



SHADOWRUN[®]

SLIP STREAMS



PLOT SOURCEBOOK



SLIP STREAMS





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CREDITS

Writing: Kevin Czarnecki, Jeff Halket, Jason M. Hardy, Jason Hawks, Mason Hart, Clifton Lambert, Danny Oliver, Alexandra Pitchford, Grant Robinson, Scott Schletz, James M. Spahn, RJ Thomas, Malik Toms

Cover Art: Benjamin Giletti

Illustrations: Brent Chumley, Tyler Clark, Phil Hilliker, David Hovey, Victor Manuel Leza Moreno, Marco Pennacchiotti, Derek Poole, Júlio Cesar Oliveira Rocha, Robert Ruffolo, Andreas "AAS" Schroth, Takashi Tan

Design & Production: Matt "Extra Social Distance" Heerdt

Art Direction: Brent Evans, Ian King

Shadowrun Line Developer: Jason M. Hardy

Proofing: Chuck Burhanna, Jean-Marc Comeau, Mason Hart, J. Keith Henry, Robert Volbrecht, Jeremy Weyand

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FIND US ONLINE:
 Shadowrun questions: info@shadowruntabletop.com
 Catalyst Shadowrun website: shadowruntabletop.com
 Catalyst Game Labs: catalystgamelabs.com
 Catalyst/Shadowrun orders: store.catalystgamelabs.com

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INTRODUCTION

Everything still has a price. There are great powers in the Sixth World, and they can do things we might have trouble imagining, but there's still a price they need to pay. The grander the action, the higher the price.

In early 2081, the UCAS, one of the mightiest nations in the Sixth World, nearly collapsed. One of their largest employers—Ares, the last megacorp headquartered in the nation—announced that they were leaving. The nation then had an entire army corps disappear, followed by blackouts hitting several major cities and subsequent economic and physical devastation. Neighboring nations then came in to sweep up the wreckage, and large sections of the border areas departed for greener pastures. What was left was a shell.

Bringing down a nation like that doesn't come easy. There's a price to be paid, and it doesn't always come in a currency you recognize. *Slip Streams* shows some of that price, and how the payment might be higher than anyone expected.

Frayed Fabric starts the book with a description of what's going on in the Sixth World—alchera and other tears in the fabric of reality appearing across the world. *Soldiers of III Corps* connects those ruptures to the troops from the missing UCAS Army corps—some of which are now returning. *Bad Mojo* pushes the issue further, looking at some of the possible causes of these tears and how different powers of the world might be taking advantage of them. Should the runners want to be involved in the investigation into the alchera, *Who You Gonna Call?* profiles some of the organizations interested in this part of the Sixth World, focusing on their goals and activities. *Hiring Board* gets more specific, looking at a few dozen jobs available that runners could take on. *Cast of Shadows* has the game stats on

people they might meet while on the job, while *Game Information* provides rules connected to the events and phenomena in this book.

WHAT'S UP WITH THE METAPLANES

Here's some background for some of the events of this book. For sixty-seven years after the Awakening, astral space was only open to the Awakened—magicians and dual-natured beings who could perceive astrally, or leave their physical shells behind and wander disembodied through astral space. The metaplanes were even more remote—available only to initiates with the will and discipline to pass the Dweller on the Threshold. Rare astral rifts and powerful spirits with the astral gateway power could sometimes open the way for astral travelers to reach the metaplanes. But for most of shadowrunners, they seemed forever out of reach.

The Yellowstone Calamity in 2078 signaled a shift in the functions of the planes (magic has a way of never staying still). It tore a hole in the fabric of reality. For the first time, a doorway opened from the material world to a metaplane—not just a path for astral travelers, but a physical portal that anyone, even mundanes, could step through and enter another dimension: the Faerie Court.

Since that event, other gateways have been reported, leading to other destinations. Rare, unpredictable, and unstable, but still undeniably real. You need to know that they're out there. And if you see one of them—run away!

To understand the function of the metaplanes, use the definitions in the Astral Glossary below and the info in *The Astral Plane*, p. 159, SR6.

ASTRAL GLOSSARY

Alchera: A place where the material world intersects briefly with a metaplane. *Manifest alchera* are intangible; they can only be seen, never touched. *Reflection alchera* are echoes of events that happened in the past. *Materialized alchera* introduce something new to the physical environment, and seem real while they last. *Displacement alchera* temporarily erase part of the existing world and replace it with something else. Think twice before climbing a phantom tower—it could vanish any moment and leave you hanging in empty air.

Astral form: The astral body of a magician, focus, spirit, or other being active on the astral plane.

Astral gateway: An astral rift created by a spirit. It enables mundanes to perceive and project astrally, and opens the way to a metaplane that bypasses the Dweller.

Astral perception: The ability to see into astral space and interact with things there.

Astral portal: Mundanes who pass through an astral portal temporarily experience astral perception (physical transference) or projection (astral transference).

Astral projection: The ability to separate your astral form from your physical body and travel through astral space.

Astral rift: A bridge between astral and physical space, where anyone (mundane or Awakened) can experience both astral perception and astral projection. Some rifts allow projection into a specific metaplane, without facing the Dweller on the

Threshold. Your body stays behind, though, so don't forget where you left your meat.

Astral shallow: A place where the barrier between astral and physical space is thin, allowing mundanes to view astral forms but not touch them.

Astral space (a.k.a., the astral plane): A parallel spirit world alongside our own, a reflection made of magical energy generated by all living things. Only magical beings and objects that are actively present in astral space have solid astral forms. Nonmagical living things have colorful, glowing auras but are intangible, while mundane objects are dim, grey shadows of their physical forms.

Mana ebb: A place where mana is weak, and magic is more difficult.

Mana flow: A place where mana is strong, and magic is easier.

Mana void: A place where mana is completely depleted, and magic does not work.

Metaplanar gateway (a.k.a. metaplanar rift): A portal that opens directly into a metaplane and enables anyone (mundane or Awakened) to go there in the flesh, without astral travel.

Metaplane: Beyond astral space are an infinite number of metaplanes, shaped of metaphors, abstract concepts, and stranger things. Magical initiates can learn to travel through astral space to the metaplanes, but this is difficult and dangerous.

Void door: A portal into a dimension of raw mana, dangerous for the unprepared.

////////////////////////////////////
CONNECTING TO JACKPOINT VPN...
...IDENTITY SPOOFED
...ENCRYPTION KEYS GENERATED
...CONNECTED TO ONION ROUTERS
////////////////////////////////////

>LOGIN
>ENTER PASSCODE

---BIOMETRIC SCAN CONFIRMED
CONNECTED TO <ERROR: NODE UNKNOWN>

////////////////////////////////////
“A sucking chest wound in the skin of eternity.”
—“*The Dreams a Nightmare Dreams*,” Harlan Ellison
////////////////////////////////////

Welcome back to JackPoint, chummer; your last connection was severed **26 hours, 8 minutes, 42 seconds ago**

TODAY'S HEADS-UP

Life seeming especially unreal lately? It's not just you—reality seems to be having trouble keeping it together.
—Glitch

INCOMING

>>> Do you know how many attack options you have from your current position? You should. [TAG: FIRING SQUAD]
>>> Who's a threat, who's an asset, who's a little of both? [TAG: COLLAPSING NOW]
>>> One of the great powers of magic is to make the world stranger. [TAG: STREET WYRD]

TOP NEWS ITEMS

>>> Johnny and Gabrielle Spinrad to take spectacular delayed honeymoon in new reality trid series.
>>> Seattle officials say independence has “breathed new life” into the city.
>>> Injuries at Bugstomp Music Festival called “just part of the life” by organizers.

JACKPOINT STATS

88 Users are active on the network.

LATEST NEWS

United Nations says that the status of the UCAS on the Security Council will be “re-evaluated.”

PERSONAL ALERTS

>>> You have 11 new private messages.
>>> You have 6 new responses to your JackPoint posts.
>>> A small Japanese tea room has appeared in your living room.
There are six Members online and in your area.
Your Current Rep Score: 720 (64% Positive)
There are six Members online and in your area.

YOUR CURRENT REP SCORE: 720 (64% Positive)

CURRENT TIME: 12 May 2081, 2310 hrs

////////////////////////////////////



WILD RIDE

BY RJ THOMAS

“Onyx, it’s been a while.”

“Hoi there, Sully. I ... almost expected you to bounce this call.”

“What kind of trouble are ya in?”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Call it an educated guess.”

“Yeah ... look, I know what my rep’s become, and I know you’re likely to bring a drek-ton of heat down on your head by just taking this call but ... but I’ve got nowhere else to turn.”

“First, I told ya then and I’ll tell ya again now; I don’t blame ya for what went down on last year. That was all Tanner’s doing; ya just got caught up in it all and had to make a no-win decision.”

“Lot of other people don’t see it that way.”

“Lot of other people ain’t me. And if they still have a beef, they can talk to me about it up-close and personal-like. I told you a long time ago that if ya ever needed me, I’d be there, and that didn’t change.”

“Thank you.”

“Now on to the second thing—you need a quiet ride or a loud one, and for how many?”

“Quiet, but I don’t know how much longer that’ll matter, you scan? And it’s for two, me ... and my brother.”

“Wow. Okay, yeah, I read ya. Pick up, destination, and when?”

“I’ll send you encrypted text with the data after we disconnect. Time is ASAP, because I got that feeling again, you know?”

“Yeah, last time you had that particular feeling, they were pulling bodies out of the rubble for a week. Get ready to roll, I’ll fire up Goldie and be there soon as I can.”

Forty minutes, thirty-six seconds late.

I looked at Goldie’s AR chronometer (again) and grunted, watching the seconds tick away. Anyone with two good brain cells would have figured that something had gone sideways and it was time to cut losses, call it a night.

That might have been the smart play, but I’ve never been accused of being smart. Stubborn—oh yeah, plenty of times. I may not have the traditional brains, but what I do have is a gut that’s never steered me wrong, not once. A few close calls, sure. But it’s kept my skin intact in the New York shadows longer than I had any right to—almost twenty-five years now.

And my gut told me to wait just a bit longer.



So here I was, sitting on my warty backside in my beloved cab “Goldie” (also known as the Golden Whale) parked the middle of a pitch-black, garbage-strewn Bronx back alley. Multiple AR windows from drone feeds let me know what was happening around me. I may be stubborn, but I’m not stupid. The Bronx was a rough place, the kind where you brought friends with heavy mojo and/or firepower if you knew what was good for ya. Honestly though, I’d prefer a real crew, or at least a shooter as backup. But sometimes we can’t get everything we want.

Onyx’s call was a bit of a shock. I’d honestly thought she’d gone deep, maybe gotten geeked over that bad batch of business last year. She was one of the best razors I’d ever worked with. Problem was, she fell hard for some neo-A punk named Tanner who filled her head with drek about “fighting back against the corp establishment.” Yeah, New York was a *great* place for that. I tried to get her away from Tanner, hook her up with some solid teams I fixed for on the regular. But she was “in love.” And curse Tanner for forcing her into a no-win situation that ended up with a beloved local Mr. Johnson dead because Tanner wanted to make a political statement. Only thing that kept Onyx from getting a death-mark was that she ended Tanner herself. But someone had to take the blame, and so Onyx took the full brunt even

though she hadn’t even been there when Mr. Johnson was geeked.

Anger and hate always needs a target.

No one was going to lift a finger to help Onyx, even on *my* asking. I was literally her last chance for getting out of whatever bad juju was going down.

What really got my attention was that Onyx’s younger brother Wade was somehow involved. Seven years ago, Wade went full UCAS Army, a way to “get out of the slums.” Frag, he even made sergeant in some infantry unit (I do my best to keep tabs on people). He tried to get Onyx to follow, but she’d already gotten deep in the shadows, much to Wade’s displeasure. So brother and sister had a massive falling out, with Onyx calling Wade a “neighborhood deserter” and Wade calling her a “common criminal.”

They were just another broken family from the Rotten Apple.

I lifted the DNI data cord plugged into the data-port at the back of my neck and tried to massage the tightening muscles. The connection linked the vehicle control rig implanted in my skull with Goldie’s systems. Long story short, I thought something, she did it. Normally, I preferred old-fashioned hands-on-wheel, feet-on-brake-and-gas driving. But I wasn’t going to forgo any advantage in the name of ego. Besides,

Goldie was special, and it took a special kind of hand to make her dance on the New York streets.

Still, maybe I'll invest in one of those new cyber-jacks when this is all done over.

Before I could form my next thought, several warning AROs from my drones lit up—amplified sounds of gunfire heard in the distance. Could be nothing, could be something; either way, I pulled my Ares Crusader II machine pistol.

No sooner had my piece cleared synthleather than outta nowhere something *slammed* into the back of Goldie from above with enough force to bounce my head against the roof. More AR windows suddenly filled my vision telling me about additional sounds of gunfire and some structural damage to Goldie's roof. Took me only a half second to shake it and the pain away; ork heads were good for takin' lots of damage. I glanced in the side view and saw two figures rolling on the ground. One was wearing military fatigues. The other was Onyx, face twisted in silent pain.

Grunting, I mentally ejected the DNI cable from my neck and got out, my Crusader II ready. I saw some shadows in the windows from the dilapidated apartment above and cranked off a few rounds out of instinct. In the distance, the sounds of gunfire came closer.

At my feet, Onyx and who I was guessing was Wade were both writing in pain on the filthy ground. It looked like Onyx's AK-97 had taken the brunt of the fall, the barrel bent at an angle that likely voided the manufacturer's warranty. She tried to get up again but immediately went back down.

"Onyx, can you move?" I asked as I cranked off another round at the shadows still moving above.

"Yeah ... just, wind knocked out ..." she croaked as she tried to stand, only for her right leg to crumple. Next to her, Wade continued to roll on the ground, hands covering his face. Things were quickly going sideways. One by one, signals from my drones went dead, their AR windows winking out in rapid succession as the gunshots grew louder.

Oh yeah, it was time to go.

Taking Onyx's tac-vest in my meaty paws, I unceremoniously tossed her into the back seat and turned to Wade. I was just about to repeat my tossing performance when his hands grabbed mine, and I got a good look at his face. Except it wasn't *his* face, or any metahuman face I'd ever seen.

Through filters in my cybereyes, I saw purple blood run from near-black eyes and a nose that was nothing more than two slits on his face. Almost all facial features had been, for the lack of a better descriptor, smoothed out. And forget any hair. But what got me was how his skin was completely grey, like those alien things from old flat-vid movies.

I don't spook easy, but I was thoroughly spooked then. What happened to him?

Frag it, leave now and everything else later.

No sooner had I tossed Wade (or whoever) into the back with Onyx when two more ... things joined the party. First one landed square on Goldie's back. Second frag near stomped on me from above like an

old-school wrestler. I didn't take time to get a good look, but I couldn't help but notice that both of them had some kind of modified arms or something. Frag that; don't care. One of them tried to take a swipe at me with some kind of clawed hand. But instinct kicked in, and I emptied half my Crusader's clip into its face first. I didn't bother to see what damage I did—I was already in the driver's seat, sending mental commands to Goldie as her engines roared to life.

No time to plug in and sync up. We were doing this old-school.

I stomped on the accelerator and Goldie surged forward, sending bits of trash and flotsam flying in all directions. I could tell by how she handled that those fraggers were somehow holding on, for now at least. The engine whined as turbochargers kicked in. Swerving between some derelict cars, we were quickly back on the main road, cars swerving and horns blaring. I felt heavy blows slam into Goldie as status AROs popped up on the windshield. Fraggers were actually ripping and punching through her armored skin!

Oh, frag no! No one touches my girl like that!

I cranked the wheel hard to the left and hit the gas. Any other car would have lost it, but Goldie's independent wheel suspension whipped us off the main and onto a service road. I briefly saw one of those things, still holding on with some kind of clawed hand to the left side, almost (frag) go flying. Meanwhile, the hammering near the back continued.

As good as I was behind the wheel, I knew I wasn't going to shake these losers, not like this. Looking ahead, I grit my tusks, hit the autonav, and grabbed the DNI cord, slamming it into the back of my neck. The connection was quick, but as soon as we were linked up, every hammer blow from those fraggers felt like someone was slamming me in the gut. But it also meant that I was fully in control.

I was finally able to get a good look at them. They had the same grey skin as Wade, with some kinda, I dunno, mutated arm on their right and some kind of crab arm on their left. Pointed teeth made them look like Halloween rejects.

One of 'em was just holding on between the driver and passenger side door. He could wait. His partner, the one about to rip the roof off over the passenger compartment; yeah, he had to go. With a mental command, I popped Goldie's defensive turret. The dual-mounted AA-16 shotguns spun around and let loose at close range with a blast of double-aught buck and slug rounds, right into Mr. Ugly Number One's face and chest. Damn if he wasn't tough, though. I had to empty both weapons into him, sending purple bloody chunks flying before his arms simply came off. What was left went flying into the streets.

Before I could celebrate my victory, I felt something slam into the window beside me. Mr. Ugly Number Two was snarling and continued to use that crab-claw thing like a fricking jaws of life to rip my door off. Taking a hard right, I send Goldie flying down toward an abandoned warehouse district. Normally, I try to

avoid drek in the road, but that time, the garbage was my arsenal.

First up, an old favorite: a dumpster. Clipped Mr. Ugly real good with it. I watched a large chunk of purple meat go flying off. But that just seemed to slot him off even more.

Next up: some old garbage. I knew it wasn't going to do much, but I wanted him distracted, off balance. Old bits of disgusting filth slammed into and covered both of us. Had I not been plugged in and running on sensors, I'd have been completely blind.

I whipped Goldie into a tight spin, independent wheel suspension pulling off a perfect donut. For a few seconds, it looked like Mr. Ugly was about to go bye-bye, but instead he just hauled himself onto the hood and planted his crab-claw into it. And to add insult to injury, Mr. Ugly puffed his chest out and actually puked freaking *acid* onto the windshield!

Warning AROs sprang to life, and I could smell acrid smoke entering the cab.

Frag!

About seventy meters up ahead, I saw something hanging low. Mentally I hit the gas, and Goldie surged ahead, smoke billowing from her tires. Mr. Ugly had no idea what was coming, until his head suddenly snapped back, then clean off thanks to the old gas station sign I ran him into.

The rest of Mr. Ugly's body quivered on my hood, but the acid he'd spewed was still eating into the window and now engine block. Goldie began to sputter.

And of course, in the distance, I could hear the distinct sounds of NYPD Inc. getting ever so closer. I doubt even I could have talked my way out of this one, not to mention that both Onyx and Wade needed medical attention, ASAP. I mentally ran through my options, all of them bad. Then of all things, a call came in over my commlink.

I didn't recognize the number, but without me accepting, the call came through anyway.

"Mr. Sullivan, I—or rather, you—don't have time for an explanation. I assure you, I am a friend. And if you want to save the lives of your passengers and keep yourself out of lockup, I suggest you follow the instructions I'm about to relay."

I paused for a heartbeat. "Okay, chummer, whoever you are. My back is against the wall, but if you try anything funny, I have no problems blowing up my cab along with anyone who tries anything stupid, *capisce?*"

"Completely. Now, we will deal with the NYPD, all you to do is head to these coordinates at best speed. A semi-truck will be waiting for you there ..."

An hour later, I was sitting in a small room in the back of some custom semi-trailer. On the table before me was some bottled water, some decent canned soykaf, and some donuts from Mike's in Brooklyn. Whoever my mysterious benefactor was, he had *some*

taste. I was about to break down and grab a glazed when the door opened and in walked—no, strode—one of the best dressed dwarves that I'd ever seen. His grey suit seemed more like a second skin and blended well with his dark complexion.

Before he could stay anything, I went on the offense. "My passengers, are they gonna be okay?"

The dapper halfer sat down and steepled his fingers before answering in a deep baritone voice. "Mr. and Ms. Toussaint are both being tended to. My medics tell me they are both stable. Although Mister—or should I say Sergeant—Toussaint is presenting some interesting medical issues."

"Like what?"

"His physiology has been altered in many ways."

"How?"

"We don't know the extent, and that's why I'm here. I'm going to cut right to the chase, Mr. Sullivan. Sergeant Toussaint was part of a UCAS Army unit that disappeared several months ago. Now he's apparently returned but has also been significantly changed. I represent a group that is attempting to determine not only the reason for Sergeant Toussaint and his unit's disappearance, but also the nature of his alterations, and whether this represents a significant threat to metahumanity."

"So, you some kind of spook?"

"Of a sort. I'm more of an independent contractor."

I nodded. I'd worked with a lot of ex-spooks and former company men, and this guy fit the bill to a T. But there was something about the way he talked. He didn't talk down to you, and he left the impression that you could trust him. At least, that's what my gut told me. "So what now? What'cha going to do with Onyx and Wade—or me, for that matter?"

"As soon as Ms. Toussaint is fully recovered, I'm content with releasing her to your care, if that meets with your approval. As for Sergeant Toussaint, I am obligated to keep him in protective custody for the time being."

I didn't like the sound of that, but I also knew that, despite my gut, I didn't have much of a choice.

"But as for you, Mr. Sullivan, I'd like to make you a business proposal. The situation I am investigating shows no signs of abating. As such I need as many allies and contacts as I can muster. You're one of the best fixers and riggers in the greater New York area. All I am asking is to be eyes and ears, and if the situation calls for it, help me recruit local talent for work. As such, I'll provide a handsome retainer and pay for all repairs to your cab, plus additional funds for any upgrades."

It was a sweet deal. And from what I'd seen, there was some bad drek out there, and I didn't like not knowing about it. Besides, Goldie needed a new paint-job, and I could keep a direct eye on Onyx.

"Okay, chummer, you got yourself a deal. So you got a name, or are you simply Mr. Johnson?"

The halfer smiled. "This may sound a bit dramatic, but you can refer to me as Ringmaster."



FRAYED FABRIC

POSTED BY: KELLAN COLT AND LOTHAN THE WISE

I got wrangled into this. I'm not complaining; I'm just saying that, while I'm putting all the data that got dumped on me into some nice little digital bites, I don't see why I'm doing it. This is some serious Plan 9 stuff and they have me compiling data from several hundred less reliable sources alongside my own research, and it irks me just a tad.

- ▶ KC wrote and compiled this. That is her gripe, not mine. I think she has a point, but the issue is more ambiguous than she pretends.
- ▶ Lothan the Wise

I've got several main areas of focus. I'll cover the big picture first, even though it looks like Dali and Seurat got together to paint it, and I haven't gotten far enough away to make out most of the details. Beyond that, I need to cover some places that appear to be hotspots, though I am under the impression these alchera and rifts can appear any-

where (more on that later). After the discussion of hotspots (a.k.a., potential work spots for runners), I'll cover what I know about the other side of the looking glass. The rifts and alchera are a menagerie of historical reflections, metaplanar gateways, astral portals, and what I call "void doors," best discussed away from the physical world hotspots because it appears some are reached from differing locations.

With that introduction, let us turn the page and open the proverbial book of madness. Ye who art weak of heart dare tread no further.

THE BIG FUZZY PICTURE

The name says a lot of it. I've got so much data and so many reports that sound like Chicken Little, I have had a hard time making heads or tails. I'll give you my thoughts here, but then I'm going

to drop some “straight from the horse’s mouth” bits and throw my best interpretations into the commentary. It’s a lot easier to make notes on the nuts than to try and explain their mad ramblings.

The big picture. For some inexplicable reason, despite a million claims to why, alchera and other mana rifts have been opening up around the world at a far greater rate than any other point since the Awakening. As I alluded, we don’t have anything close to concrete for the reason why, but we have hoards of speculations and assumptions. Enjoy it as it comes, and take it all with several thousand grains of salt.

Just in case.

I believe we are entering some form of mana-bending period. We don’t have great records of the previous cycles of mana, and those who lived through them tend to be stingy about what they share. Or, as I usually assume, they don’t remember, just like we don’t remember the bulk of events in our lifetime. This mana bending is enhancing localized mana events. My research has found no concrete connections among anything that is occurring, but a small portion of my data points to several of these events being manipulated by forces here on our physical plane.

Who? I have no clue. I do know that Wuxing has long been able to manipulate mana lines, as have several other megas and magical societies. That’s all general knowledge though. More direct evidence or conjecture is in my comments, which I should get to.

- › And I’ll pick up some of these threads in the “Bad Mojo” section of this download.
- › Elijah

MYSTICAL GEOGRAPHY

Across the entire breadth of my research and intel gathering, I can form only two conclusions: First, that these events can occur anywhere; and second, they don’t appear with any immediately discernible overall pattern. Some seem connected to the sun, some to the lunar phases; others match with planetary alignments, a few with historical dates; a handful match astrological readings; but the vast majority connect with nothing. They simply occur. All this is through our eyes—mine and my research associate’s—but we welcome more views with a wider angle in hopes of picking out a pattern or connection we missed.

Upload time.

◀ANTARCTICA CALANOR INTERCEPT▶

Dr. Carson, I regret to report very little activity at the Antarctic location to which we were dispatched. We have discovered the facility developed by your rival corp, though some details of their re-

cords do not match corporate standards and mention a secondary organization they were involved with. Details I will present when I return my full findings in person. For now, a few key points need be delivered to best utilize our assets and funds.

1. As suspected, the local manascape is severely depleted. Antarctica has a thinner-than-average manasphere, but it now seems barely present. This is not a fovea, but rather a thinning of the already-thin mana. The issue appears to be localized to the area of the base and returns to normal within a few kilometers.

2. The facility had no current research staff, only security. Obviously it was abandoned, but some evidence indicates the staff did not leave via standard transport. Security staff are sparse, and we had minimal contact during onsite investigations.

3. Data pulled from the security node indicates several aberrant events still transpiring over the past few months, since the research station was decommissioned. Event details are in my reports, but I will say each event involved an entity from outside our plane coming across.

4. The site being studied could not be accessed—it is buried under piles of rock, ice, and snow, to the point that the actual location is no longer easy to discern.

All this data brings me to point out it would be best to direct our resources to a more active location. With the data I have in hand, we should be able to locate our next viable research locale.

This report fulfills the first payment point of our contract. I’ll expect to find funds available during our return trip.

—Magellan

- › I’ve heard of Magellan but never met him. All I know is that he’s male, an ork, Ivy League-educated, and incredibly cautious. That said, no one has heard from him in a bit, and no data seems to have gotten back to his employers. Maybe he simply dropped off the data and gallivanted off to his next stop, but certain personal aspects of his endeavors were also not completed. Namely, no money was deposited with his daughter for her education. (I try to keep tabs on my colleagues who have good hearts.) All this is to say that there may be more going on down there than they thought, and someone may be trying to keep it quiet.
- › Kellan Colt
- › This particular location in Antarctica seems a dead end. That said, the rest of this fairly large continent is not explored and poorly scanned by satellites. Not to mention that the scans need to penetrate several kilometers of ice in places. I understand geological history and know that this region has in the past not always been a frozen wasteland. The thing is, when it wasn’t, metahumankind did not exist. That means artifacts and relics of

this time are either metaplanar or extraterrestrial or both. Just putting that out there.

I personally think digging around in the ice is a recipe for disaster.

- > Lothan the Wise
- > We have so much we could learn and advance from this, but the biggest problem is that it's all corporate. We need to work for the little guys, or at least the bigger guys who aren't solely focused on making money. Even the crazier ones—looking at you, Apep Consortium!—are better than any of the megas that just want to cash in. As long as the plan isn't “destroy the world,” then we need to look at who we help in matters like this.
- > Old Crow
- > I'm not opposed to “destroy the world” when it comes to a world run by the rich, the powerful, and those looking to exploit the common man. We have places available to us where we can learn how to live in a world not driven by greed. We should be focused there.
- > Neo-Anarchist

◀AMAZONIA PHILLIPPE PERAULT JOURNAL TRANSCRIPT▶

DAY 19:

Finally! After almost a fortnight of travel we have reached the coordinates of the mana nexus. Dr. Palhaptinay's efforts are not in vain. While I had hoped to arrive three days ago and take advantage of the full moon as the locals recommended, I must now wait. This is not the worst thing, as it will allow more time investigating the rumors offered by the locals along with examining any smaller events that may occur over the next month, since many speak of the arcane activity in this region.

We were delayed by a local tribe I did not recognize. A few artifacts left behind (i.e., an arrow left in the arm of one of our security detail) will be an excellent start for my studies. Today we set up camp, prepare an expedition and security schedule, and prepare for the coming weeks.

DAY 24:

We lost Dr. Palhaptinay to the attack today. I'm not sure how I feel about that—she was a physical comfort on cold nights. I'll need to process when I return home, but for now I must concentrate on the endeavor at hand. An effort like this requires no distraction.

Our security team was not able to identify the attackers, but they have collected data for the next time we have satellite access. They were well-armed and well-equipped, a positive as we have acquired their equipment and arms in our victory. They must have been sent by another corporation, but we do not know which. Speculation is high based on the branding of equipment and arms, but

even I know that can be a ruse. Our arcanists have taken physical samples from our assailants and plan to utilize a few rituals to attempt to garner more details, but they are concerned with the local manasphere. It has been erratic, and they feel it may be dangerous.

As for the attack itself, we were assaulted by four well-armed individuals with spiritual and drone backup. One was a female elf, two were humans with considerable cyberware, and the fourth was an ork who we suspect was an adept, but no one managed to assense him before he died. Our security detail was able to deal with the immediate threat but has not been able to locate the rigger in control of the drones or the arcane specialist who brought the spirits. Dr. Palhaptinay was hit by a stray round while she slept. Two members of the security detail were injured, but the automated weapons systems operated excellently.

As for the science of the mission, nothing new or exciting today.

DAY 30:

It has been a wild day! The new moon has not been a disappointment. The entire region has been active with a collection of astral windows and what appeared to be metaplanar openings. We sadly lack the resources to send forth explorers, but the few technological efforts we sent out provided information through both their success and failure.

The windows were confirmed by the arcanist staff and offered a glimpse of these jungles unlike anything I have seen before. Many of the security staff openly wept at the beauty of the astral here in the Amazon. It was truly glorious to see the life and energy present here. Such abundance, but science must always prevail, and for that we need objectivity. My objectivity, to be precise. While others stared in awe, I looked for the anomalies, the patterns, the details. In the end, I saw it all.

The region we seek to study is not like the rest of the rainforest in the region. There is some form of vortex there. I could see the subtle swirls of energy pulling toward it in the astral. I am excited for the full moon and appreciate the energies of the new moon for this revelation that I can look at with the arcanists until then. Possibly this will offer a point of focus for our searches and studies.

The portals also revealed the pattern of the rifts, a wide swirl that closed in on us. We are currently mid-cycle, but I fear for any group that may have set up camp along the line of the swirl during this peak. I will send a few teams out to scout tomorrow and see what their reports show about that ring of the swirl I could see. A blind study, obviously. Any information I provide them could skew their perception of the exploratory region. I debated warning them of hazards, as any trepidation on



their part could limit their success. I will see in the morning.

