actually. After Ghostwalker's little stunt at the rift left you comatose and helpless for the UCAS government to extract samples of your vitals for tracking. I wouldn't want you misdirecting that anger, Aden, at the poor little mortals."

"*The poor little mortals have forgotten their place. They need a reminder. I will deal with Ghostwalker's transgression in my own time and in my own way. We are in agreement on this, and that is more important, for now. Age-old traditions must be preserved. And examples must be made. There are greater conflicts at stake here. Greater enemies. And you are one of them.*"

"Really?" Harlequin said, as words and symbols of power cascaded through his mind at the speed of light, tumbling trippingly past his murmuring lips. Each of Bel's bodyguards slumped over, asleep, as though succumbing to days and days of accumulated fatigue. Bel himself "willingly" handed the briefcase back to Harlequin, looking completely bewildered as to why he'd done so for a moment, before bodily calcifying into a stone statue of himself, a new decoration added to the square.

Distantly, Harlequin registered the sound of suppressed gunfire as a hail of stick 'n' shock rounds from concealed shooters dropped the 10,000 Daggers mercenaries that had begun converging on his position, sending innocent bystanders scattering and pigeons filling the sky in mass exodus from the square. But even with all this, the bulk of Harlequin's attention never left Aden. "Perhaps Lofwyr will be more appreciative of this gift, then, since you don't want it."

"*You know, I could kill you where you stand,*" Aden said, calmly, as if commenting on the weather.

Harlequin smiled so savagely that the corners of his rouged mouth seemed to be on the verge of tinting his earlobes. "You could certainly try," he said, and rattled the swordbelt he wore slung low over his jeans. The belt and the rapier in its holster had been invisible and inaudible as he wandered the streets of the city. To some degree, it was false bravado. Harlequin was far from sure of his chances. Aden had leveled the city of Tehran—that was the rage Harlequin had hoped to turn against Denver, after all. Harlequin was many things, he was no easy kill, but he was not a city.

What seemed like an eternity passed between them, the square seemingly emptied of all other motion and sound, as Harlequin gathered all of his magical defenses around himself, plotted his move if worst came to worst, and waited. But it wasn't an eternity. Wasn't even a minute.

Aden laughed—telepathic laughter was a strange, unsettling sound—and Harlequin joined him. It was either laugh or kill each other, after all.

“You keep it,” Harlequin said, setting the briefcase slowly on the ground. “Dunkelzahn wanted you to have it, and that’s good enough for me.”

“*Giving it to Lofwyr would have been foolish,*” Aden said. “*He feels the same way as I do, only more so, if possible.*” He was, of course, right, and it had been an unlikely gambit to expect Aden’s antipathy toward Lofwyr to outweigh his ability to reason. Alamaï, on the other hand, might have been a different story.

“I meant no disrespect, *perritaesa,*” Harlequin said. “My reputation as ... hotheaded is well deserved. I hope that the next time we meet, it’s under friendlier terms.” He doubted that would be the case; as likely as not, the next time they met, only one of them would leave. That seemed to be the way things were going, the whole world ‘round.

Hands in pockets, he turned to go. The runners he’d hired were in the process of falling back to a prearranged safe house, a wise move after firing on Constantinople’s security forces. He would meet them there.

“*Aren’t you forgetting something?*” Aden asked, when he reached twenty paces.

Harlequin turned around, slapped his forehead with the heel of his hand, and chuckled.

With a completely unnecessary snap of his fingers, Bel turned, staggering and gasping, back to flesh. By the time he had clawed his Roomsweeper free of its holster, spinning and snarling in rage, Harlequin was gone.



Leaning against the window of the Gulfstream-Luxe V’s cabin as it taxied to take off, en route to the next item on his carefully compiled mental list—titled “Enemies of my Enemy”—he received another text from Ebran.

“At least think about what you’re doing. You should know better than anyone that these things take time and planning. Sometimes centuries of it. You’re rushing this, and you’re going to make dangerous mistakes. Besides, shouldn’t you be reining in Gwynneplaine? It’s doing considerable damage back in Seattle. And not just to your reputation.”

Harlequin deleted it unanswered.

He had a bigger fish to fry. His darker half would have to wait.



The old fashioned videophone on the wall rang, stirring him from the groggy recesses of sleep. He dragged himself out of bed, the sheets cool as they fell from his naked skin, and found his way to the phone by memory. Dim gray predawn light that seeped in the computer-polarized windows.