Finally, the region we seek and its power sit at the center of this vortex. It was not a glow, but a hum that I felt and it seems none of the arcanists were aware. My hypothesis is that they spend too much time reading auras and energies by “sight” and ignoring the other astral sensations. It is common among the magically inclined, as they are taught to associate astral perception with sight. I cannot tackle this as part of my current studies, but it could be the subject of a paper for a student. I’ll make a note elsewhere.

I grow more excited with this news. The site is awake and waiting for study.

DAY 32:

We awoke today to a jungle all around us. The area we had cleared for ourselves has rapidly re-grown overnight. The security detail on night watch described it as a slow creep at first, but every effort they made to cut it back resulted in a doubling of growth as cut ends rooted to the earth and sprouted new growth. The evening footage was extraordinary to review today. I wish we had a way to view it astrally, as I’m sure this was all powered by mana. The arcanist who was assigned to the night watch

fell ill shortly after watch began, and the regular security detail simply relieved him. It is an odd coincidence that I suspect is not coincidental at all.

Since the morning, the camp had been cleared again, and the jungle pushed back. No abnormal growth seems to have occurred during day. The sick arcanist is better after an evening of nightmares and vomiting.

I grow fearful as we approach the full moon that things will grow worse, but I also feel energized by the activity and presence of such power and energy. The mana is so strong here that even I can feel it. I want to ask about manipulating it, but I believe that would be silly.

I will say I feel the growth of the moon may have a connection to the growth here, but I need to send out more drones to make scans. Though I feel arcane scans would be better.

DAY 38:

We finally got a brief satellite signal yesterday. I was able to spend a few minutes scouring the Matrix for information to download. I managed a healthy bit of research before the signal cut out and I was dumped. I should never have entered fully, but it was faster. I’ve lost almost a day to the dumpshock.

The arrow we recovered from the arm of Daniel, the security team member, is extraordinary. The design, material, and style are ancient. Nothing similar has been utilized in this region in the bulk of recorded history. A small cache of similar arrows was found in a protected cave in the mid-'20s. They were dated back to some point in time BCE, before that dating was discarded as an error of some kind. The current arrows match these perfectly in dimension, design, and, most astonishing, feathers for fletching. The amazing part is, the feathers have never been identified with a known species.

Until now!

The birds that attacked us several days ago had long tail feathers that matched the pattern. Since our arcanists identified the birds as Awakened but extraplanar, we can only assume this tribe is also extraplanar, or at least in frequent enough contact with an extraplanar force to have used this bird's feathers as a regular construction material.

The day arrives in less than a week, and we will have a chance to seek answers for ourselves. Tomorrow, I am headed out to check out the strange stream that appears to be moving each night. I hope to find understanding, and I hope something more is happening than our security team being unable to read a map without technological assistance, which has proven unreliable of late.

DAY 41:

Our arcanists are gone. I'm not sure how I will study this, but I think they taught me enough. The moon is the key. Phases, astrology, angles, rises, falls. Luna is not the path to madness but instead the course to illumination. Wisdom in the clarity of pure thought rather than the placement of patterns from an old life. I will come from this a pure being or be obliterated peacefully in the errors of my perceptions. We cannot seek to know our past without erasing our present and embracing the times from which we came in a pure form.

The light of the full moon will cleanse me, and I will step onto the path of knowledge as a newborn, clear in mind and open to all ideas that are put before me in clear and present purpose.

- ▶ And then "Also sprach Zarathustra" played in the background.
- ▶ Cosmo
- ▶ I have studied cases where pure mundanes (those with no cyber or major injuries) often touch magic in places with unique arcane properties. This area may be one such location. The trouble is usually a lack of training. With only a small semblance of control to weave the spells, the risk of harming yourself is immense.

For a brief background, these entries were pulled from what remained of a burned and bloody journal traded to a fellow archaeologist who sent the data on to me. A local tribe acquired this and several other parts of the expedition's gear and traded it for supplies and sweets. The archaeologist who sent it to me

wasn't in the area for the same thing, but we nerdy types like to collect and distribute all sorts of data.

Based on how much of the journal remained after the last readable entry, I don't think the author made it to the full moon.

- ▶ Kellan Colt
- ▶ A likely scenario is a classic one. A person, in this case, our author, is touched by a power that drives him mad. This contact may have given him powers, or simply taken his mind. Many are driven mad by the touch of otherworldly powers, especially when the energies are derived from another metaplane. The mana coming across carries the astral signature of its native plane and does not merge well with ours.
- ▶ Lothan the Wise

◀AMAZONIA RIO DE JANEIRO NEWS REPORT KENDRA LAMB▶

Who speaks for the lost, their voices silenced by disinterest? That is a rough translation from the original Portuguese, but the meaning comes across. A meaning that has been scrawled on the favelas of Rio for months—but so few take notice of what goes on among the downtrodden.

This frequently seen tag does not signify the rise of a new gang or even a political movement—it is a call for help by the citizens of the favelas who have lost their family members to what they call "the nothing." This is not some corporate abduction plan, not a gang recruitment drive, and it is not some mass exodus for a better place. It's a dark phenomenon that no one seems to be willing to shine the light on.

I will risk the glares. Risk the animosity. Risk the retribution. I will speak for the lost.

The number likely approaches a thousand. I wish I were overestimating, but I'm likely far below the real tally. We have lost so many, but so many of us here are already lost. For our bodies to disappear is nothing, for our souls and standings are already gone. The difference here is that I have turned a seeing eye, no longer blinded, toward this eclipsing shadow. We do not fade but instead blink from the world.

Each day a few, a handful, maybe two (it depends on the day) disappear from the favelas. We are not taken by cartels or famine or drugs or even death. We are taken by *them*.

Them! You chuckle. So often the word is used by madmen. I am not mad. I simply have no better word to use. No better phrase. Those who bear witness have seen the events. They use "them" because few would lend credence to a tale that claims a narrow gash of blackness limned in a metallic silver glow writhes across the landscape and steals one figure after another.

I was not taken.

I have no touch of magic in my blood.

But those who were taken did. Most were well-known, others had hid their gifts from all but their

closest kin, and a few were only known as mundane but still held a spark within them.

And now they are gone.

That ribbon of energy must have been a gateway or rift, but only those who possessed magic could pass. Several scholars I have interviewed claim this is possible and that such a rift would have likely shifted them bodily into a metaplane—a new development in metaplanar functions. The nature of the plane or any other way to access or identify it have not been discovered, despite the efforts of several skilled mana weavers to read the energies around the disappearances and throughout the region where the ripple passed.

I don't care if others think I am mad or delusional. People need to know what is happening, even in the favelas. Those with the gift of magic beware these events. Avoid the region if you can, and get away if you see or hear of an event in your vicinity.

This is Kendra Lamb, reporting for Independent News Weekly.

> I get INW is a shadow news source and there is no reason to besmirch Ms. Lamb's rep, but this screams of corporate interference to keep this area thin on magic users. Maybe there's a secret lab they're worried about or something they've released to affect the mundanes, but no matter the reason, this could easily be a corporate deterrence effort.

Anyone know Lamb and able to confirm she wrote this willingly—or at all?

> Ire
 > This could very well be happening in other Z-zones where no one is paying attention. There isn't always a Lamb around when you need one. Keep your ears and eyes open for rumors of similar rifts near you.
 > Glitch

> A contact of mine just got back from a corp-sponsored metaplanar hop, and he mentioned a report that came in from another team. They hit up a plane that appeared barren but then spotted a settlement made of black crystal that throbbed with light and hummed with mana. One of the scouts reported seeing "people" before he went suddenly mad and charged back to the camp. He was mad with rage but succumbed to attacks quickly due to his exhaustion from running so far.

The team had no time to follow up, as they had other planes to visit, but they logged the encounter as an anomaly for another team to check out.

> Sapphire
 > I know Lamb. And she hasn't responded to any of my messages. I dug a little, and she went missing shortly after turning this article in to her editor. Had a friend dig on finances, and she hasn't touched the pay from this or made any Matrix transactions in over a week.
 > Plan 9

> Over two weeks. Her last few payments have been automated rent and grid access. They recur monthly.
 > Plan 10
 > Can't you two just share that with each other?
 > Stone
 > They're in a bit of a tiff.
 > Glitch
 > Lamb's report, along with several others I've seen and chosen not to share, suggests that the same phenomenon now occurring in the favelas is also happening in other places around the world. The events don't always match up, but the numbers of missing persons, extrapolated to then include the SINless, has certainly increased recently. Disappearances are always hard to pinpoint, and the causes could be myriad and unrelated, but the reports consistently describe a magical effect that might be an astral gateway or localized alchera.
 > Kellan Colt
 > I placed most of my focus when looking at events surrounding this on the potential influencers behind the scenes. While few details or specifics can be garnered, the similarities in events and descriptions point to a single force behind these events. I have managed to rule out most of our most well-known arcane manipulators as the culprits, as my sources occasionally mention they are at odds with events that are occurring or are contracting investigations into the matters. I can not fully dismiss the involvement of the Black Lodge, IOND, Apep Consortium, and Draco Foundation, but I can, with some certainty, claim they are not the instigating force behind these events.
 > Lothan the Wise

◁A TRIP TO THE VOID: VOLCANICASH▷

Just wanted to offer a little heads-up for a strange little thing going on out there in Puyallup. There's a "dealer" who goes by the name of Blackness offering a unique experience that some people are using like a drug. It's described by most who go as a vast blackness, not unlike a sensory deprivation tank, but with a heady euphoria making you giddy and tingly while making you feel like you're completely outside your body. A few people I've talked to with chronic pain issues even claim to feel free of pain while they're gone.

Getting in touch with Blackness isn't straightforward, as she moves around a lot, but conversation with the right street types will get you pointed in the proper direction. I know a few names to get you started—hit me on PM.

You'll know it's the real Blackness if you can't see her but you can *see* her. It's weird, but you'll understand when you meet. There's some arcane fluff going on around her that makes seeing her

straight on impossible, but from just off the edge of your focus she looks like an inky, black-hooded figure. It's very grim reaper-esque, but the creepy factor goes away once you're in her presence.

So if you're looking for a new and unique high, drop me a line, and I'll get you on the right path.

- > That's a lot of mojo to make all of that happen. I'd say free spirit rather than mage. I get that the reality of it is confirmed, but what about any details on what's really going on? Is this just a magical high, or is this spirit actually sliding people into another metaplane?
- > Slamm-0!
- > This one seems to be a unique astral experience. Blackness must add some form of euphoric spell to the shift. Most people with chronic pain who have experienced astral space can still feel their internal pain. For some, the lack of sensation makes it better, but for others it is suddenly infinitely more painful, as it becomes the only thing they feel.
- > Kellan Colt

<TRANSCRIBED SPEECH FROM A BELIEVER: IRE>

The Glow will redeem. The Glow will protect. The Glow will transport. Behold the day of reckoning. Our final phase as the Glow finally opens the veil to our true destiny. The course has been laid out, and only the true believers shall be given way into the heart of the Glow. Faith for the wanderers is rewarded with the holy green path. Fear not the glowing gateway, as it is your salvation. Step forth into the light and the love of the almighty Glow.

We have long known the truth of the name of our home, and others will finally see that Glow City was not some moniker of shame placed on our holy land by those who fail to see the glory of radiation, but instead a touch of the inspiration of the Glow to lead its true followers to the land of their salvation and redemption.

If you believe, walk the streets, seek the shining path, and step into the Glow.

- > This was fun. Dealing with wackjobs always is. This is one of the leads I confirmed for K, since I spend a decent amount of time in this region anyway and there was another interested party willing to offer a few rent payments for my eyes on this band of weirdos.

I can confirm they are not entirely crazy, and they wander around the Glow City area of Redmond looking for glowing portals. When they open up, each one grabs a nearby "believer" (or, more properly, an innocent bystander) and rushes in like a madman before it closes. They're almost always led by one of "The Returned" who orchestrates the efforts and keeps the madness burning.

From what I've found, The Returned are always worshippers who have crossed over and come back. Every one of them has a unique signature on their aura that I haven't linked to any specific spell or person, and none of them are willing, or able, to be taken alive. I suspect some aspect of that signature is a suicide spell, but I have not been able to analyze it in depth.

- > Ire

<AIN'T JUST ONE WIZARD IN THIS OZ: TINMAN>

Most people know that Seattle is referred to as the Emerald City due to the massive amount of greenery around town. The nickname also pervades our Matrix and apparently has now become so ingrained into the mythos of the city that a metaplanar reflection exists that takes the tales of Frank Baum and twists them to better match the physical geography of Downtown Seattle.

This metaplane has become increasingly reachable in recent months; some speculate it has to do with the newfound independence of the metroplex, and more and more Seattleites are coming back with astonishing tales. So many so that my entrepreneurial spirit has me looking to build a business out of this newfound, close-to-home tourist destination. The problem is, I need a more consistent method of access. I heard you may have a line on a few individuals who have the ability to open or sustain specific metaplanar gateways.

I'd like to meet up and discuss this venture further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Charles Tinman

- > This was me again. I dug into Tinman and OZ, and both are legitimate. Tinman, though, is shady on a street-scum level. He's a two-bit street hustler working an arc with as many angles as he possibly can. This was one of a couple dozen messages he put out there to find people who could offer insight into the pattern of the rifts that roam downtown Seattle and offer access. He managed to make a few solid connections out of it, but clients have been the struggle for him. He's decent enough in text but in person he gives off the used car salesman vibe.

As for OZ ... well, it is quite the wonderland on the other side of the looking glass. The heart of OZ reflects the Downtown district, with several other districts gaining their own unique reflections. The reflections on the metaplane aren't just about the place. Several iconic gangs are reflected within the OZ metaphor as well.

- > Ire
- > The district reflection goes all the way to the edges, which contain corrupt lands not unlike our own Puyallup and Redmond as well as a wildland surrounding the city. Thrill-seekers often come over and head for these areas, including those seeking highs unique to this metaplane.
- > Lyran

◀TRIPPING REDMOND PLANESENDER INFO BY RAE WOLF▶

I got a chummer who has been offering a bit of work out on the outskirts of Redmond, near Fall City. It doesn't pay well, but the work is worthy. Since the pay is low, as a little favor, I got the lowdown on the targets they are trying to get rid of.

So you know you're on the right gig, it will come through a standard Mr. Johnson, but he'll be young and likely bear some native features. Job should come in as a basic intimidation gig. Most teams get the drug-dealer pitch to tug some of the few heartstrings out there. After agreement, you get the lowdown.

The target is referred to as Planesender. Best guess is a free spirit or something similar. If they like you, they'll refer you here if that's not how you got the gig in the first place. They assume there is more than one Planesender, but they just want one of them intimidated on their current dime. It's more of a temporary chase off than a permanent solution—in fact, if they danced around the notion of something permanent and you're thinking of offing Planesender, *don't*.

Might as well get to the why on that now. Planesender is in fact a spirit, or more than one. They can powerfully mask their aura, and no one the First Nations (that's your real employer) can afford will be breaking through. This means it could be one, could be a bunch. They all play dumb and offer the best trip of your life in exchange for leaving them alone. Don't take the trip.

Everyone who has come back, and some people haven't, comes back different. I'm not saying Monad or bug spirit different, but different. A craving for sweets has been the most common oddness I've noticed.

Planesender works around that same Fall City region, right on the NAN border. Its operations seem to tie into specific locations in the area. I know three, but there are rumors of at least ten. Each location supposedly offers a different trip. Meaning each place offers a different metaplanar portal Planesender knows how to use.

Intimidating Planesender seems easy, but it keeps popping back up. If you've got some free time and want a little scratch to track down this thing and toss a little intimidation its way, hit up the First Nations. They'll definitely return your call.

If you happen to take a gig and feel like tossing up a little report, drop it with the bartender at Under Construction—he'll know where to send it.

- ▶ The Nations are working for this thing. They "hire" runners, and even if just one in twenty takes the trip, they're good.
- ▶ Kid Kaos

- ▶ Interesting viewpoint, Kid. Hit the streets and back it up with fact.

This one alarms me on several levels. The cooperation of a group of free spirits is rarely beneficial to metahumankind. Most free spirits are in it for themselves and require some strange things from those who serve them.

The number of available gateways in that very clustered region is also disheartening. Especially when you consider it's a rather destitute region, which to me means they are seeking easy prey or a level of anonymity from authorities. Either, again, is not a thing beneficial to most.

The First Nations are likely in need of more professional help. We should at least look a little more deeply into this in relation to the other increase in events we are discussing here.

- ▶ Kellan Colt
- ▶ With the mention of the infamous Under Construction and their "bartender," a man most know is a former runner who went by Jake, this individual is already connecting with some power players in the area. If the threat is real, I'm sure there are a few individuals in that area Jake can reach out to for greater assistance.
 - Beyond that, Kellan's concerns mirror my own, and I have no reason to repeat things.
- ▶ Lothan the Wise
- ▶ We all like to operate in places with limited authority and access to easy prey. Not saying this Planesender is some benevolent anarchist, but painting it as an enemy doesn't seem fair.
- ▶ Neo-Anarchist
- ▶ Leeriness keeps more runners alive than kindness.
- ▶ Kellan Colt
- ▶ I'm not sure it's related, but the streets whisper of a connection between Planesender and a local pack of ghouls. We all know, sadly, ghouls are a great way to dispose of bodies. It's a whisper, but it's out there and it's better to know than not know you might turn into ghoulish chow if you cross this thing or something goes wrong on your trip.
- ▶ Hannibelle

◀GHOST FLIGHT: GETTING RESEARCHERS IN THE AIR: LANCASTER JONES▶

FORT LEWIS, SEATTLE FREE METROPLEX

If you've been keeping a keen eye on this reporter's work, you'll remember my exclusive report on the Ghost Flight. Yesterday, for the fifth time in as many weeks, the Seattle Metroplex Air Force scrambled aircraft against an incoming flight formation of small aircraft alongside a matched force of aircraft from the Salish-Shidhe. While the first two events were met with panic and fear that someone was out for a little explosive retribution against the newly recognized nation-city, this last event saw six non-attack aircraft scrambled in the mix. While the brass still launched attack craft as

a show of force and to demonstrate they take all threats to the sovereign airspace of the metroplex seriously, these six additional craft trailed the lead sortie by several kilometers and only moved in to engage once the coast was clear.

This reporter was on scene for this amazing investigation of such a unique arcane event.

As we approached, I was limited to watching the radar screen. I was astonished at the precision of both the radar system and the piloting of the incoming aircraft. Thirteen small green dots moved in perfect unison on the screen from the moment we activated the system. Lieutenant Dan Toliver of the SMAF reported that the flights maintain that perfect formation throughout their flight each time they appear, only breaking the formation as they near land.

Once the all-clear came from the fighters, they broke off, and the research group headed in. I was then allowed to move to the observation bubble in the specially modified research aircraft. I watched as the small dots in the distance grew slowly, and I gained a much greater perspective than my earlier flight. This time, there was no evasive flying or fast flybys on our part. We sat above their approach and then matched their pace.

It was a marvel to watch. Just as each time before, thirteen World War II-era Mitsubishi A6M “Zero” fighters cruised along over the Pacific headed toward the Olympic Peninsula and the heart of Downtown Seattle. The craft flew in a perfect double-diamond formation and cruised along at 370 kph. The event was astonishing but shifted to truly surreal as the aircraft reached the coast over the Salish-Shidhe Council near North Bay. As the group approached North Bay, they dove rapidly to just one hundred meters above the water. Looking down through the formation out at sea everyone commented on the slight haze or shift of the water beneath, but as the craft reached land, we understood why, as landscapes and cities shifted below.

While this event had been classified as an astral phenomenon—a mobile and flying alchera, to be specific—standard photography was able to capture the shifted images, and brief analysis has the landscape dated back to the early 1940s, though analysts think they can narrow the time down to a span of a few months with time for image comparison. It was like a glimpse into the past. But in what past did this event occur?

The flight shifted their pattern to a tight trailing formation and began zipping along through the bay before sliding northeast to head for the cover of the canyons on the Olympic Peninsula.

At this point, radio chatter was distracting as none of the previous events came this far. All of the previous flights had flown into a cloud before the coastline and simply vanished. Our research flight tried to refuse commands to back off, but several of the Salish escort fighters made strafing

runs at the Zeros, coming uncomfortably close to our Ospreys. The attacks appeared to puncture the aircraft, but they quickly returned to their pristine former status.

As our research crew peeled off, I saw a fog bank roll up from the tree line. We paused long enough to get footage of the Ghost Flight entering the fog bank before disappearing from sight and radar.

What is this phenomenon? When will its full flight course be revealed? Did this really happen?

So many mysteries, so many forces arrayed to hide the truth.

Donate [<here>](#) to fund my private investigations! The truth will be revealed.

- > Flying alchera are not unknown, but an alchera that is so concentrated and moving that quickly is unheard of. I've tossed some nuyen Lancaster's way with a request for early details or any details he leaves out of his published news.
- > Kellan Colt
- > The flight idea was very corporate, including the MCT logos plastered on the sides of the Ospreys, but I found drones to be a bit better. Working for someone other than MCT, I took a contract to run a set of drones into the flight formation. I lost the signal on two of them as the flight passed through them, but they came back online as they passed, still hovering in the same spot as when they left. Footage confirms some kind of temporal shift, though as we all understand, it's not actual time travel, just a reflection. Right? I have plans for another effort when it appears again and could send a few private updates.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > I'm sure nothing survived the Crashes but maybe there's a historical record of this happening. Maybe worth looking into to get an idea about what happened.
- > Glitch

<THE GOOD OLD DAYS: STANLEY WRIGHT>

Hey friends, have I got an opportunity for you. I'm Stan, and I've been right where all of you are right now. I've been down. I've been pushed aside by society. I've been savvy in my survival. I know the story of days without eating and savoring the wretched tartness of devil rat because it was eat or be eaten, and the rat lost out. We could swap tales all day long out here in the drizzle, but I'd rather swap them in the warmth of a nice pleasant home, with a fire in the hearth and a fridge full of real food.

I hear the groans. I do. And I see the skeptics, because I was once a skeptic too. When I first heard this, all I heard was “corporate experiment in need of guinea pigs.” They got me on my worst day, and it turned into my best day. You all see me up here. Nice clean clothes, clean shave, and a decent little trim of this mop top. Only a little, though—I had

to keep my signature hairstyle. This is me now. You all remember me then, right? I prefer not to get into the infrequency of baths, the lack of shaving toiletries, and—well, I'll just admit now—my hair hadn't been washed since Big D bought the big one, but that was me. I took the chance to follow another of our lost-then-found sisters, and now I'm happy to help more of us find the kind of comfort we have.

So, who here would like to get off these streets and into some homes on streets without can fires? Who wants a white picket fence instead of barb-wire-topped chain link? Who's ready to trade their tent for a three bedroom with a pool and a grill out back?

I'll let those who are walking away now waddle back to the misery I used to know. Those of you still standing here, I can see you've got an interest. You may still be skeptical, but at least you're willing to listen a little more. But I don't want you to listen right now. I want you to go for a ride with me. I can talk all day long and never get all the way through your skeptical mind, but a short ten-minute drive, and I can show instead of tell, and you can all decide for yourselves.

So, who among you is willing to take that step, take that chance and find a little slice of heaven after all the hell we've survived?

▶ Stanley Wright is better known to runners in Redmond as Stinky Stan. He used to be a squatter who lives around the Plastic Jungle. He recently cleaned up his act somehow, and this is what he's doing now. The video we pulled this transcript from showed him talking to about thirty collected squatters. He lost half early on and then some more a little later, but in the end he walked off with six of them. The person who did the recording said he hasn't seen any of those squatters return to the area, but that's not a huge surprise if they moved to a different squat in Redmond.

For a little cursory investigation, I went and listened to a similar speech and watched almost twenty other squatters leave with him as word on the street is spreading that his offer is the real deal. These are just rumors, and he could be spreading them himself, but his numbers are growing, and not knowing what is happening to all these squatters is a little disconcerting. I haven't heard of any nearby communes being formed or anything like that, and there is nowhere within ten minutes of any of these spots with "white picket fences."

That led me to connect with Kellan and discuss the possibility of this involving some kind of astral or metaplanar event. Based on recent rises in such events, it is certainly a possibility. No less likely than many of my other hypotheses. If there is a mass exodus of squatters heading off to some unknown location for some unknown arcane reason, I would increase my concern level from "a little disconcerting" to "full-on worry." We've had incidents of metahumans being used by metaplanar beings before, and anyone with any street experience knows how poorly that all works out.



I don't have the resources or talents to take this investigation further, but I figured tossing my comments and initial findings on here was a decent start. I am also completely scrazzed by the fact that I'm putting a post on JackPoint. Ahoy, chummers, I'm out here if you need me.

- > Seattle Sleuth
- > Mid-stream break time!

There are enough reports from Seattle alone that I was able to pull up a number of retired assets to report and analyze what was coming my way and even report back on whether or not the story appeared to be true. If they made it into the collection above, someone talented signed off on it. Everything south of here has yet to be investigated alongside the hundreds of other files I got that I have not even bothered to load.

- > Kellan Colt

<SHADOW THIEF: E-STREET ALVIN>

To Whom It May Concern,

I'd like to report several missing persons: Squigg, Miss Jinx, Debbie Downer, T-Rex, Johnny Mouth, Smelly Mel, Hot Scott, Darryl Red, Darryl Black, and Cross-Eyed Larry were all abducted by the shadow man. I'm sorry this report took so long to offer; it's not easy coming to the authorities. I couldn't be certain the shadow man was not a corporate ruse, but now I have seen this monster and it is no man of meat, metal, or magic. This is a creature that steals souls, and my friends are its latest victims.

Please send an investigative force to the region of Avondale. Once we've seen you making efforts to locate the shadow man and rescue our lost comrades, we will come forward and offer our assistance to your endeavors.

Thank you for your time and impending assistance,

—E-Street Alvin

<THE FLOWS OF TIME: LOSTGYRL>

My family disappeared without a trace last week. I'm trying to be calm and neutral and let the authorities (who are doing nothing) do their jobs and look into these and all the other families that disappeared last week, but I have done a small amount of digging in my calm state. Several local witnesses watched a large lava flow with an odd blue glow pour into the area. There was no heat or direct damage, but the lava filled the space that was our small community. A community we have chiseled from the existing rock left from the real eruptions. A few claim this mana-lava to have burned all these people to ash, but that doesn't "feel" right. Not that my feelings are perfect.

I just needed to put this out there and help process my feelings a little bit. We lost them somehow, and I don't feel totally disconnected from them, something I've experienced in the past due to my

slight hint of magic. I don't know what's going on, but I know something is up.

- > The eruptions are alchera. They've been going on for several months now. Smaller at the start, but growing over time. Several of them now flow into areas that the original lava flows never reached.
- > Sounder

<DESPERATELY SEEKING SETTER: AN OLD FRIEND>

I've got no one else to turn to at this point. I don't have time to apologize for every way I've wronged you. I can't give you back the time you lost in that cell. I can't make up for the damage done to your street rep with the Wolves. All I can do is reach out a hand in need and hope that the brotherhood we once shared is enough to get some help. And if you don't want to do this for me, do it for Candyce, as she's fallen prey to this cult.

The hardest part is to once again put you at odds with Darius Haynes, now Sgt. Haynes. Haynes was on some kind of op out east when he fell off the grip for a stint. He popped back into the ranks just before the independence shake-up and got himself a nice cushy spot at Fort Lewis with the Seattle Metroplex Army. Now, he's been convincing other members of his unit and others at Fort Lewis to join some kind of cult. I don't know the details, I just know that when they meet Haynes privately, they come back different. I need you, and any buddies you can call in favors from in your line of work. I got a decent sign-on bonus when the Metroplex transitioned to a nation-city. It's sitting in an account, and it's all yours if you can figure out what's happening and stop Haynes from continuing to lay his cult's roots in my precious brotherhood.

<GHOST RIDERS IN THE SNO. CITIZEN S>

I have never seen anything like this before. I was cruising down the 405 up in Sno-Ho when a rumble started to come up out of some heavy fog that had been rolling in. I wasn't moving fast, so it was easier to keep an eye on the rearview. Something started to take shape in the fog behind me—ghostly riders on bikes made of mist, their eerie headlights weaving in and out of traffic. It was crazy. I thought *I* was crazy the first time I saw it: Four of them took the corners of a car, their headlights flashed bright—and then all of a sudden, the car and three of the bikes were gone.

It happened two times behind me, then they skipped past me as they chased down some hot-rodder in a Phoenix who cut through the center lane. I watched their lights fade into the fog ahead, though I did see a few more flashes before they were gone. It was absolutely crazy, and I have no idea what kind of magic was going on, and I didn't identify the logo or colors of the bikers as

they passed in the haze. It was just a really cool experience I wanted to post up here on the Matrix. I'll cruise the 405 more often and see if I can upload some video.

◀SMSSO WARNING▶

The Seattle Maritime Security and Safety Office has issued a warning to all boaters and short-range air transports traveling among the islands of Outermer. In recent months, several unexpected arcane events have arisen within the waters of the sound. These events create reflections of islands that do not last and risk leaving visitors stranded. Please follow and operate only within the SeaGuide system, which contains verifiable satellite and geological data. Any incidents occurring outside of these authorized waters will result in the cancellation of any and all legally binding insurance, safety, and security contracts.

- > You put a warning to keep people from drowning? Kellan, why is this here?!
- > Bull
- > The islands that pop up are not just a drowning risk. Several individuals have gone missing. Maybe they just drowned, but these are alchera. If one of these phantom islands disappears and takes your astral self with it, your corporeal form is fish food. These islands have had several explorers stop in for visits of a safe duration, and the variety of environments that have been identified across them is interesting. A few true jungles, a crystal castle, a small series of villages, a reflection of an inverted Space Needle, and several other less extraordinary but equally interesting sites have been studied on the islands.
- > Kellan Colt
- > All of the events above are unextraordinary from a singular perspective. Magic may not be common, but it is commonly known to exist. These events are the standard events we have been studying for decades. The strangeness of them is simply a matter of the ignorance of those experiencing them. We should keep the focus on the danger of these events, and the potential that they are linked and occurring for some unknown and potentially nefarious reason.
- > Lothan the Wise

◀DENVER DELVING: KELLAN COLT▶

I truly thought the rift troubles in Denver were done for when several arcane sources reported on the collapse of Zebulon. This tragedy has been explained and detailed by others, so I don't plan to go into it here, but it was what seemed to be a key point in settling metaplanar rifts in the Front Range Free Zone. Things were briefly peaceful in terms of these rifts and ripples, but rumors and sightings surged again awhile back. Ghostwalker was still busy solidifying his power and these events either went unnoticed, were unimportant to

him, or were of his own making and thus they have continued unabated.

I have experienced a few events firsthand and can offer some insight to my experience, but the bulk of my intel is still secondhand. I have this bit from myself here at the top, followed by items from my most trusted associates, trailed by stuff from the classic "friend of a friend," and then I wrap up with street rumors. I only put those here because the world we live in never seems to keep normal as the baseline. If you had told me a decade ago that AIs were going to be writing themselves onto people's brains, I would have directed you to a shrink or a B-rate trid director, but alas, Monads were real and they're just one chapter in the book of weird that has been the Sixth World.

The fall of the Mile-High Realm, as Denver's reflection metaplane is known, did not destroy the realm. The city of Denver still stands, as does its metaplanar reflection, but the sense of order in the place has diminished. The loss of the tower at the heart of the realm with the destruction of Zebulon created a ripple that left many of the lower sectors in disarray. The recent changes made by Ghostwalker didn't help as the astral echo of bringing down the sectors has warped the barriers between the sections of the Mile-High Realm as well.

As many of the rifts that are occurring in Denver now lead directly to this metaplane, I decided to do some investigating of my own. I have been to the Mile-High Realm several times, both before and after the collapse of Zebulon. The place was a wonder, with excitement to be had in many forms along with rewards worth the risks. Not really the point here, but a glimpse of what makes what is all that much more horrifying.

The new realm is a blur of the previous sectors, with denizens of each flowing and moving among them all while they set up what seems to be a new hierarchy. Several factions have developed in the realm, and they're fighting for the top seat. I have noticed none of them can truly destroy each other, but they can weaken one another through war and trickery. From what I can tell, none of them have any support or connection to Ghostwalker, and there is at least one faction from each of the previous sectors, even the Black Canyon. Politics and conflict seem to be the main tale these days, but I caught a rumor that seemed out of place. There are two factions within the realm that are not native. There is some kind of dissonant cult and a collection of astral travelers who are working within these political and physical conflicts.

At first I was confused by the dissonants, thinking they had something to do with technomancy, but it's simply a similar word usage. They seem small but are politically savvy and apparently have connections to other planes. They're using this multimetaplanar access as leverage to get more power, but they are directly opposed by the Veil.

The Veil is the group of metaplanar travelers from our plane. Despite our connection, they were standoffish with me and not very forthcoming with information. They were generally polite but inferred that I might be an agent of the dissonants, operating for them, from our plane, and trying to disrupt the successes of the Veil in the Mile-High Realm. I would have moved them down to the crazies section, but they were deeply convinced that there was some kind of metaplanar conspiracy going on, and the dissonants were simply the agents on this plane.

In an effort to gain favor with the Veil, I did a little poking around and discovered something. The dissonants operate a series of locations within the Mile-High Realm that have direct connections to locations in the Denver metroplex. Astral gateways open frequently at these sites. After each opening, the dissonants carry off a large chest and deliver it to a location near where the central tower once stood. I haven't managed much more info as I didn't have the resources to dig deeper, but efforts are in the works.

I managed to uncover a connection in Denver to the Veil. The individuals who are working so hard to protect the Mile-High Realm were victims, or were related to victims, of the rifts that affected Denver recently. Their resistance efforts on the physical side gained some traction, as the population here is much greater than in the Mile-High Realm, and Denver, even with its wild subcultures, does not have the style and cultural distinctions that are so easily discernible in the Mile-High Realm. It's hard to imitate these unique cultures without extended exposure or tremendous skill, neither of which I had.

Back in Denver proper, it was easier to run a little investigation and start looking into potential Veil members. As I said, the majority have some connection to the events prior to the collapse of the Mile-High Realm. The primary motivator among them seems to be a mix of fear and revenge. They were harmed by the events in Denver and are now desperately trying to discover the truth behind what happened to them. The fear comes from someone or something that is targeting them specifically and has been since shortly after the rift events.

My hunt for this mysterious hunter has led toward some kind of cult. I don't have a name and don't have a lot of details, but I know they focus on metaplanar events. Even though a name has managed to escape me, I have heard some reference to "dis" but assumed it is a shortening of dissonants from the Mile-High Realm. To keep digging would require more resources and different resources than my skillset provides. I have no problem running around and digging in arcanoarchaeology, artifacts, and other arcane wonders, but this stuff certainly seems the realm of runners with skillsets a bit more varied than my own.

Speaking of which: As a final note here, the events and actions of this dissonant group are organized. *Very* organized. They are being utilized by a shadow network of some kind. On one of my few toe-dippings into the genuine shadows, the team I contracted found a collection of messages in at least twenty different languages. I'm a middle North-Am girl, and most of my counterparts speak one language: bad English. I've got a few under my belt but twenty? Not even close. The Matrix did a solid job of translating, but plenty of stuff looked like it was in code. Point is, this stuff is bigger than Denver, it's bigger than one metaplane. I'm sure I'll say it again once I compile all this, but this is serious. We've got something playing out that could be another Chicago, could cost us another Boston, or could be another Tehran. It all depends on what this group wants from us. They want something. We just need to find out what.

- I forgot I wrote that last bit. I was definitely in the deep dive part of paranoia. I'm still convinced it's big, but I think we might all be able to see that. After everything that's happened, I think the shadow community might actually be able to get together and protect the world, instead of just profiting off of it.
- Kellan Colt
- Really? The shadows are all about profit. We aren't some gallant group of anti-heroes out to save the world in our own unique way. We're profiteers. Why do we have to suffer through this drive? It was bad enough someone put together that "hooder" garbage download last year—can we stop pretending we're heroes and just get back to sharing profitable data so we can get rich and retire on the corporations' dimes?
- Clockwork
- Vive la différence.
- X-Prime

◀ HEARD IT FROM A FRIEND: TOLTHUS ▶

Since I fall into the desired category, I managed to get an offhand comment directed at me about Ghostwalker hiring a ton of arcane talent. It was a well-known local fixer, and I'm sure the offer would have been legitimate, but the questions immediately came to mind about what a great dragon needs one or even a hundred meta-human magicians for that they can't do themselves. Sure, the White Wurm can't be everywhere at once, but any problem he was looking to deal with is above and beyond the scope and skill of most of the arcane talent on the streets of Denver. Sure, a small cadre of a few dozen of the best in the city might be able to play a small part in whatever Machiavellian machination this is, but the majority of talent that answers the call would likely be under-skilled and overconfident. The usual tale of the street mage.

After the mention, I poked around and got little more than a crumb. Something big is going down, but the wyrm is tight-snouted and those hired are smart enough to not get eaten. He's apparently teaming mages with local free spirits, and the majority of the work is not being done on our metaplane. Other than that, they gave me nothing except a comm number to call to get in on the action.

- › This sounds like metaplanar strike teams with a free spirit to open the door and a group of arcane hardhoops stepping into the firing line. I just hope anyone who signed up got this briefing beforehand. Hate to see most anybody walk into a slaughter.
- › Ire
- › Anyone else see this as suspicious? Ghostwalker starts tossing local magical talent off into faraway metaplanes using his spirit lackeys. This looks an awful lot like culling the magical herd. He could definitely be cutting out the arcane talent in Denver in order to consolidate his power base.
- › Plan 10
- › Paranoia is great, keeps most of us alive, but if you don't have facts, keep your speculation to the side chats and off the main post. I'll leave that line because it's Plan 10, but the four dozen that came in after got scrubbed. Just in case it was a mistake, beware the albino lizard people who are looking to take over the city once they land their spaceship.
- › Glitch

◁STRAIGHT TO THE POINT: DAGGER▷

I got word from a local contact on a rather unique opportunity in the city. This individual got word of a fixer in Denver that got a multipart contract involving the mapping, tracking, and creation of metaplanar portals across the FRFZ. He was happy with the nuyen but unhappy with the contractor and thus decided to put some of those resources back into discovering the source of the contract. It wasn't exactly the most straightforward investigation, and he didn't manage to come up with a lot of leads, but throughout his contractors' efforts, they kept seeing a reference to something called "dis." KC shared her dissonant's intel, and he's trying to reconcile the two, but he hasn't come up with any solid connections yet.

From what he was willing to share, I got a portion of a ritual that uses sacrifice magic to sustain metaplanar gateways as well as hold alchera in place for longer than intended. The resulting extension of their stay seems to have had an adverse effect on the surrounding manascape. The alchera starts to pull mana from the surrounding regions into itself in order to sustain its presence beyond its normally allotted expiration. The larger the alchera, the greater the sacrifice, and the more mana it pulls from the local region.

- › I really wanted to push this one down into the crazy stories pile, but the connection is solid. Plus, I've investigated two of these on the back end and found it all true. The potential damage on a large scale is a bit terrifying. I would hope others are able to realize how toxic a path this is, but money and power are hard to look past for the average runner. Consider the long term. All that money will be worthless in a global catastrophe, and that is what things like this could lead to down the road.
- › Kellan Colt

◁FROM THE MINDS OF MADNESS ? MAYBE?: KELLAN COLT▷

Cut-and-paste ahead—beware. “Our lord and savior, the high energy of the universe, the grand light in the heavens, the one and only true guide to salvation, shows us the way. As he once came forth from the ether, he shall guide his newly anointed realm to this existence of bliss and joy. Follow the signs. Seek the portals and pathways. Empower the master and walk the righteous path. We will find our way now on the wings of our White Lord.”

This was a post attached to a rather well-programmed icon of a glowing Ghostwalker flying over Denver, followed by Denver transforming into a beautiful white crystal city. The post got a bunch of comments, and from what I could discern it was all about GW working with all these events and anomalies in order to move the FRFZ over to the metaplane he was trapped on in order to make it his new home. Some craziness about links between the realms were in there and talking about how the two would become one and the physical would touch the metaplanar “in perpetuity” (seriously, who says that). It was crazy blabbering, but it touched on enough current events that I think maybe, just maybe, it might hold a touch of reality.

Again, cut and paste. “We can't keep waiting and watching. We can't just sit back as the waves crash onto our shore and slowly erode the beach that is our existence. We have, for years, sat back and let Ghostwalker make the Front Range Free Zone a prison for those of the flesh, while it is only truly free for the spirits he pampers. Stop your slavery. Flee these mountains of tyranny before he sells our souls for the return of his precious Zebulon. We are not fodder or slaves—we are metahumanity. The dragons are powerful, but they are not without a metahuman match. Remember the Jester. Remember the fall of Dzitbalchén and Sirurg. The non-presidency of Dunkelzahn. They are not indestructible. We can bring them down, and we do not need to be their slaves. Stand up, Denverites. Fight, if your heart yearns for it, but leave if it does not. For if you choose to stay, you choose a life of servitude as our monstrous master trades us to his spectral minions.”



I felt something while reading this. I'm not driven to run or fight, I'm just driven to see why someone would think these things. What led them to this point? I'm sure madness sometimes plays a part, but this person's words weren't scrawled in an alley—they were skillfully broadcast across the Denver grid. They were neatly dropped in AR tags across the 'plex. They supplanted the scoreboards across several professional sports games. This person is savvy—or has savvy friends. And while I've met plenty of mad hackers, I've met few who take their madness from mana rather than from the digital monsters they face each day.

The other thing about this message is the groups it's attracting. Anti-dragon groups are flocking to the message. Anti-magic groups as well. They're building popularity with a wide array of people who are going to use this message to their own ends. Pro-technology groups are using it as a post to build animosity against a world that has become focused on magic as the only route to power. It's too easy a route to build separation and hatred between our differences. Ugh. I sound like one of them. I'm not, but I can so easily see how the corporations and those in power seek to exert their control on the people.

This one just seemed like another potential connection to these rifts and these events. Or maybe it's just another bit of crazy popping up in this Sixth World of ours.

AFRICAN DREAMS

This work came from a myriad of sources, and I want more eyes helping me suss out the depth here. The dark continent appears to be deep in the heart of this. I'm confused as to why the evidence does not point in a firm direction, but maybe with enough eyes looking at all this, we can come up with something. For now, I just know that a lot of different reports are coming in from Africa. It is the sparsity of major cities and massive natural abundance that makes me think there may be even more going on in the depths of darkest Africa. If the shadows are a great place to hide, the dark continent is even better.

From my basic overview of all this, the massive abundance of mana combined with the aforementioned sparsity of civilization is making Africa the perfect place to open pathways to the metaplanes with only a few the wiser. I will say that the abundance of old cultures that held to their sacred ways and came to magic with ease at the Awakening are wiser, but their numbers are limited and their reach short. I gathered much of my African data personally, and I know these cultures often fight the efforts of whatever has been bridging our worlds. The shadows have allies, but the growing power of the corporations on this continent, while perpetually funding the shadows, is strangling these old cultures.

From what I have seen, most of these ancient cultures need—but do not want—our help. We stand to bridge the two worlds, but so many of those in the shadows stand firmly in the modern realm. I'm not one to preach, but if any of you spend any time working here in Africa, be open to the aid and teachings of these people. Now on to the information!

◀PRETORIAN DEPTHS: KELLAN COLT▶

In the depths, a dark secret lurks.

Nice and foreboding start, eh? I talked to scores of citizens in and around Pretoria, especially below, as they develop the newest arcologies, the subarcologies beneath the earth, using the former mines beneath the region. These technology-riddled structures would be among the least likely spots to expect an abundance of mana and magic, but expectations can be confounded. The veins of mana that run through the former mines are pulsing as if they were still packed with the glorious gold on which this city was built. These veins of energy are fueling these astral events. The powerful in town are taking advantage and it made it a little easier to dig into the business down below.

Let me mention business first, as it is the most likely thing to draw those reading this to the subarcologies of Pretoria. Long story short, they're built in abandoned mines. Mines that have run too dry to continue operations. That said, several, including a few owned by Ares as well as rival UO, have suddenly started pulling minerals and gems from the mines. Often these products are things that were never part of the original vein. As this property is extraterritorial, no one can really officially investigate, but several trusted contacts have identified the resources coming from those two corps as magical in nature. My contacts were part of the initial survey, and they tell me that they found numerous astral shallows and rifts down below, which are somehow replenishing the area's mineral resources.

According to my sources, these phenomena were initially unstable, but executives were approached, deals were struck, and now a small and rather mysterious contingent of arcanists help to maintain the stability of the effects. My sources describe their efforts in a similar fashion to geomancy but lacking the common Eastern culture iconography. Instead, they appear to be using symbols entirely foreign to my rather well-versed source. He described them as "Africa meets Mars" at one point but laughed off the alien connection.

Shortly after he laughed it off, we sat down and had a rather in-depth conversation on the truly likely source for the "alien" iconography. Neither of us have spent much time as metaplanar linguists—I'd be happy to share data with anyone who has that kind of knowledge.

From my viewpoint, someone or something (however you want to describe extraplanar entities) has an interest in keeping these pathways open. I made sure to avoid digging to the point of drawing attention to myself, but I understand the shadows and made a few gentle pushes in the right place to show how important this access is.

We all know what I did, so I'll just spell out the results. After four efforts to shut off a connection located in the Ares subarcology out under Centurion, my efforts gained the attention of an interesting group. From reports, they were all Awakened, apparently extraplanar, and extremely polite, to the point of creepiness. I had made sure all my teams knew to wave the white flag or bug out if things went south, just to make sure I could stay a few steps back. They all played it safe and it was one of the biggest clues this effort wasn't from the powers on our plane. Our corps would have pushed harder, fought dirtier. These individuals, who I will describe in a moment, simply walked away, satisfied their "polite" request had been heard and granted. Had it not been followed, I'm sure the results would have been different, but I am not willing to test that.

The teams that were tracked were visited by a group of four figures; Grim, the Detective, Angel, and Lady North. Obviously pseudonyms, but they gave no other names. I'll wrap this with descriptions, in case anyone runs into them.

Grim is named for the grim reaper due to the heavy, bulky black robes he drapes over his frame, though none of my reports say anything about his actual physical form beneath the robes. He usually hangs back and has been connected with some magical spell defense, so other arcane talents are likely. His aura appears similar to his robes, though on the astral they glow in a bright silver, rather than a light-absorbing black.

The Detective did most of the talking. He wore the classic long coat and low-slung fedora as he posed his questions. He only spoke in questions, repeating himself if the answers weren't sufficient or adding clarifying questions when needed. His voice was described as gravelly but calming, and arcane observers were aware of some form of mana being shaped and cast in the region around him.

Angel was the most unearthly. While the others could have appeared mundane in some fashion, her massive feathered wings, described as five meters across by at least two individuals, were certainly otherworldly, unless you consider the possibility she is SURGED. She said nothing, but the astral watchers saw her drop a dome of energy over the area as she arrived and the rest of her cohorts approached. Estimates of the dome's size range from a diameter of twenty meters all the way to one hundred meters, as if she knew the space necessary to cover the team being visited. Analysis

showed a decrease in overall potency across the dome, but as I said before, no one tested it. Those in the background of conversations reported a feeling of calm coming over them every time they looked at Angel, though at least one contradicting report from a self-proclaimed atheist indicated a feeling of extreme discomfort, almost to the point where she thought someone was initiating acts of aggression against her.

Lady North was only present for two of the four visits. She wears thick furs and shades her pale face beneath a fur-lined hood. No one was exactly sure what part she was playing, especially in Africa, but both meetings where she was present involved unusual low temperatures for the area.

- ▶ I have met another similar to Lady North. I was studying an errant portal that seemed bound to the northern lights. I came upon a group looking to develop a stone circle that held the portal open, and I may have interfered with their efforts. I gained a visit from a woman, similar to Lady North, who made sure I understood my continued interruptions would not be tolerated. I took it seriously, even with her over-the-top appearance. I saw nothing else of her and don't know if their efforts were successful, but I stepped away. It was easy, since my contract wasn't to continue interference, just make the one effort.

- ▶ Stone

◀ A WILD WEEK IN THE CONGO: KELLAN COLT ▶

Despite the name of the article, it was actually more than a week that I spent conducting research around the Congo region of Africa. The wild week in the title is in reference to the first bit of this report, after which I'll discuss everything it led me to along the way. My time in the Congo started with a little adventure. I usually don't take jobs of this sort, but a good friend had lost her first mage to a kidnapping in Lagos. The promise of some tit-for-tat time trade for a little protection on a research expedition locked me in and helped develop the rest of this report.

The endeavor started as a hunt in Libreville. The slums of the town had become the hunting grounds for a large predator, and a bounty on its head was enough to draw in my associate. As one can guess, the use of the generic "large predator" description is intentional, since no one knew what was doing the killing and, even to this date, no official name exists as the creature was not from our metaplane. We came to call it a razor rhino, but it was not some awakened rhino species, it was just the best name we came up with after the first attempt to capture it.

That initial effort to capture it taught us two important lessons. First, its torso flesh was nearly impenetrable. Second, its aura didn't fit our world and was fading. It was not only attacking and killing people—it was siphoning a bit from their aura in order to slow the fading of its own. We weren't

able to stop it here, but our efforts did something to inhibit its ability to maintain its aura. This caused the creature to leave the Libreville slums and head back out into the wilds.

Money and curiosity kept us going, as the razor rhino had killed the son of a prominent criminal in Libreville who offered to double the bounty. I speculated the creature was heading back to the place it came over, and thus my curiosity kept me on the team.

Traversing the jungle presented the typical struggles, but it was not the hardest part of our efforts. We tracked the strange astral trail left by the razor rhino's fading aura. Additionally, following the mangled and half-eaten prey it left behind offered physical clues to ease the minds of the members of the expedition who didn't quite trust my arcane credentials. Along the way we came across the other events of importance that I'm thinking relate to this rising phenomenon of global mana events.

The razor rhino's path revealed six previously undiscovered ruins, four of which were the locations of active alchera. We suspect the other two were active when the creature came through, and these phenomena were either slowing the aura fade or potentially recharging it as it moved.

We were actively tracking and had little time to slow at each site, but our tracker found signs of an active presence at two of them. We didn't encounter anyone at the sites, though I had that sense of being watched. The wildlife was too thick to seek out auras, and even a quick astral trip was useless (though quite beautiful; reminded me of some of my earliest expeditions).

The evidence of a presence meant, in my opinion, that someone is monitoring or studying these, which means they need to be consistent. The fact that this creature found all of these active sites over a 200-kilometer line of jungle seems like something more than a coincidence. The fact that the sites all lined up well enough for a fairly direct route back to the location it had come from (we'll get to that in a moment) makes it seem there are a lot of active sites.

- ▶ After this was written, I got word from contacts in that region, and it seems our sites are only a fraction of the active alchera the locals and explorers have been coming across. Figures ranging from dozens to hundreds are coming in, and corporate interests have started to turn their gazes to this area en masse.
- ▶ Kellan Colt

We discovered the origin point of the razor rhino to be a ring of Awakened trees, specifically the Man of Two Worlds. A paranormal species of the Lombi tree, the dual-natured Man of Two Worlds has massive buttress roots that create a ring, and this formation somehow opens periodic connec-

tions to other metaplanes. The rhino was stalking among the trees and killing other errant visitors that passed through when the gateway opened. It appeared to be waiting for access to its own realm.

While it stalked prey, we stalked it, and through some creative trapping, spellcasting, and a tiresome game of tug of war, it was finally subdued.

We had intended to make stops at the alchera ruins on our return but instead called in an airlift after only a single day of traveling back with the rhino, as it proved difficult to keep sedated and subdued.

The massive amount of life and mana in the Congo is a great place to hide arcane activities, and with as much as I came across in such a short time, something bigger has to be going on here.

Open eyes and minds.

◀NO SURPRISES IN EGYPT: KELLAN COLT▶

The Great Pyramids and several ancient Egyptian cities have already reported alchera events since the Awakening, usually around sacred celestial events. Over the course of the last six months, these events have increased in frequency, and several of the reappearing cities seem to be capable of trapping explorers who remain inside the alchera when the event ends.

The region has massive increases in tourism, both official and unofficial, and a spokesperson for Egypt's National Tourism Board has recommended taking a trip as soon as possible, since no one has been able to determine what spurred the increased events on, which means no one knows when they're going to slow again.

Tourists aren't the only interested parties, and several magical societies and arcane research firms, along with some megacorps, are sending explorers to several of the ancient cities. Some of these forces are large enough to take control of the designated areas. Most claim it is for the protection or recovery of their citizens, but everyone is vying for control in this strange version of Desert Wars—which is not getting televised, but probably should be.

◀GHOSTS OF THE IVORY COAST: WAVEWATCHER▶

KC,

Thanks for that tip and the recommendation for the team—it was a smashing success. Everything you got in that basic report about a “Ghost Ship” alchera was spot on. Location, timeline, course, and the unique lenses required to see it when it was out to sea were all spot on. The team's mage said the lenses were necessary when concentrated life was not nearby. On several occasions a school of fish beneath the water would bring the freeboard of the vessel into view and as soon as we boarded the vessel quickly appeared around us.

As for boarding, we discovered the ship to be a reflection of a slave transport ship from the 1800s. The small crew, only twenty men, became quickly violent after we were welcomed on board. They were susceptible to our attacks, and after overcoming them, we made a gesture of freeing the hundreds of slaves down below.

It was the most spiritual and fulfilling event of my life. Each broken chain felt like a blow against the oppressive chains the megacorps have over all of us. I have felt energized and infused since. The new positivity has just led to one windfall after another. I'm sending the reports and data from our time on the ship, along with a chunk of my cut. I know you said the tip was just because we're friends, but it has been too much to not pay it forward.

NO GOOD DEED

There is a small bonus available for teams and runners that do “good” things while in alchera similar to the ones described here. After getting back out, things just seem to work out easier for them for awhile.

In game terms, good deeds and acts create a pool of Edge that anyone who was in the alchera at the time can pull from, even if you were not the one doing the good deeds. Freeing slaves, rescuing captured royalty, helping the downtrodden, or whatever the gamemaster deems worthy adds to the pool.

This Edge is only available outside the alchera, and it vanishes after a week. Limits on available earned Edge is up to the gamemaster, but spending rules still apply.

This also means some individuals could do good things, then eliminate the people they are with to keep the benefit all to themselves.

◀A GLOBE LINK: KELLAN COLT▶

After all the other events, I did what any good globetrotting explorer would do: I phoned my friends. As you can guess by this point, the reports I got included temples, ruins, and pyramids around the world all hosting arcane events. Alchera are not exactly common but still can be found without intense effort, but a few of my braver peers are reporting multiple planar portals leading to the same place. One that materialized in both Angkor Wat and Tulum appeared as a metaplanar beach described with identical features by different sources.

Very quickly, corporations have gotten word of this and are looking at exploration and research to see if you could travel from one of these alchera to another, thus finally realizing the longtime magical goal of teleportation, even if in only a limited form.

- ▶ I did some initial recon on this for an interested corp, and it doesn't look promising, though corps can be convincing. The plane in question has two warring groups that have maintained a simmering war since as far back as they remember.



I've got a good rep with the corp, and if and when I get called back, I'll be sure to drop an update here. But I've learned to be wary of people's claims to be close to doing the impossible.

- > Lyran
- > Reminds me of the work being done at MIT&T before the quarantine. Any potential connections to that?
- > Icarus
- > Nothing that we've uncovered. There's a report snippet later on from someone who went in to check on that doctor's work.
- > Kellan Colt

< SPIRITS OF ST. LOUIS: A.J. >

Yup, still here! Seemed a good spot to settle into with all that's transpiring. And there is a lot. St. Louis is hotter than usual since the blackouts and secession. Now we have this report, and I'm sure I'm missing a lot going down. If you're sick of drizzle and clouds or "rebuilding," come on over from Seattle or Boston and check out the gateway to the west.

No, literally, that's part of this report. That arch, and the new one, are doing some goofy drek. I lack the mana perception to see what's up, but I have friends, and even a few who don't mind letting the mundane see the magical. I did my own digging and called in a lot of favors because I am sick of being in places when drek goes down because I wasn't using enough foresight.

On that note, let me just say, things are going down again. Something is manipulating all this mojo, and when any source of power is manipulated, there is either the risk of an accident or they manage to get whatever they wanted and the rest of us pay the price. If you're in the shadows, keep digging and sharing. I get that our jobs are meant to be hush hush, but JackPoint isn't some public site. We share secrets here. Let's keep that in mind before I get stuck in another "rough" situation.

THE ARCHES

Crazy rumors and stories about the Gateway Arch have existed since its construction. One of the more persistent ones, regarding a portal to another world, seemed particularly appropriate to look into with the recent changes Kellan has been talking about.

The rumor has existed since before the Awakening, so I can't confirm whether the portal was there and became more active or if the rumor and beliefs of the populace energized the portal, but whatever the case, it exists. I managed a quiet infiltration, but I wasn't in a position to download any data. All I got was what the other employees were willing to share with the External Logistics Operation Head Site Security Advisor. A digital clipboard and a smile made up for a weak electronic trail, espe-

cially with me never asking to see anything that could be a security risk. Always being with an actual employee was a great touch as well.

On to the data. The portal beneath the Gateway Arch has been active since before the arch was even built. The location was chosen to go over a riverside cavern that had been used by natives in the region for worship and rituals intended for dreamwalking. We understand now these dreamwalks were astral events. No one knows who set up the first facility on the site, but most claim it was a U.S. government agency and the records were lost in the Crash.

Currently the facility is operated by Novatech, a big win for this filleted fish. As the owners of the ARCHology, they got the facility in the deal, which came with Corp Court stipulations on its use and access by other Big Ten megas. They've done a bunch of research and know the Gate, as they call it, opens to dozens of different metaplanes. They have yet to control its opening, but thanks to years of research, they have a decent system of knowing where it leads when it opens. It has recently begun opening with greater frequency, sometimes staying open for hours on end, when it used to only open for seconds at a time. Most in the facility speculate that it will eventually stay open all the time once the mana level of our plane rises sufficiently. The completion of the ARCHology also focused greater levels of mana on the site and gave both the smaller arch and the Gate a boost.

I didn't get the exact data, but I was told where the portal opens to is based on the time of day and current lunar phase and position in the sky. New destinations are discovered on occasion, especially with the more frequent openings. Extensive exploration is limited to destinations that have had at least four confirmed openings.

The portals open as a two-way gate, and the longer they stay open, the more frequently beings from other metaplanes have come across uninvited. At least one employee I spoke to mentioned a group that has come through as envoys several times, rather than stumbling through. Pressing them more shut them down, but it's an avenue to explore.

I didn't get anywhere near the actual Gate room, but I know it has a security strike force always ready, but at least twice something came through that got clear of the room before the strike force could bring it down. Both events were astral, and one of the workers said it reminded him of footage of Ghostwalker and the Watergate Rift.

The Gate is down there, and it's getting more active.

WHERE RIVERS MEET

Staying along the river but heading a hair north gives us the chance to talk about the Missouri roll-

ing into the Mississippi and the mana merge that comes from this confluence of rivers.

The mana merge has been known about for quite some time, but recently the area has had an increase in astral activity that matches the types of events Kellan is concerned about. The events appear random, but that could just mean we're not understanding the pattern. No one is really putting the research effort into discerning patterns for these events, and that has me wondering if the powers that be are in on this increase and minimizing investigations in order to prevent any identification. And yes, I get that sounds like conspiracy-theory crazy talk, but remember what I've been through already.

From what I've discovered, the events that pop up are random but frequent enough that anyone coming near the area is likely to experience some kind of astral phenomenon on their trip, increasing the level of astral tourism in the area and the amount of shadow tourism with rich execs wanting a little walk on the wild side. Astral windows are the most common, offering everyone a glimpse of the astral from the physical. Voids are the second most common form, and they're often dangerous, as they occasionally appear inside or over the water. Several vessels have been damaged or lost near here, which connects to several legends in the area of people losing time or having unique visions and experiences. A few reports of a small Native American village popping up is likely an account of an alchera. Reports indicate the people in the village like to interact and feed guests. If no one has ever warned you, it's not wise to eat food offered by fae/mana-created entities. Most reports indicate a certain level of euphoria or intense relaxation after ingestion, but a minority talk about leaving with the food and seeing it turn into grubs or maggots. They also report vomiting a green sludge after leaving.

Several of the spellslingers I talked to told me this region also has some very potent mana. The confluence draws a bunch of young casters to the area. They tend to spend their time studying or practicing, but problems have arisen. Local groups—be they cabals, college fraternities, social clubs, or whatever—have begun using this place for “Wizard's Duels” late in the day and at night. Johnny Law chases them off during the daytime, usually via a spirit or a projecting magician, so that local tourism is not disturbed.

THE SEA DRAGON

Since St. Louis went independent, the Sea Dragon has been snout-deep in the arcane affairs of the city. She managed some kind of deal and has some level of grey-area authority in town. She's prepping her local lackeys for some pending event, but like most dragons, she isn't straightforward about

what's really going on. The problem is, I got a file recently that has me worried, as I don't think the Sea Dragon is going to be focused on this little patch of river for too much longer. Check out the message <[here](#)>.

OCEAN QUEEN.

As you have foreseen, these events are increasing, but even with your aid and the preparations we have made, we have been ill-equipped to handle the quantity of events that have arisen in your vast domain. The alchera have been particularly active and numerous. With aid from land-based assets, we have managed to keep coastal events in check, but the deep-sea events are simply too spread out and too numerous for our resources. I accept my failure when I say your leadership and superior abilities are necessary to stem the tides of the Pacific and Atlantic fronts. Efforts in the Indian go well, the Mediterranean and Caribbean are also stable. Reports from the Arctic have been sporadic, with serious concerns arising over events beneath the ice sheet.