“What is it?” he asked, in a Spanish dialect that hadn’t existed, exactly, before he’d been born. He didn’t look at the screen, but at the girl in the bed, the graceful curve of tanned leg, thigh, and hip that rose from the silk sheets. He felt a tiny prickle of guilt; she was 19. Far too young for him, twenty or thirty years too young, even for how he appeared after Léonization.

“Sorry to wake you at this hour, Mr. Chavez. There is someone waiting in your office, sir,” answered the voice on the other side of the line. It belonged to David Martinez, his personal secretary and aide, a sleekly groomed young corporate professional.

Domingo Chavez blinked and looked at the clock on the video phone, turning to it for the first time.

“Ridiculous. I don’t have any appointments scheduled until 10:30,” Chavez said.

“He didn’t ... make an appointment, exactly.”

“Then have security throw him out! Why are you calling me with this—”

“Sir, you don’t understand. He’s *in* your office.”

“In *my* office? *In* the office?” Chavez was becoming quite loud. The girl murmured sleepily, a plea for quiet. He ignored her. “Send in a team of Ocelomeh at once!”

“I did sir, immediately,” Martinez said.

“And?”

“And they ... er ... they were forced to withdraw.”

Chavez was nearly stunned. He looked around him for his bathrobe, then barked at the girl to bring it to him. She rose, frightened, and began searching for it as well, near panic. Chavez tried to plan his next move. He did not want any of the other members of the board to find out about this embarrassment, which limited the military muscle he could bring to bear. Unless this damn fool Martinez already had.

“Tell me you didn’t—” Chavez began.

“He asked for you, sir,” Martinez interrupted. Timidly.

“He what?” Chavez said, as the girl tried to put the bathrobe on him. He slapped her away dismissively, and shrugged it on himself. Then he realized he’d been asking the wrong questions. “Who *is* this crazy asshole?”



The skies over Tenochtitlán were unusually clear that morning, with a pollution index of only 3.6, as an armed and armored helicopter brought Chavez and his escort of Ocelomeh quickly from his residence to the helipad nearest his office. Martinez had pleaded with him to let the Jaguar Guards take him to a previously arranged, secure safehouse until the full level of the threat could be assessed. The powerful elven



mage that had forced his way into his office could have chemical or biological weapons with him, a suitcase, or God-only-knows-what. The entire wing of the arcology was being evacuated, and wouldn't he please listen to reason rather than charging in headlong?

As it turned out, he wouldn't. Chavez would never run from a fight.

He strode purposefully down the carpeted skyway to his office, now dressed in a jet-black, custom-tailored Synergist business suit and slacks, white shirt, and slender black tie. The heavily armed and milspec-armored Jaguar Guards jogged at either side of him, keeping pace in front and behind.

Through the doors to his office waiting room, it was worse than he'd thought. Martinez approached him immediately, babbling apologies and pleading with him to turn around and leave. Chavez ignored him, looking instead at the pair of initiated Cuacuhtin mages who had been stationed outside the door to his office. The Eagles were sleeping like babies. Unlike the bruised and battered bodies of the six-man assault team of Jaguar Guards that had attempted to breach his office, which had been smashed back out of it with the force of a wrecking ball, so hard that their insensate bodies had crushed the receptionist's desk with the weight of their armor and gear. Though they were black-and-blue and bloodied, they too weren't dead.

Chavez felt something he hadn't felt in decades: actual fear. Nothing could do this to properly trained, properly equipped Ocelomeh. Nothing.

He shifted his perception to the astral, analyzing the brightly burning residue-signature that the spells had left behind. As he expected, the two Eagles had been subdued with a stun spell of some kind, while the other six had been caught in the radius of a blast of some sort of energy, which had also shattered the expensive wood of the door frame and knocked the doors off of their hinges. Both spells were alarmingly powerful.

"You alerted the board of directors," Chavez said, running a hand through his patchy gray beard and longish gray hair.

"Yes, sir," Martinez said, like a dog expecting to be kicked.

"Good," Chavez said. Aztechnology was bigger than him, and bigger than its reputation. This could potentially threaten all of them. They needed to know.

Then the former Corporate Court justice went into his office, alone and unarmed, leaving his own squad of Ocelomeh behind him. It didn't look like they'd be able to do much good.