MY HONOR TO SERVE,
WETHENISHEN

If I read this right, everything we're facing up here on the dirt is also happening below the waves. We have a lot of resources and research going on up here, but the Sea Dragon, while likely the wealthiest being on the planet, does not have the resources at her disposal to deal with the number of events happening. Their seclusion beneath the water fills me with concern as well. How many events are the agents of the Sea Dragon missing because of the vastness of the Earth's waters and the sparseness of life compared to the dirt? Which actually makes me wonder what's happening out in the deep wilds, but that is well outside my efforts for this little report.

Even though I don't have a lot of solid data, I hope this offers enough clues to keep everyone wary and on the lookout. Stay safe out there.

- > Take AJ's views on the arcane with a grain of salt—his "friends" that open the astral to him are called "astral dream" and "aurora blaze-ya-ass-off" on the streets. He's got a deepweed habit. I respect his history, he deserves the break, but I'm not sure he's the "journalist" he was back inside the lockdown.
- > Butch
- > Not exactly a habit, but you can think what you want. AJ did a good bit of digging, and St. Louis is a hotspot for some of these events. The hardest part is that it's just now recovering from the blackout and its own bid for independence. Events in and around the region appeared to be in check, but that message and subsequent decrease in sightings of the Sea Dragon means that city is going to need more help to deal with whatever this is.
- > Lothan the Wise

<BOSTON BUSINESS: A.J.>

When I was informed of a global increase in metaplanar and astral activity, I instantly thought about the lab I had heard of inside the NEMAQZ, run by Dr. Dyna Mite. I was busy elsewhere and therefore sent some work back to the slowly restructuring region.

My investigator initially discovered the place to be active with local corporate rebuilding, but they dug further and found out the lab itself is already rebuilt and operating under the purview of a covert-operations division. They were not able to discover which government or corporation funds the group, only finding the security to be beyond local assets, and intelligence about the location was heavily protected.

Due to this protection, gathered intel was limited, but it mentioned the gateways that Dr. Mite used being operational but not being used for their initial purposes. The lab is no longer focused on some metaplanar-assisted version of teleportation. Its new direction is unknown, but the reliability of metaplanar access from the lab had a myriad of potential exploits.

- > The teleportation dream died before it had a chance to live. With no predictability or precision, using these gates for travel is not going to be a thing.
- > Jimmy No
- > I didn't include it in my little report there, because it didn't seem important at the time. After reading the rest of this data, I can see a connection. My investigator was eventually redirected away from their investigation by two men and a woman. They match the descriptions given for Grim, the Detective, and Lady North.
- > AJ
- > So the same trio stopping jobs in Pretoria is also working in Boston?
- > Glitch
- > If they're extraplanar, it's not a stretch. Especially since Dr. Mite showed the ability to connect metaplanes via open portals. They could be bouncing all over the globe.
- > AJ

<LIFE FINDS A WAY: G-NOME>

Let's talk kudzu! It's a funny name for a not particularly funny plant. In the right conditions, kudzu can choke out every other kind of plant life in an area while overgrowing entire buildings in short order. This means not just flora but local fauna will be affected as their food supply changes.

That's how I got called in. A rapid growth outbreak of kudzu popped up in the Aurora Warrens. I wasn't a big fan of visiting Ghostwalker's new fiefdom, but it turned out fine in the end. What

wasn't fine was the kudzu and its extraplanar origins. Even worse was getting a series of calls about similar events near Atlanta, Seattle, Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, and St. Louis while looking into this case. Since that week and a publication I put out on another shadow digest, I've gotten reports from around the world. Every one of them involved this same species, and every one was growing out of control—and, if my assessment is correct, growing from a single point.

That point is a very small extraplanar gateway. My investigation in Denver revealed a single root for the growth, though like most plants it anchors at so many points and grows so many stems, it's hard to track it back to a base. I used nanites to map its central core xylem structure, and from that tracked back to its base root. This root passed through an extraplanar portal that was less than ten centimeters in diameter.

Study of the plant showed that it absorbed mana from the surrounding region. This mana is then stored within the plant's small fruits. I have not been able to determine if this stored mana can be utilized, but the ability to do so could be quite useful—and worthy of study. The results of this mana siphoning, though, are quite detrimental to the surrounding manasphere. Odd astral phenomena occur around the plant, including a strange rabies-like illness that settles into paranormal critters in the area, along with an acute psychosis that affects spirits and other sentient Awakened, including metahumans.

The exact reason for this growth and the eruptions around the world is not something I have determined yet, but I cannot believe this is just a random occurrence. This species may be extremely invasive, but for it to arrive at so many places around the world seems very suspicious. Something is using these vines. I'm not sure who or what, but we all have a place to start the investigation.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

We have four basic types of rifts that lead us to other places or realities when we pass across the threshold: historical reflection alchera, metaplanar gateways, astral portals, and void doors. Reports from each vary extensively but I'm happy to offer short briefs on the several I have personally experienced and, as before, I will offer the experiences of others in a minimally modified way and place my thoughts in the comments.

ASTRAL PORTALS

Let's start with the easiest. An astral portal is any metaphysical portal that allows an individual from the physical plane to step across or look

MANA-SIPHONING KUDZU GAME RULES

This species of plant grows through an open metaplanar portal and was initially created to draw mana from one metaplane to another. This strain has mutated and instead stores mana in its fruits. The process creates three primary game effects: stored mana, background count, and astral rabies.

STORED MANA

The fruits of these vines create pockets of mana. This is an enticing food for any creature with a Magic attribute, luring them in and then exposing them to astral rabies (see below). For an Awakened metahuman, each grape-sized berry consumed offers a point of Edge that can be spent on any Magic-based or arcane test. Up to two berries can be eaten with a Minor Action, four with a Major Action, and gained mana must be used within 2 Combat Rounds. Berries lose their potency two weeks after harvest.

BACKGROUND COUNT

The vines create a local low mana ebb (see *Mana Ebbs and Flows*, p. 140). The effect extends one meter from each vine, four meters from the core of a vine tangle.

ASTRAL RABIES

Anything with a Magic attribute must make a Magic + Body Test for every ten minutes spent near the vines. The threshold for the test varies based on the proximity to the gateway or central hub of the vines. At the heart of the system, the threshold should be at least 6. Failing the test results in a temporary drop in the Willpower attribute equal to the difference between hits and the threshold, along with an increase in erratic behaviors. The erratic behaviors are primarily intended as a roleplaying opportunity for the player. The threshold for the test drops to 1 in areas one meter away from the vine, and the threshold then gradually increases the closer to the core.

through the threshold and experience the astral plane. These phenomena take two main forms: physical transference and astral transference. Within these two categories are several variations you could find in arcane textbooks.

Let's talk physical transference vs. slumped bodies at the door, a.k.a. astral transference. The former sounds a lot more professional and looks it, too. There are astral portals that allow a physical form to walk in and out. An abundance of research has been run on this since a rather famous dragon presumably used this technique (no confirmation, but tests have come close) to save a few people a few years back. I don't have time for details—snag a history site and read up if you're interested. The point is, what happens is that a physical form enters the astral plane, interacts and operates like an

astral form, and then steps out at another astral portal or ... well, there is some variation there. They could exit to another metaplane, back to our plane, get lost in the void, etc.

The “slumped bodies at the door” always makes me nervous and leaves teams of runners (our likely patrons) in a bit of a nervous lurch. With astral transference, you step through the portal and join the ranks of astrally projecting arcanists around the world. The problem is, the majority of them have a sound physical form somewhere and are interested in protecting it from damage or invasive implants. This gives them a pretty clear timeclock on how long they can stay separate from their physical shell. That wired-up street sam who has traded “holistic integrity” for speed just doesn’t have the same amount of time that others do, leaving them more susceptible to sudden planar exploration death syndrome, or SPEDS. It’s nothing new, and projecting arcanists have been dying from it for decades, but the sudden flare in these events is increasing the exposure to the phenomenon.

To put some numbers to it, these astral portals occurred at a reported rate of 30.46 global events per day in 2075. In the first few months of this year, the rate already exceeds 100 events per day. It also appears to be increasing with my figures, with the calculation only sitting at fifty per day if that timeframe is halved.

- ▶ The danger of these events is especially true in areas where the events occur randomly. Sometimes even sweeping across an area and leaving a swath of unconscious forms in its wake. A few larger urban areas, particularly Seattle, Denver, Atlanta, Miami, Toronto, and Boise have developed police task forces that specialize in the redirection and retrieval of non-Awakened individuals affected by this.
- ▶ Lothan the Wise
- ▶ Events like this have been random but are occasionally focused around regions with intense emotional energy. A rather large event occurred in Denver, where a group of protestors came out to march against the disconnection from Zebulon and Ghostwalker’s sudden rage-filled apathy. The group suffered no ill intent, but an event occurred that left many of them confused at the sudden disappearance of their peers and even more shocked at the arrival of spirits and projecting officers trying to guide them back to their bodies. Overall, it was a positive for Denver’s developing police force, but the event drew a lot of focus to the region in terms of arcane studies.
- ▶ Ire

HISTORICAL REFLECTION ALCHERA

In this Awakened world, we have become at least mildly accustomed to this. Thousands have braved the Chicago Containment Zone—even braved getting near the feral-ghoul-infested Shattergraves—in order to witness the Sears Tower alchera that returns

annually. That number easily doubles on the years the fall of the tower is repeated. Around the world, other recurring alchera draw tourists and researchers in droves. These places bring into our plane a reflection of a place from history. Some allow actual access to touch or participate in that historical event, though it never changes the ending.

- ▶ I object to that claim! I have several running mates who claim to have halted events in an alchera, only to find the world they return to different. It’s subtle, but they can make little changes even if they can’t stop an event altogether.
- ▶ Plan 9
- ▶ And how many of those chummers are novacoke addicts, because you need a totally scrambled brain to think that is possible. Alchera are not time gates, they’re mana echoes of powerful events and places. Nothing more.
- ▶ ManaSpike
- ▶ Hey, you’re new here. Plan 9 is a conspiracy nut, but occasionally they are right, so rather than call names or toss insults (frowned on here anyway), just take it with the grain of salt but be wary it may be accurate, at least in part.
- ▶ Plan 10

These events seem to be increasing in frequency. This could be a result of the gradual increase in mana levels as the Awakening grows, but most of the reports don’t match any data on mana increases. There is a niggling feeling that all of this is connected, a little touch of it, but something across these various tales and reports has me wondering if there isn’t a little thread winding through them.

Just to help give an idea of what’s out there, I asked a friend in the shadows to make a few trips. He managed three before this write-up had to be finished, but he’s out making more stops, and he’s been known to contract additional assistance when the job fits. Keep an eye out.

◀REFLECTIONS OF THE WAY LIFE USED TO BE: IRE▶

It is, without a doubt, one of the most amazing experiences to pass the threshold of an alchera and step into a place of pure reflection. I don’t know what Kellan thinks is going on, and it’s not that I don’t care, but until this trouble lands at my feet, I’ll leave others to deal, but for a series of paid vacations (with a little hint of danger), I’m happy to participate. At the behest of KC, I have thus far visited an alchera to pre-quake Los Angeles, a mining ghost town in the now fiefdom of Ghostwalker, and several blocks of a gaslit London.

L.A.: Los Angeles was a thrill ride. It was like an action movie set in the sun and palm trees of Southern California. Having a small amount of experience in action settings, I found the alchera to be less a reflection of history and more of mem-

ory—a memory created by a group consciousness formed from flatvid movies of the previous century. The true Angelenos would never recognize this glamorous city of glitz and gold, but the bulk of the world didn't live in Los Angeles—they just saw it on TV. The hustle and bustle of the real city, the workers that make it run, are unseen in the alchera. That does not mean they aren't there; they just operate beneath the perfect streets, fast cars, and pretty people.

The opportunity for adventure is available at every turn. Every Los Angeles-based movie plot plays out in this reflection. Cop films, alien invasions, romances, dramas, and horror films unfold with visitors as the heroes—and sometimes the victims. I played around in a bit of a buddy cop flick and tested my detective skills with a little sleuthing. It was a pleasant respite from daily reality, but not all who enter this place make it out. Life and death are real here. The occupants of the realm may return like automated reflections, but those from our plane who cross the threshold face a real possibility of death.

Sliver Creek: I wasn't comfortable slipping into Ghostwalker's realm, but the tales of Sliver Creek—yes, Sliver, not Silver—were enough to get me to test my skills of stealth and subterfuge against the agents of the white wyrm. That adventure is a tale for another place. Here, I talk of the wild west adventure that awaits when stepping through the arched gateway with the narrow lines forming the SC of Sliver Creek. The spot is a bustling mining town, where anyone who crosses over experiences not just frontier life but also the wonders of frontier imagination. High-noon duels, mining-camp raids, gambling dens, raider plots, creatures from the mines' depths, and adventures of the American west were all in the offing. I also found you could sit, relax, and simply enjoy a quieter time. This last was my personal favorite while I was there. It was an especially pleasant respite from the stresses and pressures of life under the new rules and laws of Ghostwalker.

The town simply draws you in, and you can engage with the locals and find whatever trouble or peace you want. It is possible to get drawn into the troubles of others or get caught in the crossfire, but I only experienced one other metaplanar traveler while I was there. The metaplane doesn't block off and create separate echoes for each person who passes through. Instead, those crossing over, even at different times, experience the same space.

London: An even better break from the new order of the white wyrm was a trip across the pond and back to the pleasant shores of merry ol' England. Though the time I visited was actually not all that merry. A quiet little alley in the heart of London is blanketed by a thick fog that hides a finely crafted carriage. After entering the carriage and paying a pair of pence—ac-

tual coins (don't ask why I carry old coins, it's a matter of luck and worked well for me here)—you will be driven a short distance and let out onto the cobblestone and gaslight of an England remembered only in still photos, mediocre recreations, and words of people of imagination. I liked it here. They talk like me, they walk like me, and as long as no one notices the shape of my ears, they accept me as one of their own. I could have gotten lost here.

I wandered those streets with no desire for adventure and simply an appreciation for a place where I felt I fit. In hindsight, I realize this feeling was part of the magic of the place, but it was worth enjoying for the short stays I afforded myself. This reflection didn't offer the action of the American west or Hollywood, but instead the sophistication and social intrigues of Victorian England. There's a bit of street ruffian fun to be had, but for the most part, sophistication is the name of the game within this magical manifestation.

Across all these places, I felt something that could be worrisome. I understand magic and mana. I have a deep connection and have delved far into the mysteries of our world and others. In these three places, I felt something: a draining. It wasn't like the strain of casting magic, pulling power across the barrier between our world and the astral. It was a loss of power. A slipping and slipperiness of mana. It felt like the slightest trickle, but it was there, and it came from everyone. Every use of magic let a sliver slide somewhere else.

METAPLANAR GATEWAYS

This is the key. I know it. Lothan knows it. But nothing we've come across offers anything concrete. We could speculate and sound like Plan 9/10, but neither of us cares to become known as the arcane conspiracy theorist here, so we will let it lie and just deliver facts. If you know either of us and want to discuss it, offer a PM and we'll chat in a private setting where I can rant like a madwoman and not have it recorded and misconstrued.

These places are opening up far more frequently than in the past. The places they open to are not always new, and several have been visited before. Some of the answers must lie in these places, but unless you're a friend of the metaplanar locals or you're very good at making friends, these places often do not treat outsiders kindly. Many metaplanes put visitors through tests in order to confirm their worthiness.

If you go out looking for answers, expect challenges.

The places you will find on the other side are myriad, so I can't really describe them here but each is a unique plane with its own rules and citizens. They aren't just a reflection or an echo, they are a real place with real beings and their own real

history, politics, and culture. Explore with all that in mind.

VOID DOORS

These are one of the most dichotomous astral/metaplanar experiences I have ever felt. The feeling of wonder and power inside these places is indescribable, but so is the discomfort.

I couldn't decide how to start. Do I focus on the unpleasant or point out the wonders? As you can see, I started with the unpleasantness, but don't worry—I'll explain both.

Let's start with the blackness. As you enter one of these voids, you lose all sensory feeling. Not a single sense operates, and you experience a floating and loose sensation. This initial disorientation is the doom of most who enter a void door. The lack of physical sense followed by a lack of time sense can easily lead to a slow and uncomfortable death, as the only sensations you truly "feel" are hunger and thirst. Hopefully, the void door spits you back out before that happens, but on a number of occasions in my research and contracting, I've come across plenty of cases of death via void door.

It is possible to get out, but with no sensations, finding the exit is as much luck as anything else.

There is one sense that works: assensing. The Awakened special ability to bridge the worlds comes in handy inside the realm of the void doors. It provides a collection of senses just as you would have on the astral plane. The trouble is identifying sensations and understanding them when you're in the void. Everything is not the same. The worst is the lack of tactile sensation or a sense of gravity. Making movements can be instantly nauseating. I utilized magic for my movement, focusing on the spell and the destination rather than the space in the middle, but others I've spoken to have said this left them spinning and nauseated as well.

The one great positive of this place is the magic that infuses it. The massive well of mana here makes spells effortless to cast. With virtually no strain, the process of casting becomes a mental manipulation rather than a mix of manipulation and restraint.

- › I've researched these places for years. They are deadly to mundanes and even most Awakened. The lore I've discovered connected to them makes them out to be a host for Wizard Duels. The easy access to mana makes the place a battle of wills and skills rather than a place focused on pulling power from across a veil.
- › AgedArcanist

MANA EBBS AND FLOWS

Various conditions can contribute to the mana levels of certain spots changing, either increasing the available magic or making it more difficult to channel. Intense events (emotionally intense, magically intense, whatever) can leave a residue in the the manosphere, twisting or enhancing it. For the purposes of this book, there are five forms of mana shifts:

High mana flow: High mana flows can be aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute in the area automatically gains a bonus Edge before a test.

Low mana flow: Low mana flows can be aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute in the area gain 1 bonus die on any test where Magic is part of the dice pool.

Low mana ebb: Low mana flows can be aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of a different tradition using the Magic attribute in the area receives a -1 dice pool penalty on any test where Magic is part of the dice pool.

High mana ebb: High mana flows can be aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of a different tradition using the Magic attribute cannot gain or spend Edge on tests using the Magic attribute.

Mana void: No magic at all can be performed in these areas, including alchemical preparations.

Note that flows and ebbs do not have to be aspected; in those cases, the listed effects are felt by all Awakened individuals in the area.



SOLDIERS OF III CORPS

POSTED/COLLECTED BY: ORBITAL DK

> To say that the events of the past few months have left their mark on the world is an understatement of epic proportions. And while there's no way to completely hide some things, such as the dust-up in Detroit, the corps and their government lackeys are usually able to spin the information in such a way that John and Jane Q. Public never gets the real story. Or in this case, the powers that be all but erase certain events from public memory altogether. A few days ago, I got a message from Orbital DK, who's taken it upon herself to investigate one such event: the disappearance of the UCAS Army's III Corps. She's already posted this to the Asgard Data Haven (where she's head honcho) but asked me and other admins to cross-post this data on our VPNs. Anyone who's been on JackPoint or in the shadows in general should know that DK's rep is solid, especially since she took over Asgard. With that being said, I'm inclined to take the data presented as chip-truth—or at least, it's more reliable than official sources. Still, do your own due diligence when acting on this, or any data. I'm also allowing some cross-posting

with Asgard on this one, so remember that if you see some unfamiliar names. And yes, they've been vetted. So play nice.

> Glitch

Two benefits of living in orbit: It's blissfully quiet, and you can see the big picture in ways typical dirt-siders never will. Up here and through the Matrix, I see nothing but patterns and movement, much like an ant hive or how the metaphorical small stone tossed in the water sends its ripples out which can result in any number of reactions. From up here, I watched the first shots fired in Detroit, watched entire cities go dark, and saw the inevitable cluster-frag that ended up with the UCAS becoming a shell of its former self.

There's also another benefit of being up here: Every so often, I see things that that some don't want to be seen—or things that others want forgotten. This is the case for the soldiers of the UCAS Army's III Corps, when more than one hundred thousand troops simply vanished off the face of the Earth. But the story was quickly buried among

the other earth-shattering events of the time and just as quickly forgotten. The UCAS saw bigger problems on the horizon and the blunder of losing so many troops was something Washington just didn't want to deal with, let alone acknowledge. As far as the UCAS federal government was concerned, it never happened.

Too bad for them, because fate isn't done with the UCAS government—or III Corps.

When this situation first caught my attention, I thought it was just going to be another side note to the rest of the insanity going on at the time. And for a good long while, that's all it seemed it would be yet another mystery of the Sixth World, an event that was less than a blip on the newsfeeds. While everything else was going on, I watched for any news or leads. I even started a personal file on it all, thinking that it may be worth posting at some point. Then, things started happening, and as I expected, the normal governmental whitewashing bulldrek began. That's when things got really crazy.

Now, before I go any further, I don't know why this particular story caught and held my attention. But for whatever reason it did, and I started to give a drek. Maybe living up here for so many years has reminded me just how easy it would be to disappear, and I'd like if someone gave enough of a frag about what happened to me. So maybe this is an odd way to pay that forward.

Anyway, once more data started coming in, I fronted my own 'yen and began investigating with the help of trusted associates. I've come so far now, I *have* to see this through.

I've become part of the story, for better or worse.

This file isn't just about the investigation into III Corps disappearance—it's about the initial incident, how the UCAS responded, and how now it's something that the UCAS wanted buried and forgotten but has the bad taste to keep coming back. That's right, months after their disappearance, rumors started flying and reports began surfacing that members of III Corps had been sighted, found at various spots all over the world. And as crazy as that seems, that's only the tip of the insanity iceberg.

- > Wait, **what?**
- > Stone

- > Hmm, interesting. I won't say too much right now, but the usual hiring boards and Johnsons have been putting out some rather interesting jobs of late. There's a connection here.
- > Balladeer

DISAPPEARANCE: III CORPS LAST DEPLOYMENT

Before we get too much into current events and general weirdness regarding this whole situation, let's all get on the same page with a brief history recap.

While most of the UCAS (and the world for that matter) were being fed a steady diet of sanitized and sufficiently spun news regarding the events in Detroit, sometime before August 8, 2080, UCAS President Angela Colloton sent orders to the Pentagon authorizing a complete mobilization of the UCAS Army's III Corps under the operational code name of "Task Force Peacemaker," in a powerful move of straight-faced irony. Their orders were simple: As swiftly and efficiently as possible, travel to Detroit and conduct a reconnaissance-in-force. Then, bring whatever situation there under control by any and all means necessary, no matter what or who the opposition may be.

- > For anyone who didn't get the hint, that meant take out anyone who wasn't UCAS. Their Rules of Engagement also included orders to take out all non-UCAS combatants, including any corporate forces. Let the implications for that sink in for a few minutes.
- > Picador
- > Still can't believe that Colloton had the guts to cut such orders in the first place.
- > Bangswitch
- > In a way, the White House dodged a politically lethal bullet in regards to Peacemaker. Had they actually engaged Ares corporate forces, the ramifications with the Corporate Court would have been earthshattering.
- > Legal Eagle
- > Considering everything that happened, that may have been considered a mercy killing.
- > Mr. Bonds

By approximately 0500 on August 8, Peacemaker had finished mobilization from their bases along the East Coast of the UCAS and was moving hard toward Detroit. There's no doubt that given the level of insanity that eventually went down in the Motor City, had Task Force Peacemaker intervened, things undoubtedly would have turned out quite differently. Thing is, we'll never know how, because III Corps never made it to Detroit.

PROBLEMS FROM WORD 'GO'

Aside from the typical issues pertaining to a massive, emergency military mobilization, TF Peacemaker experienced problems as soon as they started moving. Things really started going to drek as soon as they crossed into Pennsylvania.

According to a combination of liberated reports, classified transcripts, internal memos, and some real-time communications from a shadow team hired to track the task force's movements, Peacemaker started experiencing unit-wide communication problems with UCAS Central Command (Cent-Com) approximately fifteen kilometers past the New York/Pennsylvania border. At first it was intermittent losses of signal, then garbled communications. Which, given the state of modern communication and Matrix technology, is quite a feat for anyone to pull off on that kind of scale, especially considering the SOTA gear Peacemaker was fielding. Entire units would randomly go dark, only to come back online again with no apparent indication of any problems on the TF's end. Even Peacemaker's comm-specialists seemed confused at Cent-Com's constant status-update requests.

One of those reports, heavily redacted, indicated that Peacemaker's XO, Brigadier General Caroline Stickney, wanted to halt the advance (or at least slow it) until the communication problems could be sorted out. And in a stunning show of military intelligence (natch), III Corps CO Lt. General Clay Reynolds denied this request, saying their problems were nothing more than equipment problems or "operator error." Reynolds was reported to have ordered Stickney to "keep moving and sort it out along the way," and Cent-Com backed him up.

Now, I'm no soldier, but both Peacemaker's CO's and Cent-Com's behavior seemed extremely odd, especially for frontline military units. I still can't quite figure that one out. In the end, the comm-problems were considered a major annoyance at the time, but nothing more.

That changed really fragging quick.

- > For the record, no national or corporate army is **that** incompetent, despite popular opinions to the contrary. This seems like there was some sort of agenda at work.
- > Hard Exit
- > Reynolds is (or rather was) considered a rising star within the UCAS military. Not only did he have solid political connections in DeeCee, but he also came with the rare combination of actual tactical acumen. If not for this, he likely would have found himself as a Joint Chief or maybe even Sec-Def one day.
- > Kay St. Irregular



- › That makes his bone-headed order to push forward with compromised comms even worse. He didn't have anything to prove or anything to lose. Even if they made it to Detroit and things went sideways, Reynolds was protected. Now, Stickney, she was the one who needed to watch her back. She's a firecracker who gave frag all about political connections and actually cared about those under her command. She also wasn't afraid to tell "desk commanders" where to stick it, which mashed a lot of toes at the Pentagon.
- › Colonel Cathcart
- › I heard rumors they gave her that star to keep her "tusked mouth shut" and not blow the lid off some kind of Black Op gone bad that would have cost the careers of several high-ranking officers and politicians.
- › Scattershot
- › Fascinating. But here's my question: Didn't anyone think to track III Corps? Say, via satellite?
- › Cool Hand Duke
- › What a revolutionary concept! Why didn't anyone else think of that? Chummer, stick to slinging mana, and leave the tech to the experts.
- › Sam-R-Eye
- › Frag off.
- › Cool Hand Duke
- › Recovered records and data files indicated that Central Command had visual confirmation right up until approximately five minutes and thirty-seven seconds before all communications were lost.
- › Polaris

Drek really hit the fan comm-wise for Peacemaker once their lead elements arrived at a planned staging/refueling area twenty kilometers from the Ohio border. The intermittent communication problems that had been plaguing Peacemaker as they traversed Pennsylvania became steadily worse as the rest of the task force arrived, and eventually all contact between the task force and Cent-Com was lost. And by lost, I mean that any and all means of communication and/or tracking between Peacemaker and Cent-Com completely failed. Encrypted command channels, Matrix wireless feeds, individual unit frequencies, even GPS trackers and backup shortwave radio transmitters all went down. This meant that every single unit, from the TF commander all the way down to the last trooper's personal commlink, was unable to communicate with Cent-Com or anyone else.

Needless to say, this caused a small bit of a panic within the Pentagon.

On August 10, six hours after communications were lost, a contingent of troops from the Pennsylvania National Guard were dispatched to Peace-

maker's last known position, the staging/refueling area that was a half-kilometer south of a small city known as Dutchville, with orders to locate and re-establish contact. Now, if you want a full transcript of what this Guard unit found (or rather didn't), check out the original *Cutting Black* files. However, be warned, it's a bit on the weird and creepy side.

But I'll save everyone some time and summarize: They found nothing—literally *nothing*. There were no signs of Peacemaker ever being there and no signs of the city itself. I can personally confirm—before I lost access to the observation satellite I was piggybacking—that where the staging area and the city of Dutchville *should* be, there's now only kilometers of barren, empty land. Whatever happened to Peacemaker, apparently a small city of approximately twenty-five thousand shared the same fate.

- › Wait, so let me see if I'm getting this straight. You're saying that where this city should be, there's nothing but flat earth?
- › Rambler Rose
- › All the way to the crabgrass. Every building, every piece of infrastructure, every sign that there was a city—it's all gone. And that's not just from orbital imagery. I contracted a few specialists to do some on-site recon three weeks ago. They confirmed everything I saw. But there's more on that later in the file.
- › Orbital DK
- › So III Corps and this small city went "poof." What about this Guard unit—did they make it back and have anything new to say?
- › Scattershot
- › Negative. They went MIA as well.
- › Polaris
- › Asking the obvious question to you directly, DK: All that time you were tracking III Corps, did you see anything unusual? Even more than the rest of this?
- › Clockwork
- › I have hours of real-time footage showing nothing but III Corps moving along the highways and byways, no indication that anything was wrong as I didn't have any audio contact. But as luck would have it, at the time it's estimated that Peacemaker actually vanished, I was busy defending a satellite network from some hostiles trying to cut off Matrix access to Irregular forces in Detroit. Network was saved, but I lost access to the weather sat I was using to track Peacemaker in the process. By the time I got it back, it was all over.
- › Orbital DK
- › Fun fact—I tried doing a basic Matrix search for Dutchville, PA, and got nothing but variations of "there are no items that match your search parameters." I did a bit of digging and

was eventually able to find some local PR articles from about ten years ago talking about the expansion of an intermodal transportation hub located in Dutchville that was owned by Wuxing. Long story short, someone went through a lot of effort to erase the existence of this seemingly insignificant city from the Matrix.

- > Icarus
- > And of course, nothing about it anywhere in the newsfeeds either.
- > Sunshine
- > Should we act surprised? I can fake it if necessary.
- > Deadline

DUTCHVILLE: NEW KIND OF GHOST TOWN

When this first got my attention, I snagged a few files regarding Dutchville from the city's own Matrix node, mostly for some background material. I'm glad I did, because I'm starting to think I have the last files that prove Dutchville ever existed.

Well, I might as well put some pertinent data out now for the rest of us.

Before August 10, 2080, Dutchville had a population of approximately 26,470. It was recognized as a city (from township) on September 4, 2058.

The township (later city) was first started in 2056, the result of an influx of citizens to the area when an intermodal transportation hub, owned by Wuxing Worldwide Shipping and operated by subsidiary Overland Distributors, completed construction earlier that year. Before this, the area was mostly known for its large number of agro-farm co-ops and some of the few remaining family-owned farms in the region. Because of the large amount of farms, there was twice the normal amount of roads for such a rural area. These roads were later upgraded when Overland set up shop. Aside from the hub, Dutchville was also a popular rest area for travelers using I-80 and other nearby roadways.