The first thing that he saw when he entered his office was that behind the massive window in back of his desk, a window that commanded an impressive view of Tenochtitlán's skyline, six more Ocelomeh dangled unconscious from their tangled rappelling lines. They'd attempted to breach simultaneously through the windows and the door, and been thwarted at both.

He saw the elf second and suppressed a momentary seizure of quivering, unreasonable rage. The intruder leaned back in his high-backed forty-thousand nuyen leather chair with the massaging liners, and worse, he had his ridiculous anaconda-skin boots, fixed with chrome spurs, up on the polished, real mahogany veneer of Chavez's desk. A screamsheet, printed on electronic paper, was folded open, concealing the intruder's face.

"Well, this quite a dramatic way to get my attention," Chavez said, loosening his tie and shrugging off his jacket. He draped it over one of the two not-quite-as-comfortable chairs placed in front of his desk, and crossed to the well-stocked bar on the east wall of the room, pouring himself a brandy. Ordinarily, it would have been much too

early. He knocked it back in one burning gulp and poured himself another, not offering the stranger any as he turned around, glass in hand. "But you have it," he said, as nonchalantly as he could manage. Through his flesh-colored wireless cochlear implant, Martinez told him that a full assault team of combat and magical specialists would be on hand in five minutes. It might as well have been an eternity.

"Sorry about that," said the elf behind the electronic newspaper. "You're not an easy man to see." Speaking English, like Chavez had been. No discernible accent.

Chavez shifted his perception into the astral again, and was nearly blinded by the scintillating strength of this elf's aura. Hovering above the elf on the astral plane was the most powerful air elemental that Chavez had ever seen. The only tiny grain of relief he felt was that the aura had not been draconic in shape. Chavez blinked the view of the material world back into his vision; what he was greeted with there was far less impressive.

"Any spell you're thinking about casting, you might as well not," the elf said, folding the screamsheet so his face could be seen. He wore clown's makeup, diamonds over both eyes, and rouge on his smiling lips. But there was no humor in that smile. "I'll just catch it and stuff it back up your ass."

Chavez swallowed, dryly, almost forgetting the glass of brandy in his hand.

"What do you want?" Chavez asked.

"I understand you have a bit of a dragon problem," the painted elf said, tapping one long, slender finger against an animated graphic of Sirurg on the front page, spewing fire down on the city of Cali. The headline, in Aztlaner Spanish, read "The Destroyer Sighted In Roswell!" He tossed it on the desk and stood up.

"Four minutes," Martinez subvocalized wirelessly into Chavez's ear.

"And?" Chavez asked.

"And, it just so happens," the painted elf said, and drew a sword—a rapier with an ornate, gilded basket hilt—and pressed its point against a map of North and South America that decorated the opposite wall. Using it as a pointer, to indicate the divided city of Denver, from which Aztlan had been ousted over a decade ago.

"So do I."

"Martinez," Chavez said into the subvocal microphone discretely taped to his throat.

"Yes sir?"

"Have the assault team hold off," Chavez said. "I think we might just have something to discuss after all."



And now, the formal declaration of intent.

They called it the Hole. Ghostwalker sprawled, massive, relaxed, and comfortable, in his lair; a cavernous, subterranean space that had once been a command bunker, deep in the depths of Cheyenne Mountain. The walls dividing the space into rooms had all been

knocked down to give him his space. A wide, structurally supported shaft led straight up to the mountain's surface, where a wirelessly controlled, specially reinforced plasteel hatch had been designed so that he could come and go easily, when he pleased (which was seldom, of late).

The space was kept dark, as the dragon liked it. What little light there was came from dozens of holographic view-screens spaced evenly throughout the chamber. The screens displayed a wide variety of video feeds—stock quotes for various international markets, public and pirate newscasts, satellite imagery of Crater Lake, and picture-in-picture video feed straight from the helmet cameras of a team of shadowrunners. The holographic light shone softly on Ghostwalker's stony scales, scales that were as pale as marble and veined with blue.

Ghostwalker's eyes—larger and brighter than headlights—were closed, and an observer on the physical plane might have mistook him for dozing. A dangerous mistake to make, and impossible with astral perception. Ghostwalker's aura burned brightly with contemplation and calculation, his attention and his thoughts pulled in nearly as many directions as there were screens on the walls, the emotional payload of each line of reasoning leaving its colored stain on his astral form.