As Overland grew as a company and gained regional prominence, Dutchville's population kept pace. Soon, Dutchville had all the box stores, shops, and everything that comes along with a growing pseudo-corporate town. Now, it's all gone. GPS and mapsofts don't recognize it; it's just another patch of roads near the highway.

And no one knows how or why.

'MEASURED RESPONSES'

Now we got the history out of the way ...

After Peacemaker and the Pennsylvania Guard unit vanished, a lot of wheels started turning. First, on my end, I knew the UCAS was going to do something soon. I just didn't know what. So I reached out to a few associates and got my own investigations rolling. I talked to a fellow JackPointer, Kay St. Irregular, and asked him to keep his ears open and monitor DeeCee's reaction as well as dig up any paydata he could. I also gave him a slush fund to hire any runners and/or other professionals needed to facilitate that.

- > Wait, you became a Johnson? How in the Nine Hells can you afford to do that?
- > Jimmy No
- > Oh, I don't know. Same way I'm able to afford to live in **freaking outer space** and operate a VPN. Do you really think I'm going to tell you or anyone else?
- > Orbital DK

Second, I knew that I had to get some people out to where Dutchville used to be for some on-site recon and general snooping around. And sure enough, I was right. Within twenty-four hours of losing their recon unit, the entire Pennsylvania National Guard (backed up by some Ohio NG units) was mobilized. It didn't take them long to set up a preliminary security perimeter and re-route all highways and roadways leading into Dutchville in advance of a UCAS reaction force that started setting up shop approximately forty-eight hours later.

And for the record, none of them got within five kilometers of Dutchville. Can't say I blame them for that.

But it takes time to set up a security cordon, even longer to plug any holes in it. And no disrespect to either, but the PA and OH units aren't exactly crack military outfits—a fact that the team I managed to assemble on the fly exploited quite easily before the UCAS military proper arrived and started locking things down.

- > Now this was something I could find some paydata on. Even though the average person doesn't follow the movements of military units, their families and friends do. The Pentagon released a statement. The first part was straight from the government denial playbook, saying that III Corps was on "routine readiness maneuvers." No mention of what was going on in Detroit either, likely because of the Matrix blackout and Ares's silence at the time.
- > Sunshine

- > Ares had (and still has) a lot of UCAS politicos in their pockets.
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > And it still amazes me on how the corps and the governments can get away with something like this, and the populace basically lets them.
- > Treadle
- > Have you not been paying attention to the world around you? The populace is in such a state of apathy. As long as they have access to their 'trid, their Matrix, soy lattes, or whatever shallow needs they have, their world is golden. And the corps, governments, and whatever powers behind the scenes have spent decades and unknown amounts of money to social engineer it all. But, no system lasts forever.
- > Rambler Rose
- > I like the way you think.
- > Old Crow

AT GROUND ZERO: DUTCHVILLE

The following field reports are from that team of runners I hired to poke around Dutchville (still going to use that name for the area even though the city is gone) that managed to stay in place for about thirteen days. Because this is still a hot topic, and they ran into more than a few complications and created a not-small amount of havoc with the UCAS military, I'm making like the old flat-vid crime dramas and changing the names to protect the innocent—and the guilty. For our purposes here, I redacted all the names and pronouns, changed the team leader's name to "Bird Dog" and called the rest of the team "Dogs." I've also edited out and filtered out all the boring bits. But if anyone wants the full shebang, including an hour of dead air, I'll gladly make them available.

Oh, and if any of you know or are able to figure out who Bird Dog or any of their team members are, keep it to yourself and don't spill it here. And for the love of Ghost, don't force me into a situation where I have to take extreme measures to protect my people or retaliate, because I will.

- > Yeah, I've seen her do it. Not pretty, do not recommend.
- > Sam-R-Eye

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #01

Per instructions from you and because of some on-site complications, I'm compiling all of our findings into neat little after-action-style reports.

We arrived in the general vicinity and set up a temporary field camp at <INFORMATON REDACTED> with no problems or indications we were detected in any way. This is good, because we've detected at least a battalion of National Guard troops

currently operating in the area. Wireless jamming is active here, impeding wireless connections and rendering Matrix access unreliable. This, combined with the amount of troops present, made operations difficult but not impossible.

We began our initial recon with Dog 2 attempting to infiltrate the NG's communications. According to Dog 2, "they're packing a lot of high-level encryption, unusual for a bunch of weekend warriors." Not surprising. Likely the UCAS rushed some SOTA comm-systems to the Guard units after what happened with III Corps. Dog 2 also said that getting into the network would take longer than anticipated.

Dog 3 also deployed one of their tracked drones equipped with a frag-ton of optical cable to get an initial impression of the opposition. The drone was able to get within seventy-five meters of a wire fence the troopers were setting up as a preliminary perimeter, clear-cutting any trees in the way or going through any farms as necessary. My estimation is that they've only been setting up for a few hours because the fencing only covered the southwest corner of what we overheard a trooper call "Containment Zone Alpha." Foot, vehicle, and drone patrols were heavy. We're also certain that one of those drones found ours, but nothing came of it. Dog 3 also had it modified to look like a woodchuck of all things. It sounds ridiculous, but despite no wireless signal and active jammers in the area, the plan actually worked.

During our observations, we noticed that all the troops on-station were on edge (not that I can blame them given the circumstances). More than once, we witnessed foot patrols shoot at random sounds in the distance and even at other patrols. Still, they were extremely thorough in their sweeps before rushing back to camp. But I wonder if that will hold once the initial adrenaline wears off?

Our most significant finding came from Dog 4 and was confirmed by myself. At ten kilometers out from our intended insertion point, they attempted a spirit summoning to assist us but quickly abandoned the idea. When asked why, they replied that the local manasphere somehow felt "off." They likened it to feeling heavier than normal or swimming in water that's somehow extra-thick. When I performed my own astral assessment, I also saw variations in the mana flow, with patterns I'd never seen before. It also gave both of us slight headaches. We tried again when we arrived at our insertion point, and Dog 4 almost went unconscious when performing the summoning, even though it was successful (if barely). I fared better but found observing the local manasphere to be ... uncomfortable. Magical theory and manasphere mechanics are not my areas of expertise, but Dog 4 and I will try to detail any and all additional findings to the best of our abilities for further analysis (hopefully by individuals more qualified).

We plan on attempting our first serious infiltration of the area within the next twelve hours of sending this report.

- > Nice trick with the drone. Sometimes old ways work just as good.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > Lots of better ways. But if you want to carry around that much cable, be my guest.
- > Rigger X
- > It worked—that's what ultimately matters. Sometimes we have to work with what we have, not what's "best."
- > Osprey
- > I'm more interested in the manosphere of the area. Has anyone else tried to travel there, even astrally?
- > Haze
- > Not that I am aware of. A few may have and have not relayed their findings or did not make it back. I'm going even going to contemplate trying it until I know more about this.
- > Winterhawk

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #02

Supplement to previous log.

Dog 2 was able to establish limited access to the NG network via one of the construction drones putting up the perimeter fence with Dog 3's help. Intelligence was limited, but we were able to obtain a current map of the area as of <INFORMATION REDACTED>. We've learned that the security perimeter encompasses an area that includes both the missing city and the staging area for III Corps. We haven't been able to find an official name for this place, if there is one, but we know the perimeter contains four different containment zones starting with Containment Zone Alpha in the southwest from the containment area's center, with Zone Bravo being northwest, Charlie northeast, and Delta southeast. Patrols are still heavy with randomized rotations, which have been a pain, but we've avoided detection. Additionally, large numbers of sensors have been activated, forming another layer of security.

Dog 5 noticed two hours ago that a contingent of four heavy VTOL lifting aircraft with UCAS Air Force markings arrived and quickly departed. Since then, there's been a small but steady flow of new aircraft and vehicles into the area, all bearing UCAS regular army markings. If they continue to follow standard UCAS emergency procedure, my educated guess says that they've already constructed a rudimentary landing zone and are working on establishing some kind of HQ.

Hopefully we'll know more after our first recon.

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #03

First recon into the area was successful, but with some setbacks. Using the data obtained by Dog 2, we were able to find a path through the perimeter fence and past the sensor fields in the Zone Bravo. From there, we discovered a secondary wire fence with the beginnings of foundations that suggest that something more permanent will be constructed in the area. As we continued inward, we found more evidence of preliminary construction work. Dog 5 and 6, using long-range optics, also confirmed other preliminary construction sites further in.

- > Sounds like someone is setting up shop. Maybe to investigate the disappearance or make a new black site?
- > Brutus Ex Mechina
- > Logical assumption. But it would depend on where and what exactly. Building an even semi-permanent base or camp this close to this ground zero is akin to putting your command center inside the nuke range.
- > Picador
- > Also doesn't help that in this case ground zero is several kilometers squared.
- > Orbital DK
- > One thing I've noticed is that there is no mention of any magical security being deployed by the National Guard or incoming UCAS troops.
- > Jimmy No

Whenever possible, we tagged drones and vehicles with RFID stealth trackers. Dog 3 was also able to take control of two more construction drones, which we are currently using to help map the area and track NG troop movement. That allowed us to avoid most security patrols. We had to use the sole service of Dog 4's earth spirit to distract a security patrol, but otherwise we met no direct opposition.

Approximately two kilometers in, I took a calculated risk and had Dog 4 attempt to perceive the astral again. At first the observation, while still more difficult, was possible. Dog 4 reported that the astral in this area was also different when compared at our base camp. In their words, it felt more "bent and warped." I felt off, as if my abilities were detached from my body. At times I felt sluggish and slower, other times it was hard to concentrate on sustaining my spells. Three minutes into their observation, Dog 4 collapsed and went unconscious, blood trickling from their nose and eyes. At this point I ordered the team back to base camp, which we arrived at without further incident.

I was able to treat Dog 4, and their vitals are stable. I expect them to recover within approximately

sixteen hours. I will try to debrief them once they awaken. In the meantime, we will continue with alternate forms of recon.

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #04

Two hours ago, Dog 4 awoke and began rambling about dark figures, mutated beings, and ... chimeras. This rambling quickly became screams of panic as they began to describe horrible mutilations such as limbs being removed. I had to completely sedate them to prevent discovery. Since then, their vital signs have reversed and have been steadily dropping.

Additionally, there's been a distinct increase of aircraft and vehicles entering the area.

Soon, I'll have to make a decision whether to continue this operation without magical support or exfiltrate. Based on their rate of decline, I am not confident that Dog 4 will survive the next eight hours.

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #05

Dog 4 died approximately two hours ago. We have stored the body within Dog 3's vehicle until I can find a suitable location for burial. I have elected to remain, for now. I trust you will uphold your end of the deal with regard to Dog 4's payment. Nothing else to report.

- > I don't know if that's a gutsy or stupid decision.
- > 2XL

- > Damn, DK, how much you pay those guys? Must be a frag-ton to stick around like that. You got any more jobs that need doing?
- > Clockwork

- > Enough, but none for you.
- > Orbital DK

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #09

- > You all may have noticed skips in the report numbers. That's because most of them were nothing but mundane items such as information on the lockdown of local highway and roads, the diversion of all civilian traffic around the area, and the UCAS Army taking full control with increased security measures overall. And as always for you nitpickers, if you want it all, message me.
- > Orbital DK

We've been conducting more recon sorties into the perimeter but have been getting diminishing returns. With the NG network being upgraded and new security protocols put in place once the UCAS Army officially took over three days ago, we've been having to conduct operations in a more old-school fashion, which I'm afraid to say is not yielding much useful data, all while the chance of

detection continues to increase. Despite this, I have authorized Dog 5 and 6 (with assistance from Dog 2) to continue limited recon along and just inside the perimeter. Maybe we'll get lucky.

Several drones have attempted to enter the vicinity over the past few days. And like the others before, they all were quickly eliminated by either small arms, anti-aircraft fire, or (in a new development) spirits. Around this time, I started to observe additional spirits in the area for the first time since our arrival. Although based on their actions, I surmise they're not local but conjured by security magicians now on-site and able to operate normally.

This also seemed to coincide with my own personal situation in that my abilities seem to be evening out. I no longer feel magically fatigued, and my abilities seem to have returned to normal. So given these circumstances, I decided to attempt perceiving the astral with orders to my team that should anything happen to me, they are to abort the operation and exfiltrate with whatever data they have.

Thankfully, that order proved unnecessary, I was able to perceive the astral plane with little difficulty. By all accounts, the local manasphere looked relatively normal.

While this is a welcome revelation, it also means that the UCAS has full access to it as well. This will seriously hamper any further data gathering efforts. Once Dog 5 and 6 return, I believe it may be best to exfiltrate early rather than risk detection; I do not know how much more useful data we can gather. I will wait until Dog 5 and 6 return and see what, if anything, new they have to report.

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #10

During their latest recon sortie, along the Zone Charlie perimeter, Dog 5 and 6 observed seven VTOL aircraft approaching from the northwest and headed into the containment zone's interior. According to Dog 5, they lacked any identification markings and did not have any external lights on. Further, they also seemed to have noise-baffling on their engines; it was pure blind luck they were spotted.

Both Dog 5 and 6 want to go back in. They believe they've found a path that will allow them to get eyes on the main area within the containment zone. I was hesitant at first but gave them the go-ahead anyway.

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #11

Weapons fire and explosions have been heard in the distance, in the direction towards the Army's main encampment. I can see flashes in the distance as well. Alarms can be heard. Patrol aircraft and drones have also been observed responding. On top of that, I've lost contact with Dog 5 and 6.

Per operational parameters, if I cannot reestablish contact with either Dog 5 or 6 within two hours or our position here is compromised, the rest of the team will exfiltrate without them.

BIRD DOG OPERATIONAL LOG #12

This will be my last report, as we have exfiltrated from our position. The operation is over.

Dog 5 and 6 returned from their recon and reported another team/group operating in the vicinity.

Seven, possibly eight, in total were observed at long range moving on the outskirts of Zone Charlie moving inward. According to Dog 6, the unknown team's movements were well-coordinated, and their equipment and weaponry were uniform, in all black, and apparently top-of-the line. Dog 6 also reported that their only possible identifying marker was a stylized wolf-face on their ballistic masks.

The Unknown's target was a nondescript modular building adjacent to the main Army HQ and CNC. According to Dog 5 and 6, the situation occurred as such.

The Unknown's infiltration was "flawless" and were in the building for approximately eleven minutes. At that time, there was an explosion inside the building; possibly even underground. Alarms began to sound across the UCAS facility, and security forces mobilized. Within two minutes, aircraft and drones in support of the Unknowns arrived and provided close air support, enabling the ground forces to execute a fighting withdraw.

This action unfortunately also forced Dog 5 and 6 to also withdraw when they came under fire from a security patrol, likely alerted by the Unknown's actions and likely taking them as part of that assault force. Dog 5 and 6 were forced to defend themselves and had to neutralize the UCAS patrol in the process. Both sustained heavy injuries during the encounter. We were able to exfiltrate the area without further incident.

End of report.

- > Bit of a postmortem here. My team made it out, but unfortunately Dog 5 later died of complications from their injuries. The rest of the team and I had a full debriefing via the Matrix three days after the last report. I'm still running down some of the leads they provided. After that last encounter, additional troops began to arrive, but like the unknown aircraft, these vehicles and troops had no identifying marks. Security in the area became even more restrictive. Any vehicle or aircraft that tried to penetrate the security cordon was eliminated with extreme prejudice. That policy is currently still in effect. The only thing that changed is that after the first flash was seen over Philly, all UCAS military personnel scrambled to other fronts or duty stations. The Dutchville facility is now just that, a full facility that is still expanding. But so far, I've been unable to determine who's now manning the fort, as it were.
- > Orbital DK

- > Obviously you're not the only one with an interest in this, DK. Over the past couple of months, I've been getting a lot of request for both paydata and jobs regarding the Dutchville black site (because honestly, what else can it be).
- > The Mechanic
- > Looks like we've got a new Area 51!
- > Electric Blue
- > Indeed, and it looks like we now have a new hobby, which is good, because we've been insanely bored after the blackouts.
- > Plan 9
- > Rumors are starting to circulate among the rigger communities; seems there's a movement gaining traction that wants to run scores of drones through the security cordons, just to see what happens.
- > Turbo Bunny
- > I'll give you a hint: **BBBBBBBBBBBBRRTTTT, Fa-WOOOOSH, BOOOM, CRASH!!!** Did I miss anything?
- > Osprey
- > Fa-Woosh???
- > Treadle
- > Oh for frag ... **missiles!**
- > Osprey

AND THEN THINGS GOT REALLY WEIRD?

- > In the original draft of this file, this is where a section on DeeCee was supposed to go. But as I started compiling all the data and reports (many dating back to over a year), I realized it would be better to go over this first and give more context. So if things seem a bit disjointed, just be patient and keep reading.
- > Orbital DK
- > Have you forgotten where you're posting?
- > Bull

Eventually, the drekstorm that was happening in the UCAS ended (sort of), and the country found itself in its new normal, for better or worse. After several months of that insanity, the fate of III Corps was barely a blip on my mental radar anymore. In fact, all I wanted to do was sleep for about two months.

That changed when I found a small data packet from an unknown sender in one of my extremely private Matrix dead drops that got me back on the case. This drop in particular got my attention because it's one very few people know about, let alone have access to. In the dead drop was a small data file along with the subject heading: "In case

you forgot.” Yeah, the old paranoia and some anger spiked after someone hacked one of my most secure private assets. So after I ran every security scan and back-trace I could think of, I calmed down and reasserted the logic part of my brain and opened the packet.

It was a bit anticlimactic, because the data was nothing more than the summary section of some medical report.

FILE NUMBER 21-334. REPORT SUMMARY, CASE #3379-44, CORPORAL JAX HELLER UCASA

Based on the condition of the lungs and near-absence of seawater in the alveoli, I can conclude that the cause of death was not, in fact, drowning. Rather, the cause of death appears to be acute multiple organ failure secondary to what I can only describe as some kind of massive organ mutation. It was as if each one of those organs or glands was being rejected by the body. Sections of the brain, the heart, lungs, as well as the pituitary and adrenal glands all appear to have undergone significant genetic damage. But the cause of these mutations is unknown, as there were no signs of common mutagenic catalysts such as cancerous cells or radiological exposure. Additionally, there were several patches of skin that seemed to have undergone some kind of discoloration that is inconsistent with the patient’s time in the water. See my full report for complete organ analysis and details regarding the nature of these mutations. I have also sent tissue and DNA samples to the proper labs for testing. The body will remain in the cold storage unit until transfer procedures with the UCAS Army are completed.

— Dr. Fernando Alvarez, MD/PATH

I wondered why someone would send me something like this. So I began the usual game of cross-referencing and data searching. At first, I couldn’t find anything about a Corporal Jax Heller. That cranked my curiosity meter up a few notches. So with Polaris’ help, we eventually found out that (surprise) Corporal Heller was part of the UCAS Army’s 24th Infantry Division ... attached to III Corps at the time of its disappearance.

Yeah, I know. I should have seen this coming. But frag off, it’s been a rough few months.

What was easier was tracking down this Dr. Alvarez. Long and short of this is that Alvarez was a respected MD/pathologist in Lima. Yeah. And the body of a UCAS trooper, last seen in Pennsylvania, somehow made its way to Peru—and was dead by unusual means. It took some deep digging and more than a few fights slugging it out with some nasty IC, but I was able to back-trace and find some data on how Heller ended up in Peru.

On November 23, 2080, Heller’s body was found floating twenty kilometers east of Lima, Peru. He

was spotted by a commercial aircraft and later recovered by search-and-rescue craft. According to the initial Peruvian Coast Guard report and field notes, they thought this was just another drowning victim, which isn’t uncommon in the area. And naturally, they did their due diligence and attempted to identify the body, but they were initially unsuccessful. Heller wasn’t wearing anything except a shredded pair of BDU pants. Fingerprint scanners were also useless, because Heller’s hands didn’t have any prints. And of course, facial recognition software didn’t bring up any hits (shocker there). There weren’t even any signs of ’ware, even though according to army records, there should have been some cybereyes and reaction enhancers. They were all gone. The only thing they found on (or rather *in*) the body that could assist with identification was a set of UCAS Army-issued dog tags resting in Heller’s stomach.

- > Military jewelry in the gut isn’t proof. It’s a definitely a clue and lead, but I’ve seen many red-herrings on bodies before. And as ID evidence, it’s flimsy and circumstantial at best, especially without a DNA ID match.
- > Det. Gumshoe
- > Swallowing one’s tags is usually the next-to last desperate act of a soldier. The last is putting a bullet in your brain. Whoever this is, they knew something bad was going to happen, and soon. He hoped that somehow, someone would eventually find and identify him.
- > Picador
- > I didn’t even know dog tags were still a thing. Figured soldiers would be chipped or something.
- > Chainmaker
- > Some are, and some militaries use both, because there’s a nostalgia and practical factor. RFID tags or chips can be erased, but a hunk of metal with basic info stamped into it isn’t susceptible to hacking. Sometimes simple is all you need.
- > Hard Exit
- > Okay, I want to say that this is messed up. Mutations don’t happen this way, and not to such specific organs.
- > Butch
- > I’m no doc, but I got a lot of augments in most of the same organs to max out my reaction speed. Could this be some sort of new experimental bioware or geneware that didn’t work?
- > Brutus Ex Mechina
- > Maybe. But if Picador is right, let’s not forget that all signs here point to an unwilling subject.
- > Butch
- > Glad I got out of the Army when I did; the merc business is much safer.
- > Scattershot

Following basic protocol, the Peruvian government contacted the UCAS government saying they've possibly found one of their dead soldiers in their territory. This is the information we have, where we found him, and oh yeah ... we found some odd stuff medically. When can you claim the body? You know, all that bureaucratic drek.

Normal procedure would be for the UCAS to send a Criminal Investigation Division team for the remains, maybe do some of their own preliminary investigations. That would normally be the end of it. But during our data-hunting, Polaris and I discovered that three days after the message was sent to the UCAS embassy, Heller's body was pilfered and the morgue records trashed (mostly). Likewise, the lab where Heller's tissue and DNA samples were sent was also raided. For good measure, the lab's entire genetic sample and specimen storage was destroyed.

And to add yet another cherry on the top of this drek sundae, Dr. Alvarez and the assistant who helped him ID Heller were found with a serious case of dead about twenty-four hours after the break-ins. Alvarez was found dead of "natural causes" in his home, and the assistant bought it in a nasty motor vehicle accident.

We've all seen this story play out before. We know what a cover-up looks like.

- > Mysterious break-ins, data erasure, theft ... sounds like a Tuesday for me.
- > Ma'Fan
- > Is it me, or does the biz start to feel so fragging convoluted and cliché at times?
- > Cool Hand Duke
- > And when we do get a simple answer, we usually don't believe it.
- > Cosmo
- > I wonder if the UCAS Government lodged any kind of formal protest with the Peruvians for "losing" one of their soldiers.
- > DangerSensei
- > The UCAS Embassy has no record of and denies receiving any such notification from the Peruvian government. And thus no one went to claim any of the remains. Draw your own conclusions from that.
- > Polaris
- > And for those inclined to take advantage of this, overall security for most UCAS systems seems to be a bit lax at the moment.
- > Icarus
- > I'm curious as to who actually pulled this off. The UCAS military and intelligence services weren't exactly operating at peak efficiency during that time (and still aren't), nor am I sure they have the money to spend on an operation like this.
- > Thorn

- > I did some digging, and I'm inclined to believe that local talent was hired. This job was competent, but a bit sloppy and very much overkill. Agencies like the CIA tend to have a bit more finesse.
- > DangerSensei
- > Unless that's what that's what they want you to believe. Current events have seen a significant influx of disavowed and so-called "retired" intelligence specialists from the UCAS into the shadows. So while they may no longer work (directly) for the company, there is still plenty of work out there for them.
- > The Mechanic

NOT SO M.I.A. ANYMORE

At the time, I didn't know really what to make of the Heller situation or the possibilities of what was going on. Could this be the indication that maybe III Corps was part of some kind of secret covert op that went bad, or was the disappearance part of that plan?

One mysterious case of weirdness wasn't enough to tell me squat. But it was a start. So I recruited a few other specialists to work closely with, and we created a search algorithm to dredge the Matrix for any possible leads. But the process was agonizingly slow, and the drek we had to sift through was heavy and deep. A month in, and all we had to show for our efforts were a lot of data files that were almost complete bulldrek. Oh sure, we found some truly odd, weird, and in some cases disturbing data (which I passed on to parties I knew would be interested), but nothing that tied into III Corps.

We'd been trying to find data to establish a pattern so then we could extend that pattern outward. But it's pretty hard to come up with a pattern when you're working with only one example. I'd also considered that maybe, somehow, this was some kind of isolated incident, and there really was nothing else to find.

But that's when I got another message from my anonymous source. It was another simple text message, but this time was just a tad more ominous. "I need your help—things have accelerated. If you wish to continue your current hobby, meet me here in four hours, or you may have to find another one. Time is of the essence." The message came with a link to a private chatroom.

- > New information, or was someone getting impatient? Anyone want to bet?
- > Icarus

The word "trap" came to mind. But at this point, I'd hit a brick wall, and my investigation was going nowhere. And the message didn't say anything about bringing a few friends ...

So four hours later, Polaris, another trusted associate, Heimdall-R, rode double-shotgun and

we went to see who this individual was and what they had to say. But before I download the transcript, I need to talk about the serious security this simple chat room had. I've been working with SOTA Matrix tech my whole life because it's what keeps me connected and my location a closely guarded secret. But this room was better than anything I've ever had access to. I had a feeling even GOD couldn't find us there. But I digress.

««««OPENING FILE: DK-404,
MEETING OOI, CREATING TRANSCRIPT»»»»

In attendance:

Admin: XXXXX

Users: Orbital DK, Polaris, Heimdall-R

XXXXX: Hello. I'm glad you came, all of you. Apologies for the subterfuge and secrecy, but I'm sure that each one of you knows the value of keeping certain things secret.

Orbital DK: <looks at Polaris and Heimdall-R> Indeed. But at the risk of sounding rude, this isn't the time for discussing anything personal. You said that this meeting was time-sensitive and about, well, whatever is going on.

Heimdall-R: Has something changed?

XXXXX: Yes, you. But, Polaris ... you don't have to hide your efforts to scan this room and ID me. There is no need for subterfuge.

Polaris: With respect, then, why do you hide?

XXXXX: Because like you, I am surrounded by my enemies. But you have a point. Part of this meeting was to start the process of building trust. And I can't do that from behind a mask now can I?

<<<Security Filter 003 deactivated>>>

Agent-X: There, is this satisfactory?

Orbital DK: I've heard of you, or at least that handle on JackPoint, from the Toxic Alleys file. Are you the one who dealt with that bug shaman?

Agent-X: I am.

Heimdall-R: I saw that file as well. I thought you were deceased.

Agent-X: I get that a lot. I use it whenever possible. Long story short, someone briefly took the moniker over for a short time but passed it back to me after things happened. But that's not important now. I need to tell you about some information a trusted contact of mine has uncovered. Things are already in motion, and if I'm reading you correctly, you want to do something about it.

Orbital DK: Yes—or at least find out what's going on and get the data out.

Agent-X: ... I guess that will have to do. I have an informant well-placed in DeeCee who has access to certain classified materials and records. They also have a vested interest in finding out what happened to III Corps but have been in a limited position to do anything about it until recently.

Orbital DK: That's how and why you sent me the information about Heller?

Agent-X: Yes. My informant was forced to go silent for a time, to cover their tracks. No disrespect, but I'd hoped you'd be able to find something more—something I could not. But events have forced all of our hands. My source has said that more soldiers have turned up and that ...

Orbital DK: Wait, more? How many more?

Agent-X: I've been told of at least eight, with the possibility of more. In the words of my source, "they're organizing teams to go get them to bring them back or eliminate them at all costs, zero trace-back."

Polaris: This seems most extreme and illogical for the UCAS government. One would think that recovering so many lost troops would be a boon.

Orbital DK: I think this may go way beyond simple politics or even avoidance of a scandal.

Heimdall-R: I will never understand that metahuman concept.

Agent-X: Yeah. Either way, we need to move on this and maybe bring in more help—of all kinds. I'm guessing you know of people who fit that bill?

Orbital DK: I may know of a few.

Agent-X: I thought you mi—

Heimdall-R: DK, we need to go now!

Orbital DK: What is it?

Heimdall-R: Something, someone is ... it's GOD, they're about to converge on this location!

Agent-X: What? How?

Polaris: Confirmed, detecting GOD presence, convergence in seven seconds ...

Agent-X: Damn! Okay, listen to me, this may be the key—look for manasphere distortions; at least six have been confirmed near a location where missing troops have resurfaced. And they think it'll keep happening! Also, there may be oth—

WARNING: THREAT DETECTED

Orbital DK: Frag, no time! Everyone scatter!

<<<<END FILE>>>>

If you've never seen GOD assault a Matrix construct with extreme prejudice, you're lucky, because it's not pretty. We were 0.034 seconds from going with it or being link-locked and simply taken out later. Still not sure how GOD knew where we were, because we weren't doing anything to get their attention (not this time). But had Agent-X's defenses not been as good as they were, I'd likely be either scattered atoms in orbit or drooling brain-dead at my workstation until my oxygen ran out.

And since that conversation three months ago (as of the time of this posting), I haven't heard anything from Agent-X. But the tip they gave has been more than useful.

- > So, gotta ask, what do we know about this Agent-X? Can they be trusted? Or is this possibly a false flag, disinformation thing?
- > Jimmy No
- > Small blurb from an old shadow file says that at least one Agent-X is was Camille Rivers, a former NSA agent and top-tier decker who slotted off a lot of powerful DeeCee movers and shakers when she went rogue by going after one Derrick Stokes, a known bug shaman who kidnapped her children. But Rivers was thought (hey, word) to have been killed during the course of that investigation. And since then, at least two others in the shadows, both also deckers, have used the moniker. But as far my sources say, "Agent-X" has had a solid rep with the teams and Johnsons they've worked with and for.
- > Glitch
- > I can vouch that much at least. I suggested Agent-X for two jobs, both completed with zero issues.
- > The Mechanic

NOT EXACTLY A PROPER HOMECOMING

With a new lead, I reached out to the magic-users I know and trust for assistance. Using the data obtained from Bird Dog's excursion as a basis, we added that factor to the search algorithm. Combined with some on-site astral recon, we were able to pin down at least six locations: Austin, Brisbane, Caracas, Helsinki, Redding, and the Southern Providences of Morocco.

- > DK, please send me your updated algorithm. Pistons and I want to assist.
- > Netcat
- > I'm fairly certain there was one in Belfast, but frag me if I was going to try and get any closer to the Tír than I already did. The astral there freaks me out more than a little bit.
- > Cool Hand Duke
- > And I'm fairly sure I saw the possible remnants of a disturbance about ten kilometers south of Cebu City in the Philippines. I must have missed the show, though, because the astral seemed mostly normal, but the manosphere was a bit uncomfortable to be around. There's also a lot of activity going on when I stopped by. Some powerful air spirits kept me from assensing too much, but I've seen enough to know what a search party looks like from the astral plane.
- > Junkyard Dawg
- > I'd also like to respectfully point out that finding these disturbances was a lot more difficult than DK makes it seem. The disturbances at Dutchville—about which I am making an educated guess here—were on a magnitude many multiple times larger than those at the other locations we discovered. For most of them, we traced any mundane leads first, then (cautiously) sent in a magician to the area for confirmation and precise location. Most of these disturbances could be measured in meters. And based on the little eyewitness accounts or visual evidence we were able to find, it would look like some kind of storm. And frankly, given the state of the world since the Awakening, such things have become a bit ... blasé.
- > Elijah

With the help of various fixers and other contacts, I was able to assemble adequate teams for each suspected location except Helsinki. I talked Traveler Jones into taking a detour from his current road-trip to spend a few days in Helsinki poking around a little bit. Of the teams I've sent out, only three (Austin, Redding, and the Southern Providences) have reported back, and the results have been less than encouraging. I'm still deciding between giving the others more time, sending in follow-up teams, or just calling them a wash. So if anyone's got any local data, don't be afraid to speak up.

The team's main objectives were to investigate the local disturbances and anyone else directly involved or doing the same. And if they were *really* lucky enough to encounter them, secure any III Corps troops. Ideally they'd be alive, but any remains may be useful for future study or maybe to give some people some closure. Some of the missions produced some positive results, while others went straight to hell in a handbasket. But all of them provided at least some useful information on this rapidly evolving cluster-frag of a situation.

- > Also, for those who aren't members or affiliates of either JackPoint or Asgard, I granted the team leaders access to answer any questions anyone may have.
- > Orbital DK
- > Not going to tell anyone how to handle their own business, but the question still remains of how you could afford all of this. I'm assuming the runner's fees weren't cheap, nor were all the logistics. You have to be broke or at least close to it.
- > Clockwork
- > Thanks for your concern, but I'm not. And anyone else can just back off on that subject. I don't ask you how anyone else handles their biz, so show me the same respect.
- > Orbital DK

GHOST BLESSED TEXAS, OR IS IT AZTLAN NOW? (AUSTIN, BY ARTEMIS LUNA)

In any job, there's always some kind of risk-reward evaluation. I don't mind going into a high-risk situation, but you better play it straight and make it worth my team's effort. Otherwise, you can kiss my ample yet firm dwarven backside.

I'll be honest; we almost didn't take the job. The area they wanted us to scout is in one of the most heavily contested parts in the city. Between pro-CAS and pro-Aztlan forces on both sides of the border constantly using each other for target practice, gangs and lowlifes of all kinds prowl the area and don't welcome outsiders. Not to mention the toxics that've migrated to the area for Ghost knows why. But there were just enough zeros in the payday. And combined with some additional terms and provisions, how could we say no?

We weren't given an exact location of this ... metaplanar anomaly (or whatever) we were supposed to scout out, but rather a rough general area that was approximately four square kilometers. Still a decent chunk of southern real estate to search, but that was the good news.

The bad news was that most of that area is a blasted-out railyard under the control of Los Cuchillos Locos, a thriller gang that's known for taking their time using blades on anyone captured on their turf. They also work for the local big syndicates as muscle, couriers, cleaners (the kind that take care of bodies), and as one may expect, organleggers. The Cuchillos' leader is rumored to be an insane blood shaman who's never seen in public for fear of that still-active bounty by the Draco Foundation, among others. But the one you're most likely to see running the show in the field is Razor Kiss, an adept and known cannibal.

- > I've heard of this guy. Did a consulting job on with a Lone Star Task Force on a serial murderer case in Dallas-Ft. Worth ten years ago, and Kiss was their prime suspect. But he bolted just

before we got the arrest warrant. And when he turned up in Austin two years later, the Star decided he wasn't worth the effort anymore. This guy is someone you literally don't want to get close to—he's known for biting chunks out of people during a fight, among other things.

- > Gumshoe

Thankfully, my face (and expert hoop-kisser) Rufus is tight with the leader of the L-Star Lancers, a go-gang whose territory butts up against the Cuchillos'. The fact they have no love for the Cuchillos worked in our favor. Not only were we granted passage through their territory, but the Lancers were also willing to part with some information regarding some tunnels that had been dug out from several collapsed buildings that fell on both Lancer and Cuchillos territory. Solid and reinforced over the past few years, these would make for a nice entrance (and egress) a quarter kilometer into Cuchillos turf unmolested.

So we packed up our guns and gear and went for a walkabout.

The Lancers were true to their word about not running into any trouble while using these tunnels. How the Cuchillos didn't know about them was a mystery, but one I didn't care about. Once we reached the end, we found a few floors of a semi-collapsed office complex to set up shop in. We tried to send out a drone, but our rigger Mongoose said there was some kind of local interference messing with all wireless signals. And if the drone got more than seventy-five to one hundred meters away from him, he'd lose signal entirely. And sure enough, even those of us with wireless active mods (smartlink in particular was a bit glitchy) were experiencing at least some difficulty. Our mages Ringo and Taurus also started to feel slightly ill and attempted to send spirits ahead to scout, but they flat-out refused; I didn't know spirits could do that. When questioned why, one simply answered, "Because we will not be able to return home." Yeah, it was cryptic, but it somewhat confirmed the pre-job data we'd been given.

Thanks for that, by the way.

Unfortunately, that meant we'd have to do this the hard and dangerous way.

I won't bore you by reviewing every encounter we had over the next twelve hours. But needless to say, the area is now cleared of quite a few critters, along with one insane toxic mystic adept. Yeah, that one was fun—speed and spells. But we also saw what happened when someone tried to use magic in the warped manosphere. Fragging bastard literally folded in on himself. With the noise we made, I thought we were going to be discovered for sure. But after that encounter, we realized that while the Cuchillos have a reputation for rabidly protecting their territory, we didn't see any of them out and about. Ringo and Taurus were also getting sicker with Taurus puking his guts out every five

minutes and Ringo not too far behind. So I sent them back—no need to risk them. And to be honest, they were worthless to me at this point. So our seven-person team was now down to five.

- > Please tell me there's video footage of this encounter. I want to see exactly how this "folding" occurred.
- > Winterhawk
- > Check your inbox—it's got what you need, and more.
- > Orbital DK

I also want to note that even in the dead of night, we noticed some kind of atmospheric discoloration and distortion. I'm no meteorologist, but even a layperson could tell that wasn't right.

About four hours in, we found what could only be described as a crime scene. Only there were no intact bodies, just signs of violence, a fragging drek-ton of blood, chunks of flesh, a few body parts, and debris (even more than normal for this area). We took some images just in case and searched the area. Panther (our samurai) found the purple blood—at least, that's what the med scanner said it was, even though it couldn't identify what kind. Some of it was mixed in with the regular stuff, but we found a thirty-meter trail of it leading back to a patch where it looked like the top layer of earth (and whatever else was in it) had been simply removed in a rectangular shape, twenty by ten meters. We bagged a sample of the blood and dirt and continued on.

For the next few hours, we tracked a trail leading from the crime scene to what I guess at one point was a transportation hub of some kind with derelict truck cabs and trailers set up as improvised barriers. But again, there wasn't a single Cuchillo anywhere. It wasn't until we got within about fifty meters from what I'm guessing was the main door that we started to hear the screaming. And I'm not talking any ordinary scream. I'm talking blood-curdling, full-on rage, pain-induced kind of screaming. We made entrance and quickly found ourselves in the main loading dock. And oh, frag me ...

In the center was some kind of magical circle surrounded with what I'm guessing was every damn Cuchillo ganger in the area, kneeling in semi-circular rows that fanned out. I saw who I'm guessing was Razor Kiss standing with a pair of wicked-looking curved short swords in hand, red and purple blood covering his body in very Aztech-looking patterns standing to the right of someone I'm going to hazard a guess was Cuchillos' leader.

They wore some kind of ceremonial armor that made it hard to see much about their actual form. They had a deep, yet screechy voice, and I'm guessing they were a blood mage (big shocker,



right?). But what got my attention was the poor slag in the circle.

Stripped naked and covered in purple blood from multiple wounds across his chest and abdomen, he was thrashing about against several heavy, spiked chains bolted to the floor and embedded in his massive limbs. But even then, it looked like the chains were about to give way; gangers were quick to imbed another when one threatened to come loose. All the while he was roaring “take me home” or “take me home, now” along with several utterances of “I’ll kill you all.” Judging by the freshly dead gangers piled up in the back, I believed him.

And I say this was a male only because I saw the typical male anatomy between his legs. The rest of his body looked ... inmetahuman. The musculature in his legs and arms was tight but grossly out of proportion, almost as if someone attached three quarter-sized troll limbs to a human body with massive shoulders and flaring hips. Across his chest, I saw what I thought looked like tattoos, but several lacerations ruined most of them. His head was completely bald, and his nose had been removed, leaving only two slits in its place. And the skin ... even in the odd lighting, it looked dark grey.

- ▶ Interesting. If you’ve got images of these tats, I’d like to see if I can ID them.
- ▶ Picador

I also saw tears streaming from Roaring Man’s eyes.

Fearless Leader was using a knife, plunging it into Roaring Man’s stomach and chest, then using the blood to draw more symbols on Razor Kiss’ body as he stood there in a trance.

I’d never seen a blood sacrifice or whatever the frag this was before, and I wasn’t going to start now. I signaled for the team to flank and wait for my signal to light these fraggers up. Six seconds later, we had optimum fields of fire and cut loose with weapons on full-auto.

I’d like to say it was a fight, but that would be lying. It was an outright slaughter. Los Cuchillos Locos were completely flatfooted. They were wearing no armor and had no weapons. But we still killed every last one of them there. Razor Kiss snapped out of whatever trance he was in and charged Panther, who was on the right flank. Kiss was good but Panther was better, and he demonstrated how he earned his street name. While the rest of us kept gunning down gangers, Kiss and Panther danced, which ended with Panther’s hand razors removing Kiss’ throat from his neck.

We kept trying to kill Fearless Leader, but gangers after gangers jumped in the way of our fire. Behind them, I saw Fearless Leader clutch something hanging around their neck. I didn’t know what spell he was about to cast, but based on what we’d seen earlier, I knew something bad was about to

happen. I ordered everyone to cover, hoping beyond hope it would do—I don’t know, *something*.

I heard and felt more than saw what happened next, although Mongoose got footage from his cybereyes. I still haven’t looked at the footage, and never will. There was a flash, a roar, and then it felt like the wind was ripped from my body then slammed back in the wrong way. Couple of seconds later, I had my breath back and noticed that where Fearless Leader was, only a pool of gore remained.

But that was the least of our problems.

Whatever Fearless Leader had done, it was now bringing the warehouse down on our heads. I checked on the rest of my team. We were all up, except for Panther, who was now missing half of his body. In the circle, Roaring Man was pinned by a chunk of roof, his lower half completely crushed, purple blood everywhere. There was no way we were going to get him out. So I ordered the rest of the team to evacuate. But before I left, I raised my AK and sighted in on Roaring Man’s face. I could tell he was in great pain as purple blood was flowing freely from his mouth. And all the while he was still mouthing “take me home,” but this time he added “please.”

Our eyes met over the rifle sights, and I said, “I’m sorry” before putting a bullet through Roaring Man’s forehead.

Not much else to say after that. The rest of us managed to evacuate in relatively one piece with no injuries a quick trip to the street doc wouldn’t fix. Few hours later, we met back up with Ringo and Taurus who patched us up. After that, we dropped off the samples, downloaded the image-feed, and collected our payday.

Now, I don’t know what all of that was about, and part of me never wants to. So after I’m done with this report of sorts, I’m going to find a few bottles and crawl into them for a while.

Don’t call me, I’ll call you.

- ▶ What the frag could have caused that kind of, I don’t know, magical backlash?
- ▶ Haze
- ▶ I don’t know. I have never encountered a phenomenon, natural or otherwise, that affects magic in such a way.
- ▶ Elijah
- ▶ All the more reason for us to look into this further. Aside from the connection to III Corps and the mystery we’re looking at, this is something that may have long-reaching repercussions and implications for the magical community.
- ▶ Winterhawk
- ▶ Typical casters, only worrying about your precious power. Frag that poor slag in the circle who was apparently another “unwilling subject,” right?
- ▶ Stone

- > Are you okay?
- > Bull
- > Just getting real fed up, is all.
- > Stone
- > I've found something else to share. Going on an educated guess, I called in a couple of favors and had those tattoos checked against UCAS military records. When that failed, I ran them against the International Mercenary Association registry. Found a match to one Staff Sergeant Matthew J. Henson of Lansing, Michigan. Seems Henson is a UCAS re-tread. He went merc for a couple of years before heading back to the UCAS Army. That meant he had to register with the IMA. After a few more calls, I was able to find out that Henson had been assigned to Charlie Company, Second Armored Infantry, etc., etc., of III Corps out of Fort Hamilton, New York.
- > Picador
- > Okay, not exactly a smoking gun, but just enough for me to wonder what the frag is going on here.
- > DangerSensei

CALIFORNIA FREE STATE DREAMING (REDDING, BY SCATTERSHOT)

First, I'm not going to give some long-winded account of events; instead, I'll share only pertinent facts as to what I observed, to the best of my ability and recollection. Second, I want to go on record and say that this operation turned into a massive clusterfrag and that despite this, the people with whom I was assigned showed exceptional skill in the face of extreme danger from an unknown and unexpected adversary.

- > Wow, this seems like it's going to be a fun one. *rolls eyes*
- > X-Prime
- > Watch it. Scattershot has been working his craft for longer than you or I have been breathing. As the old adage says, "beware of the old in a profession where most others die young."
- > Bangswitch
- > Oh, wow, that's some grade-A hoop-kissing, there.
- > X-Prime
- > Thanks for the support, kid, but I'm also old enough to not give a rat's backside of what anyone else thinks of me, let alone waste any of my time on it.
- > Scattershot

Our mission was to conduct a recon/investigation operation in the Shasta region near Redding in the northern part of the California Free State, which is near the contested area between Cal Free and Tír Tairngire. Our objectives were

to investigate any and all information related to criteria provided by our employer.

The mission CO held the IMA-recognized rank of captain, who for this operation went under the call sign of Dark Horse One. I was designated as Dark Horse Two, and my primary role was mission sergeant and local guide, as I am intimately familiar with the region and citizenry. The twelve-person unit was made up of local specialists and rounded out with other mercenaries who had served with me during action in Detroit some months earlier.

We arrived in the target region just before dawn. Our operational convoy consisted of two modified Dodge Stallion security vehicles, two Yamaha Growler off-road bikes, and one GMC Armadillo for drone and supply transport. Once in the area, I suggested to Dark Horse that we speak to a contact of mine, an individual I will not name for security and personal reasons.

This contact is considered to be the unofficial game warden and protector of the area by those who live there. As such, if there were any unusual activities or sightings in the area, there would be a high probability that they would know about it. Upon arrival at my contact's residence, I entered alone, mainly for the security and safety for the rest of my team.

- > I was going to ask, but then I realized where this was and how the people of the area are rather eccentric. My guess is the contact has booby-trapped their home and will blast anyone who gets within so many meters without so much as a hello. And they have some kind of guard animals and elaborate paths you **have** to walk along, but yet things like wireless or even indoor plumbing is foreign to them. Bet there's even a still out back.
- > DangerSensei
- > Right on everything, except the plumbing and wireless. They're not complete savages out there.
- > Scattershot

After announcing my presence, I found my contact in one of the back rooms. Their right leg was severely injured, looking like it had been mauled by some kind of animal. My contact confirmed their injuries were the result of an ambush while they were investigating rumors of suspicious activity and unusual animal tracks west of Shasta. My contact said their attacker wasn't any animal, Awakened or mundane, that they'd seen before. They said it looked vaguely humanoid, about two meters tall, thin but strong, with hook-clawed fingers and sharp teeth. My contact also said that they shot several heavy pistol rounds into the unknown, "just to get the fragging thing off my leg, but I still didn't kill the fragger."

When I then inquired into the nature of the suspicious activity, they replied that they'd been prompted to check the area near Paige Bar when

four nights previous, what was described as several “mana storms” were observed. The next day, several sets of unusual animal tracks that were not indigenous to the area were also discovered. At the time, there were concerns that “the damn elves were fragging with us again.”

Having been given approximate locations of where the storms had been sighted, the trails my contact took, and the location of his encounter, I returned to the rest of the unit and briefed Dark Horse One. From there, we mounted up and attempted to re-trace my contact’s path into the mountains. We deployed in a standard pattern, with drones taking a long-pointman position a kilometer ahead along our travel path while the Growlers provided security to our flanks. Our team magician also sent spirits along our path to search, but both they and the drones found nothing.

- > So, magicians were able to operate without any issues at this time?
- > Lyran
- > A-ffirmative. It was even a sunny day, which was kind of nice for a change. I read the other reports and know about the insanity they dealt with. But we were completely five-by-five ... at this point. A few in the unit even called it an “easy paycheck.”
- > Scattershot
- > Interesting.
- > Winterhawk

We reached our location without incident, even finding the exact spot where the attack occurred, as evidenced by blood splatter and bullet damage to nearby trees. But what stood out the most was the color of some of the blood. Dark Horse Five, our medic, was able to determine that some of the blood was metahuman, but we also found what we could only describe as “purple blood” nearby and mixed in with my contact’s.

Dark Horse One then ordered a search of the surrounding, heavily wooded area, activating our M-TOC system for better tracking and coordination. The unit’s primary magician, call sign Dark Horse Four, conducted a preliminary astral recon of the area and found only very faint “residual distortions” in the local manasphere. She reported that whatever dangerous phenomenon we’d been warned about may have been present at one point but was now gone.

About ten minutes later, Dark Horse Seven reported that he’d discovered a trail of that purple blood, possibly from whatever had attacked my contact. He also indicated that there was enough blood present that he could track. We followed the trail for approximately another two kilometers, losing but regaining it three times. We had several intermittent sensor contacts, but we could not vi-

sually identify anything in the area other than the normal fauna. Dark Horse One wondered if there was some kind of system malfunction, but Dark Horse Twelve, our rigger, maintained that aside from the occasional weak signal, all systems were nominal. Dark Horse One still ordered additional drone and spirit sweeps in our vicinity.

Eventually we discovered remains that matched the description of what had attacked my contact. Apparently the gunshots had done more damage than originally realized. Dark Horse Five did a quick preliminary evaluation of the remains. We confirmed that the creature had the features previously described, but also had large black segmented eyes, and what appeared to be some kind of thin plating just underneath its wrinkled grey skin. According to Dark Horse Five, it seemed to be akin to troll dermal deposits but was smooth rather than lumpy in nature. Additionally, the feet were also more like hands, with the same hooked claws on the toes as it had on its fingers.

- > Hardest track I’ve ever done.
- > Bangswitch
- > Wait, you were there too, and you tracked that ... thing?
- > X-Prime
- > Scattershot said that he brought people he worked with in Detroit along with. And besides, I used to hunt back home all the time. I grew up eating fresh meat, not processed soy-drek. A bad hunt meant we went hungry. But that’s ... not important.
- > Bangswitch
- > Is it me or does that thing sound like some kind of bug spirit or merge we’ve not heard of yet? Could all this be just another bug invasion—another Chicago or Detroit?
- > Mika
- > No. ‘Switch and I spent months in Motor City getting up close and bloody with bugs, to the point where we became extremely good at recognition. This wasn’t a bug; it was something else, but just as nasty.
- > Scattershot
- > I don’t like the sound of that at all.
- > Bull

After securing and prepping the remains for transport in a body bag, we headed back to the convoy while drones and spirits scouted our return path. We had traveled approximately a kilometer with no encounters and dead silence. None of the local fauna we’d previously encountered was detected. This immediately set off my internal alerts and I notified Dark Horse One, who ordered us to form up into a more defensive posture. It was at that time when we began to experience problems with our M-TOC, losing wireless

signal and communications. Within two minutes, we lost contact with the convoy and support drones as our tac-net failed, forcing us to switch to emergency radios.

We then came into contact with hostile forces.

Dark Horse One was the first to be taken out, by a sniper's bullet to the head. I then ordered everyone to take cover, just as a machine gun opened fire along our left flank, effectively pinning us along a small wall of rocks. Dark Horse Six and Eight, who were in charge of transporting the remains, both took enemy fire. Heavy MG rounds penetrated Dark Horse Six's armor, killing him instantly, while Eight received minor injuries to her left arm, but was still combat-able. I ordered Dark Horse Four to send her spirit after the machine gunner to distract them. Dark Horse Seven was able to locate and eliminate the sniper, or so we thought. But another eliminated Dark Horse Eight. Dark Horse Four also informed me that her spirit was meeting heavy resistance.

I then ordered Dark Horse Four to prepare a physical barrier spell. I also ordered Dark Horse Nine and Ten to secure the remains and for everyone to prepare to move out. Taking advantage, Dark Horse Seven and I then popped thermal smoke grenades while Dark Horse Four erected her physical barrier. We all then moved out, double-timing it along the trail. Enemy MG fire continued for a few seconds, but then stopped just as we cleared the immediate area. I surmised that Dark Horse Four's spirit had finally engaged the enemy. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

My experiences in Detroit should have taught me to look up, but given the situation, I was too focused on getting us out of the area. I got tunnel vision and didn't initially see the attack from above. Metahumanoid creatures, the exact same type as the remains we were trying to recover, descended on us from the trees above, large skin-wings unfolding out from their sides and under their arms like those of a mutated flying squirrel. Two of them immediately went for Dark Horse Nine and Ten, with a third attempting to grab the body bag. The rest of us had one of them each.

Dark Horse Four hit one with a combat spell of some kind, and the creature fell to the ground, dead. Dark Horse Seven and I eliminated our attackers with EBR and shotgun fire. Dark Horse Ten put his cyberspurs through the throat of his attacker, but Dark Horse Nine was knocked over and descended on by additional creatures and was quickly mauled to death. All of us except Dark Horse Seven turned and poured fire into those on Dark Horse Nine. Dark Horse Seven eliminated the creature attempting to pilfer the body bag with a headshot.

With our area clear of hostiles for the moment, I ordered a double time retreat in a diamond formation. For the second kilometer, we ran a gauntlet of

creature attacks from both the ground and above punctuated by occasional MG and small arms fire. I watched as one of the creatures swooped in and seized Dark Horse Ten by the head with one leg and then hauled him up into the trees with the rest of his limbs before we could respond.

Even over the gunfire, I still heard the screams.

We were able to get within 800 meters of the convoy when the M-TOC came back on line. Air support from the drones and fire support from the convoy allowed us to link back up. As we boarded our vehicles, we came under heavy rocket attack. One of our Stallions was destroyed, leaving only myself, Dark Horse Seven, and the riggers Dark Horse Eleven and Twelve alive.

Abandoning our Stallion, Dark Horse Seven and I transported the remains to the Armadillo and linked up with Dark Horse Eleven and Twelve. The two riggers then took remote control of the remaining Stallion and set the auto-systems to lay down suppressive fire with its HMG. After some return rocket fire from our aerial drones, we were able to clear the area.

We made it back to our basecamp in Redding without further incident, where I reported in and made arrangements to secure and hand over the remains we recovered.

Based on the enemy's tactics and repeated attempts to recover the remains, it is my opinion that they were there specifically to recover those remains. The question now is why and who. But that is a question I will leave to those above my pay grade.

End of report.

- > So many questions, I don't know where to bloody begin.
- > Chainmaker
- > I'll start, then. Were these things some kind of attack animal? Are we seeing some kind of new augmented weapon? Because something that can haul a fully armed combatant up a tree with one limb is—well, it's **insane!**
- > DangerSensei
- > I'm wondering who was manning the guns for the opposition and why anyone would conduct the counter operation like this? It would have been much easier and more efficient to just gun down Scattershot and Bangswitch's team (no offense). But using MG fire to pin them down in place, then send in the flying nightmares in from above, I find both impressive and terrifying.
- > Hard Exit
- > So did we, and no offense taken.
- > Scattershot
- > Crazy thought—maybe they're all working together?
- > Plan 9

FROM HELSINKI WITH LOVE!

Dear DK,

Wanted to drop you a line regarding my little visit here in **wonderful** Helsinki! First off, people here are a bit freaked out. Do a quick search, and you'll find a whole slew of news reports talking about the "freak lightning storm" that hit here a week ago, about five kilometers south of the city proper in the Gulf of Finland. At first it was all fun, sort of an "Oooo, look at the pretty storm" kind of thing. That was until magicians who were traveling astrally through the area ran smack into what I'm guessing was that manasphere distortion you mentioned.

Anyway, my local contacts tell me at least three mages were affected and in their words "cut their silver cord." Now, from what they told me, that represents the connection an astral magician has to their body. Lose it somehow, and you're dead. Except this time, those who lost their cords didn't die—not exactly, or at least not at first. Apparently their astral form was, for the lack of a better term, sucked into another metaplane. And without the cord, that's when they actually died. And of course, the Scandinavian Union doesn't want to cause a panic, so they did what most governments do and swept it under the rug and found ways to whitewash it.

But that's not all. I got a nice visit at my hotel last night from a couple of vary serious-looking individuals wearing very nice suits who tried to get me to go along with them by showing me some very nasty guns under their nice suit jackets. Apparently they wanted to talk about my current lines of inquiry regarding that storm. Who knew meteorology was such a touchy subject around here?

Anyway again, I managed to avoid hearing what they had to say thanks to the bodyguard I had the foresight to hire when I agreed to help with your investigation. Don't ask what she did to those slags in suits, even I don't want to know.

Sorry I wasn't able to get much paydata for you, but my impression is that someone wants to keep any and all information regarding this locked down tight and isn't afraid to stack bodies to do it. So on that note, I'll catch you around. I'm going to get out of the SU before anyone else wants to have a chat.

Sincerely,
Jones

MISSING THE RAINS DOWN IN NORTHWEST AFRICA (SOUTHERN PROVIDENCES BY AL DHIHI)

Greetings and salutations once again to my old friends at JackPoint and now to my new friends at Asgard! Allow me to introduce myself—I am known as Al Dhibi, master of all things transportation and venture entrepreneur. I work extensively in the Mediterranean region and North Africa. As such, I was more than able and happy to assist the most gracious Orbital DK when her investigations led her to Morocco's Southern Providences.

Unfortunately for her, she could not have picked a worse time.

Unrest continues in the area as local nomadic tribes clash with government-sponsored mercenary forces over land rights. In simple terms, the government (which is considered to be in the pockets of corporations) is attempting to secure the land in order to contract it out for development. But in doing this, the tribes claim that this will effectively ... as you say in the west, box them in, which will all but destroy their way of life. Several agricultural companies have moved in already, putting up barriers and choking off natural pathways used by the wandering tribes for countless generations.

- > Is this going to be related to the topic at hand any time soon?
- > Stone
- > Agricultural, in that region? Please, it's nothing but a front for mining companies. A few years ago, there were several rumors about orichalcum veins in the area. Various corps want access to the area but are afraid to tip off the others and kick off a bidding or outright war. Many are going so far as to use shell corporations in order to keep everything a secret.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > I also heard that a few years back, someone got a small mining operation going, enslaved several local tribes to work it, but then a "djinn and a holy warrior" freed them and destroyed the mine. Crazy story—someone needs to make a sim out of it someday.
- > Kane
- > All fascinating, but what does this have to do with anything?
- > Haze
- > Patience, my friend. Even the most winding path will still take you where you need to go.
- > Al Dhibi

Making matters worse are events that took place less than a week past, something I myself witnessed. I was heading back after making an exchange of ... never mind, that is not important. What is important is that I was piloting my PBY-70 along the coast when I saw what could only be described as Hell itself opening up as the sky around it crackled with lightning of many colors. Even from five kilometers away, I saw the air just above the dunes not so much open but split and pour out several things. Now, I have my own personal relationship with Allah, but what I saw frightened me to my core. I banked my craft hard left, gunned the engines, and did not look back. The opening had to have been at least a kilometer long.

The next day, the entire country was in an uproar, trying to make sense of what happened. Fundamentalist clerics from all over the region descended on the Southern Providences, thinking

it was a sign from Allah. The clerics claimed that some kind of new apocalypse is at hand, caused by the corruption of the King and his government, placing their greed before Allah's will.

And now they will be punished for it.

This has led to a potentially explosive situation. Instead of dealing with a few nomadic tribes, the corporate-backed mercenary forces are now dealing with an alliance of newly united and emboldened groups that are now acting in conjunction with the clerics. Faithful from Morocco and as far as the Caliphate have also been making their way there. I do not know if they have any true demons to fight, but they have the mercenaries (which many consider agents of evil anyway). This area is all too ready to explode into violence.

- > Can't say I completely disagree with them there.
- > Old Crow

So now that we know the situation, it will be easy for me to relay that this is why the team of shadowrunners that I helped transport into the Southern Provinces never returned. It is a short story and a sad one. From what I have been able to learn and piece together, they had found something in the desert and were attempting to bring it back to our agreed extraction point. But one of the local nomadic tribes discovered them literally "conversing with a demon," whatever that truly means.

What it meant for those poor souls was death. I pray to Allah that their end was at least swift.

My advice to anyone trying to determine what happened here is simple: stay away. Death walks among these dunes now.

- > Yeah, not much in the way of data, but circumstantially, it fits the pattern we've been seeing so far. Although that particular "storm" was of a magnitude second only to the one over Dutchville. It also illustrates some of the things we're up against while investigating.
- > Orbital DK
- > Okay, question. The mine that was supposedly destroyed, can anyone determine what if any correlation in terms of location it and the storm may have had?
- > Elijah
- > According to my sources, the two do in fact correlate. They physically overlap.
- > Picador
- > I have some strange corroboration on this one—someone who saw the storm and escaped in advance of it. Their story matches what Al Dhibi sets out, more or less, but they may not be the most reliable witness, as they also claim to have fought in the Euro Wars in their early twenties, and they're not even thirty.

They also weren't at all clear just what they were doing out there when the storm hit.

- > Jimmy No
- > Check out some information later in this file ...
- > Orbital DK
- > Okay, here's another one. Assuming this is what we think it is and may or may not be ... influenced by what we think is there, the local manosphere should have been wrecked, and anyone trying to cast would have been obliterated. Is there any record or rumor of this happening?
- > Lyran
- > Not at the time, but I heard that several clerics attempted to travel to the epicenter of the event. None of them returned, which only added fuel to the fire of mistrust and hatred, as the clerics blamed the government for murdering holy men.
- > Al Dhibi
- > I have received information that at least four additional possible manosphere event locations have been detected. Shall I post them?
- > Polaris
- > No, I don't want to clog this file with any more data than necessary. Anyone who wants to go snooping, let me know via PM.
- > Orbital DK

THE NEWEST HOT SHADOW COMMODITY

POSTED BY: THE MECHANIC

Unless you haven't been paying much attention, the word is apparently getting out, at least about the odd "mana storms" that have been popping up world-wide. In recent weeks, I've been flooded with requests from Johnsons across the board asking for recommendations for jobs related to these phenomena. I have no idea whether or not they know about any connection with III Corps, but we've seen and heard enough to know that other teams have been spotted in the field and in some cases have given our associates a run for their money.