In spite of this, he noticed the intruder in his domain at once. The wards around his lair were immensely powerful, the spirit allies who stood guard there were alert and mighty. The list of beings in the entire world who could finesse their way past his safeguards without even raising a hue and cry was a short list indeed.

And this intruder's astral form was unmistakable.

"You," Ghostwalker rumbled, his tone pensive, thoughtful. Letting whatever offense he may have felt at the intrusion roll off his shoulders like a massive shrug.

"Me," Caimbuel answered. The astral shape of the painted elf (a single diamond, today, over one eye) was unsmiling. The colors of his aura shone with a deep sadness and an even deeper resignation.

Ghostwalker was the first person in quite some time not to ask the elf what he wanted. Because he thought he already knew.

"I am sorry about Aina."

"Are you now?" the elf asked, trying to sound casual as the first crimson threads of rage spun through his aura. "You're sorry."

"She knew the risks. You all did, and you agreed."

"You closing the rift was never part of the deal!"

"Deal?" Ghostwalker—astral form and physical body one, moving in perfect unity—stood, drawing himself to his full height, wings still furled. "The ephemerals you so lovingly coddle—I saved this world from the intrusion of the shedim, and worse."

"Am I meant to be impressed with your philanthropy? Your arrival was what let them in."

"And I put it right. I closed the rift. I balanced the scales."

"Except you didn't, did you?" Caimbuel asked. For a moment, his aura was nearly black with hatred—a darker and deeper color than Ghostwalker had ever seen—and then it faded to cloudy, then cleared, changing faster than any other in Ghostwalker's not-inconsiderable experience. Only the sadness, pervasive and ancient, remained, both in his aura and his voice. "You owe a debt. To this world. To us. To me. I will see it paid."

His anger blinds him, Ghostwalker thought. He doesn't realize that she isn't really gone. He won't listen to reason, any more than I would.

"Is that how you see it?"

Caimbuel nodded.

"Then I know better than to think I could ever change your mind. No one ever could."

"Many have tried."

There was a heavy silence.

"For what it's worth," the elf added, breaking it, "whatever you may have heard, I'm not the one who killed Mountainshadow. I was sad to hear of his passing."

"If I had ever thought it had been you, do you think we would even be having this conversation?" Ghostwalker snorted, unfurling his wings, which spanned the chamber from wall to wall.

"Don't you mean we would have had this conversation much sooner?"

"Is this a Chal'han? Is that what you're talking about?"

The elf narrowed his eyes. "No. A Chal'han is a contest of equals."

"And that is something we are not, and will never be."

Caimbuel nodded.

Ghostwalker looked around the chamber, wondering if the matter would be decided here and now. If so, he knew, it would be two of their kind dead in one year after none of them dying for thousands. On this ground, the dragon's victory was all but certain. And yet, he did not strike. He did not really understand, in that moment, what held him back. He had learned and remembered much and more in the thirteen years since clawing his way back into this world, since taking control of his city again, but still his own heart was sometimes unknown to him.

"What then? You're going to try and hurt me?"

Caimbuel smiled his terrible, mad, broken smile. You wretched thing, Ghostwalker thought, how awful for you to have survived this long, to have endured your own company for millennia.

"Try to hurt you?" Caimbuel asked. "I am the Last Knight of the Crying Spire. I am coming for you. This is no Chal'han. No rite of succession. No sport, no comedy of manners. I'm coming for everything. I don't want your money. I don't want your crown. I've come to burn your kingdom down."

Ghostwalker felt the response rising like fire in his ancient lungs, but by the time his breath was ready to answer the challenge, the elf's aura was gone. It had begun.

"Then come," Ghostwalker said, settling down onto his haunches again. "You mad fool."

Before he could begin to prepare for war, the dragon felt a comforting presence all around him, a spirit descending on his dual-natured body like mist. He sighed. The fleeting touch of what he'd regained helped him understand the value of what Caimbuel had lost. The elf believed he knew what had happened. He saw that the dragon had traded Aina for his own Mate. That wasn't what really had happened, though it could have. Ghostwalker would have made that trade without a second thought, a thousand times over. Knowing that, he understood that Caimbuel's vendetta would not end until his kingdom was in flaming ruins around him, and his body broken. The peace between their kinds was never going to be permanent, but it was painful to see it shattered by a misunderstanding so utterly ... human.

"I don't know what is the worst part of us," he sighed, into the comforting presence, newly regained, that cloaked him, "if not the things we do for love."



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