So what I'm going to do here is a basic run-down on some of the current movers and shakers looking to hire or inquiring about these occurrences. Now, they're not the only ones, just the ones currently most active for runner recruitment. You can either consider this a listing of possible competition, or maybe you can look some of them up yourself if you want to work for someone else. No judgement here, because at the end of the day, biz is still biz.

THE CORPS

This is a no-brainer—of course the corps are going to be involved somehow. But as far as I know, not all of them are investigating this; at least not based on their hiring patterns or whose pet operatives and/or teams have been spotted in the field. So far, the biggest players in this game seem to be MCT, S-K, Wuxing, and surprisingly Ares. Now, these are just the ones who've been the most active. I'm sure the rest of the Big Ten are at least watching to see how this plays out.

MCT's Research Unit 13 was recently spotted in southern Japan near Hiroshima asking a lot of questions about magical phenomena in the area.

I've also had several S-K Mr. Johnsons—sorry, *Backhauses*—come to me specifically asking for recommendations for specialists either for escort duty of magicians or magicians with special skills that lean toward investigative, magical theory, or both.

Likewise, Wuxing's Johnsons have been reaching out, but their offers have been more about information and paydata rather than any kind of direct action. But this is Wuxing, so that may change as soon as the proper qi flow is reached.

But the biggest surprise out of the bunch is Ares. They're not known for really caring about magical stuff outside of using it blow drek up, so I would have guessed that they'd be more concerned about getting situated in their new Atlanta home and dealing with the fallout from Detroit. Yet they've been one of the most aggressive when it comes to hiring and information-gathering recently.

- > I think we can now officially add Aztechnology to that list as well. I just got word from an associate working in Guadalajara that a well-known Aztech troubleshooter has just arrived and has been hitting up all the local magical mojo slingers about "mana storms."
- > Marcos
- > Looks like the secret may be out after all.
- > Brutus Ex-Machina

THE DRACO FOUNDATION

This one had better not shock *anyone*. The DF has been poking their wannabe dragon snouts into all sorts of business since their inception almost twenty-five years ago. And all it seems to take is the whiff of something new and magic-related to bring them running, pun intended. I've personally been approached several times by DF Johnsons looking mostly for info, but a few wanted runners. So my guess is that they're getting up to speed. But watch out, because they like to show up at the worst time and frag with your plans.

- > Dude, you got some beef with the DF?
- > Electric Blue

- > Ten years ago, when I was still running with my old crew, we bagged us a nasty blood mage. But the DF wouldn't pay up because we didn't come during business hours or some drek. I lost three chummers on that run. I'll never work for them again, but they keep asking.
- > The Mechanic
- > Oh yeah?
- > Stone
- > Yep. Even had one track me down in person and try to give me a pitch not even three weeks ago. Almost worked, but it takes more than dark skin, green eyes, platinum hair, and a nice firm backside to convince me to work for the DF.
- > The Mechanic
- > Check the image in your mailbox—was that her?
- > Frosty
- > Yeah, so?
- > The Mechanic
- > That was Kendra de Santos, the voice of the great dragon Arleesh. Dude, I don't know if you're the bravest or stupidest fixer on the planet, but it seems Arleesh is finally calling in her marker. Interesting.
- > Frosty
- > Wait, **what**?
- > The Mechanic
- > While he tries to pick his jaw up off the floor, I'd also suggest keeping an eye out for the other usual magical suspects: Illuminates of the New Dawn, the Atlantean Foundation, and Black Lodge (watch it on that last one). Soon enough the word will spread about this and everyone is going to want a piece of this.
- > Elijah
- > I'm planning a deeper dive into this in a few. Stay tuned.
- > Lyran

OTHER GOVERNMENTS

After the U-Crash, a lot of their North American neighbors have become a lot more active. Depending on who you talk to, these nations may want to increase their own power base without having to worry much about the UCAS anymore, or they want to keep the UCAS where they are now: down and out.

CONFEDERATION OF AMERICAN STATES (CAS)

They've been getting deeper into bed with Ares ever since the corp came to Atlanta. I've been seeing a lot of Ares Johnsons hiring for jobs that benefit the CAS, and vice versa.

- > Interesting fact: Arthur Vogel has invited several Voodoo practitioners to Atlanta, for what purpose I don't know. But it may link into current events.
- > Glasswalker

CAL FREE STATE (CFS)

To be blunt, Scattershot and company made a lot of noise in Shasta, which got a lot of attention. Now magic-users are flocking to the area to see for themselves, and the CFS government has been hiring like crazy because Sacramento just can't get over "those damn elves."

NATIVE AMERICAN NATIONS (NAN)

This is something I've never seen before; the NAN Tribal Council (very discreetly) has been hiring from outside their borders. Maybe they think we know something they don't; maybe they have something else in mind. Either way, it's a bit of an unprecedented tonal shift for them.

- > The Pueblo Corporate Council has been the primary driving force behind this, with the Tribal Council barely tolerating it. Like you said, they have some kind of angle, but they're holding their cards close to the vest.
- > Mika
- > Should I or shouldn't I be surprised that neither of the Tirs seem to have anything to say about this?
- > Rambler Rose
- > Those who already have, or think they have, the answers have no desire to ask any questions.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

SMOKE AND MIRRORS: DEECE DEFLECTION

POSTED BY: KAY ST IRREGULAR

I have no doubt that the loss of III Corps will go down in history as one of the biggest—if not *the* biggest—military blunders of all time. That is, if it even makes it into the history books to begin with.

'WE CAN NEITHER CONFIRM NOR DENY'

It's a no-brainer that open warfare breaking out in one of your major cities, even if that city is pretty much a corporate town (I'm talking Detroit, if you haven't guessed), it falls squarely in the category of "a bad thing." And when any bad thing like that happens, the populace expects something

to be done to stop and fix it, even if said populace is completely ignorant of said bad thing even occurring.

When Detroit turned into a warzone, the White House, or more specifically President Angela Colloton, didn't even so much as issue a statement. Granted, they didn't learn about any fighting until a week after it kicked off. But instead of rallying the UCAS to aid one of their cities in a time of need, Colloton instead secretly ordered III Corps into Detroit to basically kick some hoop.

Now, what does this have to do with III Corps' disappearance? Not a damn thing, directly. From everything my military and intelligence sources have told me, III Corps was already experiencing problems long before whatever happened to them happened. But Colloton's methodology and secrecy backed her into a corner and all but destroyed any chance of a positive solution once things went south and likely hampered any subsequent investigation and perhaps rescue efforts. III Corps' mission was a massive black operation; a force was deployed in secret to fight a battle no one knew anything about. And we all know that black ops are denied and those involved disavowed. Still, losing a covert team of expendable assets is one thing, but losing almost one third of the UCAS Army is quite another.

- > Despite being in the Oval Office for all these years, Colloton is still at her core a soldier. On a purely tactical level, sending in III Corps the way she did made sense. It kept the Corporate Court from interfering, for one thing. But your comparison to a black ops team is accurate.
- > Picador
- > "No plan survives contact with the enemy" takes on a whole new meaning here—but they didn't even get to make contact! What is it about politics that just slots and weirds me out?
- > Bangswitch
- > Did they, or did they not make contact?
- > Plan 9
- > Also further complicating matters was the complex and antagonizing relationship between the White House and Ares Macrotechnology. Colloton's hate for Ares is well known and goes all the way back to the New Revolution fiasco, especially considering how Ares (in her eyes) left the UCAS high and dry. And through various political puppets, Ares still held several reins of power in DeeCee when the dust cleared. My professional, educated opinion is that Colloton saw this as a means for some legit payback and to knock Ares, or more specifically Damien Knight, down several pegs.
- > Agent-X
- > Goes back even further. Let's not even forget how Ares handled Chicago, both times. I haven't.
- > Scattershot

And despite the White House and Pentagon's best efforts, a great number of people did in fact notice III Corps roll out under emergency orders. And then you have family members, many of whom are kind of wondering what happened to their loved ones.

Media spin on behalf of the UCAS buried most stories even remotely related to III Corps for weeks, almost months. Even leaked stills and transcripts indicating something went wrong with III Corps didn't mean much, as that material was thoroughly decried, denounced, and eventually discarded. Officially the White House and the Pentagon wouldn't confirm or deny any information regarding the past or current operations of the UCAS Army's III Corps.

This announcement went over about as well as one would expect. But before the story could gain any real traction, the White House got a bit of a break in that the fighting in Detroit stopped and Arthur Vogel dropped his bombshell acknowledging the fighting in Detroit, accusing the UCAS of being complicit in not helping prevent it, and revealing that Ares was pulling out of the UCAS. Suddenly, the UCAS and the rest of the world stopped caring about a bunch of troops who disappeared in Pennsylvania.

- ▶ Yeah, the White House was finally able to publicly quash public outcry concerning the III Corps situation. With the Detroit situation finally being acknowledged (sort of, Vogel lied through his teeth, but no big shocker there), the Pentagon started hinting at some kind of "super-secret classified mission" that III Corps may or may not have been a part of and that may or may not have been related to Detroit. It's nice how the bulldrek sometimes synergizes. But they got their biggest break when the blackouts started. All of the sudden, III Corps was just another unit "responding to the current crisis," which could have been interpreted in any way possible and spun just as well.
- ▶ Deadline
- ▶ And during that chaos, records were altered, and all mention and acknowledgement of III Corps' disappearance was effectively erased, a false data trail indicating that many were simply lost in combat, MIA, or decommissioned and assigned to other units. And with everything that happened, who really cared anymore?
- ▶ Agent-X
- ▶ You live again? Or is there someone else behind the mask?
- ▶ Polaris
- ▶ As long as my data is good, does it matter?
- ▶ Agent-X

But then, approximately two weeks ago (from the date of this file posting) something happened that tossed a massive curve ball into the works and

gave the UCAS a shot of credibility to their bulldrek cover story. Several soldiers from III Corps, newly returned from their "top-secret missions" started showing up at their homes across the UCAS to the welcoming arms of their families.

- ▶ Wait, what the frag? How in the nine levels of hell did we miss that?
- ▶ Sam-R-Eye
- ▶ I'm not entirely sure, but I don't think we did. Give me a few more minutes—I've been working on some stuff for the past few weeks, and I'm too exhausted to put it up right this second.
- ▶ Gumshoe

At a time when the UCAS just had its teeth kicked in and balls stomped repeatedly, this was the kind of fluff PR the government needed to help calm the masses just a bit and give a boost to the old morale. Because after all that had happened, all the hardship and fighting, we now had some genuine all-UCASian heroes. They had answered the call to serve their country and fought the good fight. Now they were back where they belonged and were ready to help re-build the UCAS into an even better nation than before.

Yeah, seeing all that government spin made me sick.

But you have to hand it to the UCAS, despite being a shell of its former self; they've managed at least to dodge this massive bullet. At least for now, because who knows how this may come back and bite them in the ass later.

YOU CAN NEVER GO HOME AGAIN

POSTED BY: GUMSHOE

Nothing is ever easy. Just when you think that life has handed you something all wrapped up and ready to go, it has to come along like a three-year-old and rip that nice bright wrapping paper clean off.

So, literally less than a week ago, DK asked me if I could do some snooping and see what I could find out about two of the soldiers from the now-officially-disbanded III Corps who recently returned home. She wanted me to shake a few trees, see what fell out. Have to admit, I was more than a bit curious myself.

My first stop was Bangor, Maine. The place looked pretty good, considering it had been blacked out and ravaged for a few months. The soldier I was here to see was Lt. Sally Martin, commander of the 4th Cav Scouts, formerly of III Corps. I saw her in the front window, staring out at what I first thought was me as I pulled up in my rental car. But after I parked and began walking up to the front door, I noticed that Lt. Martin wasn't looking at me—she wasn't looking at

anything. Yet the tusks of her mouth seemed to move as if she was talking to someone.

I'm no soldier, but I've got a psychology masters and figured she may have PTSD, which would be no surprise, all things considered. So as I mentally prepared to alter my interview approach, I knocked on the door. Martin didn't move a millimeter. About thirty seconds later, an elderly woman who introduced herself as Lt. Martin's grandmother Sara answered the door. Using one of my cover IDs, I identified myself as a freelance reporter looking to get a human interest story on Lt. Martin. Ms. Sara was polite but firm in denying my request. When I tried again, she became visibly angry and said "Tell all your friends to leave my Sally alone! She's seen enough!" and then promptly slammed the door in my face.

Normally I'd keep pushing or try some other tactic. But instead, I headed back to my car and conducted a mini-stakeout. For six hours, Lt. Martin just stood there, no movement except her mouth. Maybe I'm going soft, but I just couldn't keep going and decided to leave her in peace.

- > You always did suck at talking to women.
- > Sam-R-Eye
- > Good thing I have no problem with guys then.
- > Gumshoe
- > Flirt somewhere else.
- > Glitch

Next stop was Buffalo, New York. I found Captain Johnathon Able, 14th Infantry, working on a stunning classic 2020 Dodge Charger in his driveway, replacing some warn-out brake pads. I don't know how he'd managed to keep it looking this good, but the car looked like it had just rolled off the factory line.

I approached with the same cover as before, but unlike Lt. Martin, Captain Able was more than happy to talk, provided that I didn't mind if he kept working. Fine with me. We talked classic cars for a while and I was able to build a bit of a rapport with him before I started the interview with some standard soft-ball questions like "how does it feel to be home," "did you miss your family," and so on, all the stuff a reporter would ask for a basic fluff piece.

As the questions continued, I started to notice something about Captain Able's answers. One thing I've learned from interrogating suspects is *how* they say something is just as important as *what* they say. The more personal I got, the more it seemed like Able had to think more and more about his answers. And his voice sounded like he was reading some kind of script.

I also noticed his hands were trembling.

So I decided to toss a bit of a fast ball and asked, "So where have you been for the last year or so?"



He was so caught off guard that the wrench he was using to tighten a break caliper came off, and he raked his knuckles against the wheel well. Grasping his hand, he hissed in pain for a few seconds and then seemed to realize that I was still there, based on the confused yet hard look he gave me. But in less than a heartbeat, that look was gone, replaced by the previous friendly one.

Able chuckled to himself and asked if there were any other questions I needed to ask, because he wanted to take care of his hand and didn't want me to wait too long. Something then caught my attention in my peripheral vision, but I didn't want to let on that I saw anything. So I told him that I think I had enough and thanked him for his time.

As soon as he was inside the house, I looked at the inside of the wheel well and saw a small smattering of purple blood on the wheel hub.

I quickly got in my car and got out of there as fast as I could without making a scene. I drove fourteen hours straight back home, dictating this part of the file as I went.

I need a fragging drink, *now*.

- > Oh, frag me. Please tell me you made a mistake here.
- > Glasswalker
- > I wish I did. The implications and possibilities in this genuinely freak me out.
- > Gumshoe
- > Okay, first, you need to calm the frag down. I get it that we've all been on edge over this and other stuff lately, but we can't go off half-cocked here. We need solid proof. Gumshoe, did you get a sample?
- > Orbital DK
- > I ... frag, no. I'm sorry. I didn't have anything to grab the sample with anyway.
- > Gumshoe
- > Well that's just lovely. Top-tier work there omae!
- > Haze
- > On a related note, I've been following the P2.0 feeds of returned UCAS troop's family members, and I'm starting to detect patterns of behavior and speech that are consistent with what Gumshoe discovered. One of the things I've consistently seen is that people are saying their family members don't seem like they used to be—that like Gumshoe said, they're acting like they're trying to remember who they really are. Could this be a sign of some kind?
- > Pistons
- > Or just a sign of trauma. Things like that happen to soldiers in war.
- > Hard Exit

- > I have received information that at least three additional possible event locations have been detected. Shall I post them?
- > Polaris
- > Not right now. I don't know of anyone I could send. This is starting to get out of control.
- > Orbital DK
- > If these continue, how long before the world takes notice?
- > Electric Blue
- > You think that matters? Look, kid, the Sixth World has seen crazy drek like this before. As long as no one important gets hurt, no one will care. But my two yens say that someone, or many someones, want to keep this thing under wraps, and they have the means to do it. I think as much as the "how" and "why," we need to start looking at the "who."
- > Icarus
- > That's just one more thing on the list. For now, we can only wait to see what happens next.
- > Orbital DK

BEYOND III CORPS

To add more weirdness, since the whole III Corps situation is not enough, here are a couple of news stories I saw in the past week.

STABBING INCIDENT WOUNDS FIVE

TENOCHTITLÁN — Visitors to the Museo Memoria y Tolerancia were stunned by a violent attack from a knife-wielding assailant Tuesday afternoon. The perpetrator, identified as Samuel Dzul, attacked patrons viewing an exhibit on the Yucatán crisis of the 2060s. While police say that his weapon was "military-grade," his swings were wild and flailing, leading to wounds that doctors did not judge to be life-threatening.

Motive for the attack is unclear. Police spokesperson Edna Belez said Dzul's mental state is extremely agitated, and that he may be some sort of history buff.

"Something about the exhibit seems to have set him off," Belez said. "He was yelling about the Yucatán crisis, including shouting slogans of Yucatán rebels."

Dzul's interest in the crisis carried to his choice of weaponry, as his knife was a model frequently carried by rebel forces.

Belez said police were struggling to find information on Dzul's recent residence. "We have records of him up until approximately fifteen years ago, but he seems to have gone off the grid. We are working diligently to find where he has been in the intervening years, including working in areas where those who have exited society are usually found."

- > Great. They're going to use this as an excuse to roust the shadows.
- > Cayman
- > Do they need an excuse?
- > Haze

DESCENDANT OF WORLD WAR II VETERAN CLAIMS TOKYO PROPERTY

NEO-TOKYO — The Chiyoda district is known for its peace and tranquility, but a property dispute is setting neighbor against neighbor.

The core of the dispute is tied to a claim from a man named Motoki Sono, who said he is a descendant of Colonel Kunio Sono, a veteran of World War II. While records show that Colonel Sono indeed owned the property before the war, he disappeared in action in 1943 and left no known heirs. The property has been sold many times since and has gained historic status.

Sono's claim is bolstered by the fact that he has a twentieth century deed to the property and a handwritten note from the colonel bequeathing the property to his daughter and his line of descendants. The handwriting on the note has been verified to be that of Colonel Sono. Motoki Sono claims he is part of this lineage and has shown a family tree describing the generations that connect him to the colonel, but authorities have had trouble verifying this information.

Motoki Sono also bears a strong physical resemblance to the colonel, a fact that many have remarked on. Detractors have noted that every piece of evidence he has, including his appearance, is replicable with modern technology.

While Neo-Tokyo residents often prefer to think the scars of that war are long healed, this controversy has opened wounds anew as residents argue about the debt owed to veterans of that service—and whether the debt must be paid to generations so far removed from the original service.

- > I've hired people to look into each case, and while they've only had a few days on each one, I'm increasingly convinced that Dzul is a returned soldier from the Yucatan and the person pretending to be Sono's descendant is actually Sono himself, back from a long disappearance. If I'm right, the implications are staggering.
- > Orbital DK
- > Indeed, and the questions are nearly infinite. Did all of these disappeared individuals go to the same place? Why are they coming back now? Why did they leave in the first place? That's just the beginning.
- > Winterhawk

- > And a soldier missing from the Yucatan Crisis makes sense, kind of, but how does a soldier magically disappear from World War II?
- > Pistons
- > Believing that the metaplanes only exist when we are aware of them is the height of arrogance.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

DIS RESPECT

Now into the unknown. In the previous section, Kellen talked about hearing references to something called "Dis." One of my people found a returned III Corps soldier in Cookeville, Tennessee. They conducted remote surveillance for a few days and then got a chance to conduct some subconscious interrogation in order to get past their less-than-helpful conscious state. Here's how some of the conversation went:

- > "Subconscious interrogation"? Come on, people—just get a mage who can cast Mind Probe. Honestly.
- > Jimmy No

Q: Where were you before you came back?
 A: Not going back. Not going back.
 Q: I understand. You don't want to go there.
 I'm not going to take you there. But where was it?
 A: The city. The unending city.
 Q: What, GeMiTo?
 A: No. Darker. Farther.
 Q: What city, then?
 A: Dis.
 Q: This what?
 A: Dis.
 Q: I don't understand.
 A: Dis. Not going back.

Now compare that to a report on a Mind Probe spell cast on another returnee in the northern part of the Cal Free State.

- > Ah, good, at least one runner team knows how it's done.
- > Jimmy No

Subject's thoughts are in chaos, which is likely contributing to their non-communicative nature. There is too much in there fighting to come out, with the end result that pretty much none of it emerges. One vision keeps coming up through the chaos—a dark city built into the side of a black mountain and then spreading all across its base. The city goes on forever. Black smoke rises at regular intervals. Forms flit through the streets and the air. Subject feels deep dread and revulsion for the entire city.

And one more—for a change of pace, this is an Az-Am veteran who vanished during the war but



recently showed up in Bogotá. Killed three Azzie troopers before being captured. My operative got in to see him the day before he was executed. Here's part of the conversation.

Q: Are you still fighting the war?

A: I haven't been defeated.

Q: But you're alone. You noticed that, right? You have no army.

Q: Haven't had an army for almost a year. Didn't stop fighting.

Q: You didn't? Who did you fight?

A: The people. The city.

Q: What people? What city?

A: Dis. The home of devils.

Now, all of you well-educated types might recognize the name "Dis" from *The Divine Comedy*. It's the name Dante gives to the city that encompasses the lowest four levels of Hell. It seems the name was meant to evoke a large, bleak city—not to say that this place is actually Hell. I think. Anyway, this was not a place I had heard of before, so I reached out to some high-level contacts I have to ask them about this place. Check out their responses below.

Valerie Gregory, Draco Foundation

I have no record of a metaplane known colloquially or formally as Dis.

Piotr Bivel, Atlantean Foundation

I have no record of a metaplane known colloquially or formally as Dis.

Sam Sasimi, Pentacle Press

I have no record of a metaplane known colloquially or formally as Dis.

Janiesha Bullock, MIT&T

I have no record of a metaplane known colloquially or formally as Dis.

Clearly, something is up. Any sort of agreement among scholars of this level is rare, but exact match in phrasing is impossible. When official sources fail us, it's time to turn to the sources who know the most. I asked Elijah about this, and he came back with an info dump that I believe is coming right behind this one. If there is a connection between the missing soldiers and Dis—and preliminary evidence says there is—then this is something we need to learn about very quickly.

SPECIAL RULES

DIS PLANE EFFECTS ON SIXTH WORLD MANASPHERE

Some connections between the plane of Dis, a plane that is connected to the disappearance of III Corps and other soldiers, and the physical plane are conventional openings, gateways that people travel through the same way they travel to any other plane. There are also connections that twist and distort the manasphere of the targeted destinations, which is a characteristic of the Dis plane. In essence, the larger the opening, the more severe the effects to the local manasphere become, which affects Awakened individuals the most profoundly.

The following are rules that deal specifically with corrupted openings linking the Sixth World and Dis.

Local manasphere visual distortions. Before the opening forms, the local sky or area becomes discolored. When the opening fully forms, it can be seen on the material and astral planes and is often mistaken as a localized mana storm.

Physical distortions. Any flora and fauna are removed from the area instantly, sent to the Dis' home plane. Local energy effects act as local noise and jamming (rating 3) for all electronics.

Effects on Awakened. Any Awakened individual coming within one kilometer of an active opening must deal with the following circumstances:

- They feel physically ill (treat as the Nauseated status).
- Anyone attempting to view or access the astral plane at this time must also resist 4P damage (resisted by Body or Willpower, whichever is higher).
- All spellcasting, drain, and any tests utilizing adept powers automatically use a wild die to replace one die from the pool.
- All glitches are considered critical and cannot be changed, even with Edge; typically the spell backfires at three times strength.
- All drain is experienced as physical damage.
- Spirits cannot be conjured, and those already conjured refuse to enter the area.
- Adepts are considered to have the Fatigue I status.

The duration of these effects after the opening is closed depends on the size of the opening; the general rule for most openings is twelve hours for every two meters.

'SITE 000,' A.K.A. THE DUTCHVILLE BLACK SITE (SPECIAL RULES)

Immediately following the disappearance of III Corps and the city and residents of Dutchville, Pennsylvania, the UCAS responded by sending in troops to secure the area, effectively treating it as a massive crime scene. Crude perimeter barriers were quickly erected while the Army Corps of Engineers brought in prefab buildings. As the site became operational, new personnel rotated in. This staff did not technically exist on any known database, and as the UCAS collapsed, they took over all on-site operations. Referred as "Site Zero" or "Triple Zero" to personnel, this facility not only secures the Dutchville disappearance area but also serves as a research station studying the effects of the local manasphere and erstwhile checkpoint to the plane of Dis. To keep these facts a secret, the facility is staffed by crack security operatives who do not hesitate to use lethal force. **Modified Ares Roadmasters** (armor rating 20 w/ machine gun mounts) regularly patrol inside and outside the perimeter with ground and drone support.

Currently, Site 000 is approximately one square kilometer with layers of different barriers. The outer perimeter is made up of crude **razor wire** approximately three meters high (3P damage). Between the outer and inner perimeter are **hidden ultrasound and motion sensor arrays** (rating 6). The inner perimeter is approximately one hundred meters from the outer and is made of a composite duraplast-ferracrete material with a structure rating of 18. Guard posts are built into the wall every three hundred meters. Featuring small "murder slats" similar to ancient fortresses, only half of these stations are normally manned but can be quickly activated in case of an alert. Multiple rating 6 area jammers can also be activated, creating a jamming field that encompasses the entire facility. The communications array on the main building has both a sat-link system and emergency short-wave radio functions. Finally, all Matrix systems have defense ratings/attribute ratings of 7.

In the center of the site are several prefab and permanent buildings such as a landing pad/strip, barracks, maintenance, and medical facility (structure rating 14, all locks rating 5). The main research and command center are permanent and are significantly more durable (structure rating 19, all locks rating 6)

This information only reflects rumors and the few rare eyewitness accounts as of 1/1/2081. The site is constantly upgrading and making preparations for expansion.

SITE 000 SECURITY TROOPER: STANDARD

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

Responsible for basic and day-to-day security functions, these troops are the first line of defense should anyone be foolish enough to try and breach security. They may be the grunts of the site, but they're also more skilled, trained, and better equipped than the average security guard or military trooper.

SITE 000 SECURITY TROOPER: STANDARD

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
3	4	4(7)	3(4)	4	3	3	3	4	3.4

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
10	10/2	A1 I3	10	10/15/+1

Skills: Athletics 4, Biotech 2, Close Combat 4, Engineering 2, Firearms 4, Perception 4

Augmentations: Cybereyes (rating 3; w/ low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic vision, vision magnification), muscle replacement 1, reaction enhancers 2, wired reflexes 1

Gear: Commlink (DR 4), full body armor (+5) w/ helmet (+2), medkit (rating 4), sub-vocal mic

Weapons:

- Onatari Arms Kali II [Rifle, DV4P, SA/BF/FA, 7/11/9/4/-]
- Browning Ultra Power [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA, 10/9/6/-/- w/ gel rounds]
- Combat Knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, * max range 20 meters]

SITE 000 SECURITY TROOPER: ELITE

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 7)

Considered to be the best of the best among the troops assigned to Site 000, the Elite Security Trooper is the one who holds the line when everyone else has given up or failed. Exceptionally fit and augmented with some of the best 'ware available, they are also exceptionally trained and chosen for their skill and determination in a fight. Any one of these troops would be considered top-tier operators in any national military, corporate, or mercenary unit.

SITE 000 SECURITY TROOPER: ELITE

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
5	4	4(8)	4(5)	4	3	4	3	5	2.88

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
12	12/3	A1 I4	11	10/15/+1

Skills: Athletics 5, Biotech 2, Close Combat 5, Engineering 3, Firearms 5, Perception 4

Augmentations (all alphaware): Cybereyes (rating 3; w/ low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic vision, vision magnification), muscle replacement 1, reaction enhancers 2, wired reflexes 2

Gear: Commlink (DR 4), full body armor (+5) w/ helmet (+2), medkit (rating 4), sub-vocal mic

Weapons:

- Onatari Arms War Hound [Assault Rifle, DV5P, SA/BF/FA, 4/11/9/6/2]
- Shotgun [Shotgun, DV 3P, SS/SA, 7/10/6/-/-]
- Browning Ultra Power [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA, 10/9/6/-/- w/ gel rounds]
- Combat Knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, * max range 20 meters]

SITE 000 SECURITY TROOPER: MAGICAL THREAT RESPONSE

(MYSTIC ADEPT, PROFESSIONAL RATING 6)

Given the precarious situation regarding magical practitioners and the local manasphere at Site 000, there are few Awakened security personnel assigned. Those assigned are highly capable of handling both mundane and magical threats.

SITE 000 SECURITY TROOPER: MAGICAL THREAT RESPONSE (MYSTIC ADEPT, SHAMAN)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
4	5	5	3	5	2	4	3	7	5	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
11	9/2	A1 I3	10	10/15/+1

Skills: Astral 3, Athletics 3, Close Combat 4, Conjuring 3, Engineering 2, Firearms 4, Perception 5, Sorcery 5

Adept Powers: Astral Perception, Improved Reflexes 1, Killing Hands, Mystic Armor 2, Spell Resistance 2

Spells: Detect Enemies, Heal, Ice Spear, Improved Invisibility, Powerbolt, Stunball, Stunbolt

Initiate Level, Metamagics: 1, centering

Gear: Commlink (DR 4), full body armor (+5) w/ helmet (+2), medkit (rating 4), sub-vocal mic

Weapons:

- Onatari Arms Kali II [Rifle, DV4P, SA/BF/FA, 7/11/9/4/-]
- Browning Ultra Power [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA, 10/9/6/-/- w/ gel rounds]
- Combat knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, * max range 20 meters]





BAD MOJO

POSTED BY: ELIJAH

First things first: I'm in this too deep.

Some of the things I'm going to talk about are going to seem new—new corporate efforts, new shadow activity. And a lot of it *is* new, relatively. But I've been in the middle of it for years. I saw the seeds get pollinated, and I helped water some of them. They're growing now, some taking shapes I didn't expect.

A lot about this is complicated, but the core is simple: The corps see a potential new source of power, and they want it. That's frequently the bottom line we deal with. The fun is the different twists they put on it.

With that prologue out of the way, let's dive into the recent news that you all should care about. As usual, we'll need to look at the story behind the story if we want to approach the truth. Let's start with a simple news item.

AZTECHNOLOGY TO JOIN SIOUX NATION IN YELLOWSTONE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

DECEMBER 11, 2080

More than two years after the entirety of Yellowstone Park was threatened by a volcanic eruption, Aztechnology has agreed to help the Sioux Nation accelerate the restoration process by lending technical assistance and expertise to the effort.

"Yellowstone Park is within Sioux Nation borders, but it is a treasure for the world," said Anna Valeria, vice president of envirotech with Aztechnology's Productos Cultivados subsidiary. "We all share one world, and we also share a continent with our Sioux neighbors. As efforts throughout Aztlan show, we are world leaders when it comes to restoring and enhancing natural areas. We felt offering our services to accelerate the restoration of this area was not a favor we could offer to the Sioux Nation—it was our duty."

Experts expect that much of the assistance from Aztechnology will take the form of magical expertise. Spellcasting and conjuring play a large role in modern conservation experts, and Aztechnology's magical resources are perhaps unrivaled in the Sixth World.

GET THE LOWDOWN

Throughout this chapter, certain Lowdown boxes appear to provide background and info on some of the elements mentioned in the write-up.

- > I do so love it when the corps act like they are doing something out of the goodness of their hearts. So of course there's an angle here, but what? What does the big A get out of this?
- > X-Prime
- > Good question. Getting to an answer requires a little more digging. Allow me to present this record from the Draco Foundation about a visit to the Seelie Court last year.
- > Elijah
- > I don't imagine this is something you have permission to share.
- > Frosty
- > Let's just say we have an understanding.
- > Elijah

SEELIE COURT FIELD EXPEDITION, DAY 32

This was the third day of interviewing people in the dungeon, and finding a pattern in who is kept there is increasingly elusive. Some who are kept there have clearly committed serious crimes, others are political prisoners, but others seem to be kept here because the Court does not have another place for them.

I had a brief conversation with a person who identified himself as Luis Raymundo, who was dressed in tattered fatigues. He was not in a great mental state; throughout our conversation, he seemed to be on the brink of tears or panic. He kept repeating one phrase: "I watched them, they watch me," but he would not respond to any requests for clarification. When I asked him if he knew why he was being held there, he only said "Containment is key." I'm certain he needs therapy, and I'm certain he's not getting it in the dungeon. I couldn't speak with him long, as my escorts nudged me away, saying Raymundo was just going to keep saying the same things over and over.

I think we should send someone with strong assessing ability down to the dungeons to investigate some of these people, though I'm not certain our Seelie hosts would allow such a thing.

THE LOWDOWN: SEELIE COURT

In the Fifth World this was thought of as a place of legend, but the Sixth World revealed that this gathering place of fae royalty is quite real and increasingly involved in our plane. The leader of the Court (currently the Lady Brane Deigh) has regular contact with the leaders of Tír na nÓg and helps plan the directions of that nation. The Yellowstone Anomaly, created in a near-catastrophic eruption of the Yellowstone caldera, generated a permanent connection to the Seelie Court, allowing significantly increased traffic to it. Many Court denizens are not enthusiastic about that change.

SEELIE COURT FIELD EXPEDITION, DAY 35

We received a report from HQ about Luis Raymundo. Suspected identity confirmed. It doesn't really seem fair to keep him here, but setting him loose would cause an interplanar incident. We could try to trade for his freedom, but of all the things we might ask of the Court, Raymundo's freedom would (unfortunately for him) be far down the list.

Though as I'm writing this, it occurs to me that someone may want him more than we do. That's a possibility well worth exploring.

- > Follow ups: First, I've been to the Seelie Court dungeons a number of times and have never encountered anyone named Luis Raymundo. Only one person I spoke with remembered a Raymundo being present in the dungeons during their stay, and they said he was "gone."
- > Second, as you might imagine, "Luis Raymundo" is a common name in the Sixth World. There's no good way to know which one they are talking about, or even if that was the imprisoned person's real name. But the memo below raises interesting possibilities.
- > Elijah

DECEMBER 18, 2078

TO: UNDERSECRETARY OF NATIONAL DEFENSE PALOMA VILLAR
FROM: DIVISIONAL COMMANDER HECTOR BARRIOS
RE: MEDAL OF MILITARY MERIT PRESENTATION

Medal presentations have been prepared for the approved soldiers. Notifications and proper support will be sent to the individuals and their families, but as discussed, no public announcement or ceremony will take place. The recipients are:

- Maria Arroyo (MIA)
- Joaquin Enache (KIA)
- Sandra Gandara (KIA)
- Esparza Hilario (KIA)
- Michael Montez (KIA)
- Luis Raymundo (MIA)

The Sioux Nation has returned all recoverable remains.

- > The connections here are slim—describing them as “circumstantial” would be generous. But the field report from the Draco Foundation was from March 2079. This memo is from the previous December. And the Yellowstone Calamity happened July, in the Sioux Nation.
- > Elijah
- > Yeah, that’s all really thin, and even if they are connected, I’m not sure what they add up to.
- > Snopes
- > To see what this might add up to, we have to remember something from the Sioux Nation download posted here back in 2076, which said: “The possibility of the Yellowstone magma pocket erupting as a massive supervolcano was of some concern even to Daniel Howling Coyote, and a large contingent of shamans from various tribes have resided in the park since 2017, reputedly to pacify the massively powerful spirits who slumber deep underground and prevent the aftershocks from the Great Ghost Dance from disturbing their rest.”

The Sioux Nation kept those shamans in that position for decades. They rotated personnel, of course, but people stayed on guard there for six decades—until 2078, when the supervolcano was disturbed again and almost blew us all to hell.

The shamans positioned there did their job. They kept the volcano from blowing up North America, and instead deflected the energy to the metaplanes, where it opened a gate to the Seelie Court. But what happened after sixty years to make them lose control? Aztechnology happened. We’ve covered that. They were sending teams all over the place looking for power sites connected to the metaplanes, and they send a squad down to Yellowstone. They ran into the shamans guarding the caldera, they got into a skirmish, and things went down. All members of the Aztechnology squad were supposedly killed, and their identities were a closely guarded secret. I’ve only been able to find two names: Enache and Hilario. Both of those names are in the above list.

So now things get a little clearer. Raymundo was part the team invading Yellowstone, and Raymundo ends up missing from Aztlan and in a Seelie dungeon. When the calamity happened, he went through the portal, and the Court decided to imprison him for his crimes. What happened after that? I don’t know.

But let’s get back to the beginning. Aztechnology is helping the Sioux to repay them for what they did under Yellowstone, and they’re not just doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. They want access to the gateway, and they think the best way to get it is to be close to the source.

- > Elijah
- > Do they have an interest in getting Raymundo back?
- > Lyrán
- > Only if they think he’s coherent enough to spill useful information. Judging by the report, he isn’t. I bet they wrote him off.
- > Jimmy No

- > I’d love to share more info, but I don’t have much. So let’s move on to the next item. Aztechnology is the world’s number-one magic corp, with Mitsuhamma being number two. MCT is also the number one corp overall, so they’re not about to get left behind in the research into metaplanar weirdness. Check out this new announcement from Pentacle Press.
- > Elijah

PENTACLE NEEDS YOU

SEE THE WORLD, BREAK
NEW GROUND, GET PUBLISHED!

Pentacle Press is proud to announce a bold new venture in magical research, one that gives Awakened individuals the chance to make their mark with Pentacle and the entire Sixth World! Your observations on magical phenomena could make you famous and catapult you into the ranks of the magical elite. Here’s how it works:

Alchera, the overlapping of a metaplane with our reality, are one of the remarkable phenomena of our world. While we know they exist, we know little about how they function—or even how long they endure when they appear. We need brave, talented Awakened to go into the field, observe these phenomena, and report on what they see. We’ll review any and all reports that come in, and the very best of them will be included in our forthcoming book, *Realms of the Unreal*. That means full payment and credits, which means you join the elite ranks of published Pentacle writers!

Maybe you’re not an author, or a researcher. Maybe you don’t think you have what it takes to conduct field research. We’re here with a simple message: Give it a shot! Our guidelines and templates make it easy for just about anyone to try! Contact us today, and start on your journey to becoming a Pentacle person!

- > Crowdsourcing has some merits, but I’m dubious about this proposal when they go out of their way to point out that no one needs to have any qualifications. How do they know they’ll get anything of use? Isn’t there a strong chance they’ll have to wade through a lot of drek in order to find anything worthwhile?
- > X-Prime
- > Let’s talk about what this is and what it ain’t. It definitely ain’t the best way to gather information about alchera, so that means it ain’t legit. Look, there are a hundred skilled practitioners that would be happy to take some of Pentacle’s cash (I know they have my number). They could get a lot better results reaching out to us than just doing a cattle-call, so that means they want something besides good results. So what do they want?
 - First, they want coverage. They will cover a lot more alchera with this open call than they would by reaching out to a few researchers.
 - Second, they want to be cheap. Most of the people who submit stuff won’t get paid, but Pentacle will still have whatever



they submit. Those who eventually get paid—assuming the book actually happens—will get far lower rates than the pros would receive.

Third, they avoid some questions. The pros know how research works, and they would ask all sorts of questions about design and purpose and whether the two match. Most of the masses will just go out and do what Pentacle asks.

Fourth is a thing we all know about: insulation. Pentacle isn't sending their best people on this job. They may not be sending anyone they remotely care about. So if something bad happens to them on the job—oh well! Drek happens!

- > Lothan the Wise
- > So they want lots of information on alchera, and they want to go broad, not deep. And they also think there may be dangers involved, so they don't want to risk any of their best people. Elijah, anything else to add?
- > Lyrán
- > All that squares with my evaluation and knowledge. I think that Mitsuhama knows that Aztechnology is interested in metaplanar phenomena, but they don't know why. They're playing catch-up. But you're right about the perceived dangers. Read on.
- > Elijah

TO: COMMISSIONER BAKSHI

FROM: COUNCILOR DEWAN

The parliament of beasts continues to appear within the Kanheri Cave, but recent reports say they have grown more active and violent. Two spectators came away with bloody gashes, and one of them needed a transfusion. We have to close off the area to spectators until we can get it under control. I recommend sending shamans who can close the connection. We do not need the extra visitors the manifestation provides, and at this point it is only driving people away.

Having twenty-four-hour security at the cave will be expensive, but it seems to me that we can easily generate revenue to pay for it from the offers we have received. That offer may well help lead to the closure of the manifestation we want.

THE LOWDOWN: KANHERI CAVES

These caves are part of a park on the outskirts of Mumbai in the Indian Union. Many of the caves have been cut and carved, and they served as a Buddhist enclave for more than a thousand years but were abandoned for centuries before being rediscovered and established as an important religious and historical site.

- > So alchera are summoning spirits now?
- > Jimmy No
- > It's always been a possibility. It plays into the not-so-hidden secret about conjuring: We know how to get spirits to come to our plane, but we don't know why they come. Is conjuring more like a Control Actions spell or an elemental control spell? That is to say, are we pulling their minds or pulling their bodies? Either way, they often resent it, but if it's the latter—and perhaps even if it's the former—it's possible that spiritual manifestations could exert the same pull on them that our conjuring efforts do, fully pulling them across metaplanes rather than just summoning ghostly shadows.
- > Winterhawk
- > The most difficult part of magical studies is that magic isn't constant. We know that—there are still some people alive who remember a world without magic—but we sometimes act like the change between the Fifth World and the Sixth World was just a light switch going on, rather than one step in the ongoing evolution of magic. We do research to figure out how magic is working, write up a paper describing it, and by the time the paper is done, magic has changed.
- > Frosty
- > I've got another letter in a similar vein.
- > Elijah

5/15/81 16:24:36

Ed:

The situation is under control. Sort of. We can keep anything from manifesting where we don't want it to be. They're not going to show up in a secure area. No portals, right? So credit where it's due to Wuxing—that feng shui crap really works. Anyway, that much is going right. But controlling where it is *not* is not the same as controlling where it *is*. The sites are still random. We know that one of those stabby things is not going to pop out in our home and kill us all in the middle of the night, but aside from that limit, we don't know where it will be. That's what the people at the top are interested in.

So let's be plain here. We're going to lose a few people. We can't spare any serious mojo-slingers for twenty-four-hour guard duty, and they're the only ones who have a chance against what these things have become. So whoever finds a manifestation is going to die. We just have to get as much information as we can before they do.

The good news is that we've noticed some patterns. There are certain elements they are attracted to, while some repeat them. Sage seems to draw them in, and they don't like onyx for some reason. We're adjusting décor accordingly.

Just because the situation is in control now, though, doesn't mean it's going to stay that way. I already said people are going to die, but if the

things get out and stay in our plane for longer and longer times, then more havoc is going to be wreaked. We can't just keep dodging them—we have to figure out how to close the gate, once and for all. That's going to require outside resources, so we have to think seriously about which offer from an outside expert we should accept. I guarantee that the higher-ups will want to go with Daviar and Draco, but I think you get more creativity in academia. Have you read that paper from the University of Toronto professor? It's cutting edge. It's what we need.

— Thel

- > Is the randomness Thel is seeing really random? Is the growing strength of the spirits she's talking about coincidental, or is there some larger purpose afoot?
- > Lyran
- > If there is a way to deliberately cause a rift—that is, a tear that lasts, not just an opening you might use for your own metaplanar journey—we don't know what it is. The metaplanes are vast, so I can't state conclusively that the power doesn't lie somewhere, but I've never seen anyone control it.
- > Frosty
- > If someone can control it, the shedim would be really eager to hear about it.
- > Traveler Jones
- > I'd love to have a look at the paper she mentions.
- > Fianchetto
- > The only question we should be focusing on are what are the “stabby things,” and where might they appear. Why are we talking about anything else?
- > X-Prime
- > Fianchetto, I don't want to make you all slog through a whole paper, but I think I know the part that probably caught Thel's attention, so I'll excerpt it.
- > Elijah

FROM 'FOLDS, WRINKLES, AND TEARS: A THEORY OF METAPLANAR BALANCE,'

BY PROFESSOR SIMONE PALOMER,
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, PUBLISHED IN
ASTRAL RESEARCH MONTHLY, MAY 2079.

Mana is what connects the metaplanes. When our world lacks mana, the metaplanes are closed to us, with the only connections coming from forces outside our plane.¹³ Mana opens gates; the passage through, as well as the return journey, is tied to mana.

Records from the Seelie Court indicate that several other metaplanes have seen fluctuations in



their mana levels at different times in their history, though generally not to the extreme of ours.¹⁴ Tracking the timing of these flows is difficult, as historical records are often incomplete, unreliable, or both. Additionally, variances in the flow of time between the metaplanes would cause difficulty in aligning the timelines of various planes.

This means that at present, the principle thrust of this work is a concept to be tested, not a theory that stands firmly on existing evidence. It meshes well with observed truths, but it will need stronger experimental support if it is to form the basis of a new model of the metaplanes. This paper will show that such experimentation is deserved and should happen.

The core of the theory is that all mana, throughout all metaplanes, is connected. One might think of it as a vast, tattered fabric, with loose threads spinning in all possible directions. Any contact with that fabric, even a light tug on a single thread, affects the other pieces and threads. The fact that the effect may be minor does not mean it is not present, which means that several small actions could combine into major effects.

What those effects would be, and whether they could be deliberately caused, is part of the needed investigation into this idea. Some ideas of what could happen can be gained by looking at two of the most significant mana shifts in our plane since

the Awakening:¹⁵ the opening of the Watergate Rift and the Yellowstone Calamity.

► Footnote 15 notes that the Great Ghost Dance would have been another great incident from which to derive conclusions, but that the field of magical research was too young at the time, so few useful observations were made.

I'll note that every single one of the megas (yes, even Horizon and Spinrad) has shown interest in this paper. They are more than willing to run the type of experiments Palomer mentions here, especially if it involves pulling the fabric of mana toward us and away from other planes.

► Elijah

► So how do you do this sort of experimentation? It's not like we could make regular Watergate Rifts—and even if we could, I don't think anyone would find it wise to do so. Even the Big Ten.

► Mika

► This is one of the things I love about JackPoint—you're all so good at asking the right questions. One organization that took particular interest in Palomer's paper was the Magical Investors Group, as the paper provides a theory well worth exploring by anyone interested in how magic works. They were the quickest to develop an experimental model, though it hasn't been as easy as they thought it would be. But don't take my word for it—read this excerpt from an internal memo.

► Elijah

MAGICAL INVESTORS GROUP INTERNAL MEMO

The dirty secret of mana is that we know when it's present, we know when it's high, and we know when it's low, but beyond that we do not have an accurate or agreed-upon method of measuring it. That's going to hinder any experimental model we develop, because it will keep us from measuring change.

Many staff members have suggested that assensing is perhaps our best way to measure mana flows, but there are two obvious difficulties: First, assensing generally does better analyzing how beings interact with mana, rather than looking at mana itself; and second, we need observations from multiple positions, and experience has shown that no two individuals assense auras the exact same way.

We need some sort of mana-meter, and we can't depend on science to come up with one, for obvious reasons. Fortunately, the materials for a simple tool are readily available. Glomoss has long been a valuable tool for allowing anyone, mundane or Awakened, to detect nearby astral activity, and parobotanists have done tremendous work developing different strains of it. Someday soon, we may have variants of glomoss that respond only to spirits, or to spells, or to magic from a specific tradition. But what we have now is glomoss that responds to any and all mana around it and glows brighter as that mana gets stronger. Put a light meter in a small box with some glomoss, and you have a simple, portable mana meter.

The limiter on these things is the supply of this strain of glomoss, as it's far from being mass produced. But we certainly have enough to get started watching how mana flows, and seeing if anything we do increases or decreases it—and by how much.

THE LOWDOWN: GLOMOSS

GloMoss is a dual-natured Awakened plant that reacts to changes in the astral plane and shifts of mana by glowing. It's often used as a sort of early-astral-warning system by those with poor astral overwatch.

- > Oh no. Oh no oh no oh no oh no.
- > Lyran
- > I see you're jumping ahead of me, but the conclusions you're leaping to are correct. The obvious thing to do when you know things that definitely affect mana is to use all of them, and try variations to see just what kind of changes affect mana, and by how much. This brief summary of some of their first-round results will do everything to confirm Lyran's fears.
- > Elijah

FROM MAGICAL INVESTORS GROUP INTERNAL WHITE PAPER

EXPERIMENT 3.1⁸

- Prolonged torture of single individual, no fatality.
- Initial reading: 152 lumens
- End reading: 141 lumens
- Time to return to base reading: 112 hours

EXPERIMENT 3.2

- Prolonged torture of two individuals, no fatalities.
- Initial reading: 153 lumens
- End reading: 136 lumens
- Time to return to base reading: 114 hours

EXPERIMENT 3.3

- Prolonged torture of single individual, no fatality.
- Initial reading: 152 lumens
- End reading: 141 lumens
- Time to return to base: 112 hours

⁸ Possible complicating factors in this series: individual variations in torture endurance and pain thresholds; skills and tactics employed by operators; subjects' perceptions of operators based on metatype, assumed class, etc.; ambient temperature and weather conditions. Consistency in tool used, quality of tools, and absence of any individuals for at least a kilometer were assured as part of the experimental design.

- > That footnote's clinical remove is blood-chilling. The easiest comparison is all the procedural memos the Nazis made while carrying out their final solution. The banality of evil indeed.
- > Fianchetto
- > So Magical Investors Group is purely bottom-line focused, morals be damned, huh? Can't say I'm surprised.
- > Jimmy No
- > MIG tends to operate pretty loosely, so it's not clear if any of the others knew about this experiment when it was occurring, or what they did when they heard about it. This means the key to shutting this project down may be as simple as letting corps and banks associated with MIG know about this activity.
- > Elijah
- > Yeah, but once you expose 'em, you can't blackmail 'em. What a waste.
- > Kane

- > Yes, the experiment is evil, but let's not overlook the scope of what they think they've achieved. A standardized way to measure mana levels is huge, and it becomes even more important if they develop standardized ways to affect astral space. Shadowruns devised to either spike or lower local mana levels will dramatically increase. Temporarily lowering ambient mana at a particular spot could become a new form of anti-magic defense. The Awakened world would become an ever-shifting minefield.
- > Mika
- > The more we try to tighten our grip on mana, the more it will slip through our fingers.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > MoMN gets somewhat lucid, and it's because he's paraphrasing Star Wars.
- > Cosmo
- > Most of the pieces of what I'm trying to show are in place. There's one more critical thing to cover, and it has to do with my excursion to Antarctica several years ago.
- > Elijah
- > You don't know how long I've been waiting for details on this.
- > Frosty
- > Oh, I have a pretty good idea. Anyway, I'm not sharing my own impressions here, because my time with the Antarctic phenomenon was lamentably short. Instead, I'm sharing the thoughts of one of the Aztechnology scientists who was there and got to study it in more detail. Her observations square with mine.
- > Elijah

EXCERPT FROM FINAL REPORT ON THE ANTARCTIC PHENOMENON

SUBMITTED BY DR. ITZEL GIL

The most important thing to know about the phenomenon is that it does not conform to any rules covering matter as we understand them. Conservation of matter, flow of matter, space-time relationships (even in a quantum model), and so on are not usable with any models of mana flow that we have developed. The phenomenon is truly its own thing, and we do not have any appropriate model to understand it.

- > Wow, she sounds just like Man-of-Many-Names, but science-y.
- > /dev/grrl
- > As I have explained, I am never intentionally unclear. I simply use constructions and verbiage best suited to the nature of magic. If you do not understand how the river is flowing, you cannot hope to know where it will end.
- > Man-of-Many-Names.

- > Yeah, like that last sentence was the absolutely most clear way to express that concept, and not intentionally obscure at all.
- > Lyran

We also have to fully understand some of the theories being circulated about the interconnectedness of the mana flow across all planes of existence. When we see any sort of connection between metaplanes, we naturally assume that mana is flowing directly from one to another, or moving freely between the two. We have no clear way of knowing whether this is actually the case. One of the largest obstacles to assessing the path of any mana flow is we do not know what the top speed of traveling mana is, or if there is one. Mana could be traveling to anywhere, from anywhere, and we would not know if it was or wasn't.

We also do not know if the mana amount available at any one time is constant or changing. If it vanishes, where does it go? If it increases, where does it come from? We know enough to understand the depths of our ignorance on such questions, but little more.

What this means for instances like the Antarctic phenomenon is that when we pull mana through it, we have no clear idea where it is coming from. Is it all coming from the plane to which the rift connects? Is it being pulled from some other plane? Is it being created somewhere in the flow? Could it be some sort of ouroboros-like design where the ultimate "tail" connects back to our plane, so when we think we are pulling mana from someplace else, we are just shifting it from one part of our world to another while reshuffling other parts in between? With the tools presently at our disposal, we simply have no way of knowing.

While this has caused some consternation within my department, I believe the concerns have little bearing on our work going forward. The end result remains as we want it to be, namely that mana flows where we want it. The only time it matters where the mana comes from is if it drains a location of importance to us. The only way this is possible is if the theory that mana is connected throughout all metaplanes, in which case there is a practically infinite number of locations from which the mana might originate, which in turn means the chances of it coming from a spot we value is infinitesimally small.

Further, the course of magic experimentation throughout the past nearly seventy years has predominantly been about experimentation to advance knowledge, rather than waiting until we have full understanding of magical functions. Some experts on mana believe that we may *never* come to a full understanding of the properties of mana, which means delaying our work until we have a clear understanding could be tantamount to delaying forever. That, of course, is unacceptable.

If we understand that we don't have to understand, that leaves us with the two most important takeaways from the Antarctic phenomenon:

- Our project goals are possible. This is, of course, very good news. By every measure we attempted, magic use was stronger near the phenomenon than away from it, which at very least classified it as a mana flow. That's good to know, but not groundbreaking in and of itself. The truly revolutionary aspect is that we confirmed that the mana flow gets stronger when you intentionally pull at it. That, of course, is different from any other mana flow we know about. It means nothing less than success—the goals we have for this project are possible and achievable.
- Opening a rift remains the most significant obstacle. The Watergate rift and the Antarctic phenomenon show that rifts can exist, but the former was only opened with a tremendous explosion that is beyond our abilities to duplicate, and the origins of the latter are unknown (though the theory about its connections to the four Traveler's Artifacts are worth exploring). The Watergate Rift also led to the introduction of the shedim to our plane, which is possibly only the start of the risks of opening a rift. Our research must continue without a clear certainty, but this is not an area to be leaped into without an abundance of caution.

- Note that this was written before the Yellowstone Anomaly—the journey of Aztec troopers to Yellowstone was inspired by this report. Just so we all keep the proper timeline in mind.
- Frosty

NEXT STEPS

While exploring rifts opportunistically can help us gather more data, in the end it is insufficient for our needs. Rifts are few and far between, and at present we have no way of controlling where they appear. The Antarctic phenomenon was valuable for research, and while its isolation allowed us to conduct research with a high degree of privacy for a time, that would not fulfill our eventual goal for this work (and that privacy was eventually lost, which led to the end of the project). To be useful, rifts need to be in strategically valuable locations, and it is unlikely they will sprout their naturally.

We need to be able to open these channels—and to do so without putting reality at risk. To be completely forthright, it is unclear if this will ever be possible. The required force might be more than we can ever produce in isolation from existing mana-related phenomenon.

If we are to get a better command of what we can and cannot do to mana, we need to be in conversation with the experts. By that, I am referring

to experts who know more than anyone on our plane, as by almost all measures we remain in our infancy, struggling to learn our potential. Denizens of other metaplanes are much more familiar with interplanar movement. Their expertise can help us. The questions involved in that area are: Who will work with us? And what will they require from us?

- Dr. Gil is not the only one asking that question. I've found some things that should amplify some of the musings about "dis" and "dissonants" in Kelley and Lothan's posting. It looks like it's connected to the type of experts Dr. Gil is talking about. My sources tell me this conversation happened in a safehouse not far from Draco's DeeCee offices.
- Elijah

CONVERSATION BETWEEN DARREN BANKS, DRACO FOUNDATION, AND OPERATIVE KNOWN AS 'CARINA'

Banks: The only allies out there are situational.

Carina: That's old thinking. That's, like, what people think about bugs, or shedim. The planes are infinite, though. Everything can be found out there. Places you wouldn't believe.

Banks: I'm not a rookie. I've been out there. I know.

Carina: Then you should know not to think too narrowly.

Banks: Fine. In theory, I can expect that there might be all sorts of planes out there, but that's academic talk, and that's not what I'm doing here.

Carina: No, you're trying to make it academic because you don't want to believe what I'm saying is real.

Banks: Because you don't have any evidence! Have you been there?

Carina: No.

Banks: Then what are we talking about?

Carina: Other people have been there. Other people have seen it. And the really important thing to know is other people are figuring out what they can do with it.

Banks: This is what I'm telling you. They'll fail. Maybe, somewhere out in infinity, is a group or a plane that would act like just another corp or country when it came to making alliances and forming partnerships. We haven't found such a thing yet. And if you've talked to people who think they have, they're wrong.

Carina: How do you know?

Banks: Because that's my job. To know how all of this is working. To be up to date.

Carina: And that's why you sent me out, to tell you things you don't know about. This is when you learn.

Banks: All right. What do you think you know?

Carina: There's a plane that's a city. I don't know its boundaries. It's like the Turkish bazaar from hell, and I mean that literally—black stone, flames shooting out randomly, weird creatures everywhere.

Banks: People in torment?

Carina: I mean, yeah, but I don't know if it's any more than normal.

Banks: So not entirely hellish.

Carina: Close enough. The locals don't have a name for the place other than "here," so people have taken to referring to it by the names of different hells from legend—Hades, Sheol, Dis, Muspelheim, Duat, Gehenna, Uranga-o-te-ra, Kukku ...

Banks: Hades wasn't hell. Most of those aren't, really.

Carina: What?

Banks: Never mind. So okay, fine, people get similar impressions of the place. What's the bazaar part of the equation?

Carina: We're about the slowest metaplane to know about this place. It seems like it's a crossroads, beings from almost every other metaplane flowing through constantly.

Banks: Why?

Carina: That's one of the things I'd need to go there to understand. I don't know what they're getting out of it. I just know that a lot of people and things seem to be going there.

Banks: But you don't know where it is.

Carina: That's certainly part of the problem.

- > I'd dismiss this as a credulous runner leaning too hard into rumors, except I went for a while hearing some of the same things from reliable sources. And then in the past month or two ... well, I think we're going to get to more details soon. The point is, Carina was starting down a trail we're all going down now.
- > Lyran
- > Banks started down the same trail. He filed this with the Foundation only a few weeks later. And before you ask—yes, I'd love to have some of his other status reports, but the leaks I've been getting are small drips, not the stream I'd really like to have.
- > Elijah
- > Aren't you supposed to have contacts with the Draco Foundation?
- > Jimmy No
- > I do. That's how I get any leaks in the first place.
- > Elijah

STATUS REPORT, METAPLANE 844

I'm not going to convince all metaplanar travelers to adopt whatever convention I decide on, but I still need to decide on one, to help keep me sane. I'll make it simple—the plane is clearly a city, and of all the names that have been used, Dis is the most urban. So from here on out, I'll be calling Metaplane 844 Dis, and encouraging my contacts to do the same.

The path to the metaplane is tricky. I've found spirits who have been there, but none of them are anxious to share what they know. The question now is figuring out how hard to lean on people and what favors to pull in to get more information.

The Seelie Court is an obvious stop, since they're as in tune with metaplanes as anyone else. It doesn't help, though, that they're all walking on eggshells now. Mention the Shadow faction to the wrong person and you shut down all possible conversation. Mention it to the right person, and they'll do just about anything to shut you up.

This is why I write these things, because in the process of doing it, I just figured out what my next step should be.

- > This leads us back to Dr. Gil. She found a place with the type of people she was looking for, who might have the expertise she wanted. She also seems to have adopted Banks' naming convention—which isn't surprising, as the two have a professional relationship. Note that this excerpt comes from about a year after her report excerpted above.
- > Elijah

EXCERPT FROM WEEKLY BRIEFING BY DR. ITZEL GIL

Some of my peers believe the Disians' reluctance to speak of what they know as a warning sign. They're concerned that they are just stringing us along, allowing us to believe what we want but telling us nothing because they don't have any genuine knowledge to share. I take an opposing view. In my experience, almost none of the people I have known who possessed valuable knowledge openly broadcasted that fact, while those who speak loudly about the depths of their knowledge tend to know very little in actuality. This means that I find their reticence to speak of what they know encouraging. On top of that are the obvious signs in their city that they have traveled extensively over the planes. There are caves under the city that clearly had their start as insect warrens. There is a turquoise temple near city center that looks straight out of Celephaïs, and an auditorium made of materials identical to the surface of the Black Moon. It takes the blended architecture of a city like Casablanca and magnifies it by a hundred, combining a multitude of design styles into a chaotic whole. Those styles did not come from a

nearby city, or another country. They came from distant metaplanes, and the only reason they took hold in Dis is because there was enough traffic from those planes to make the buildings seem natural to at least some residents.

What I'm saying is that every sign I'm seeing in the city is telling me that the things we want to know are there, if we are just patient enough to wait for the Disians to trust us.

THE LOWDOWN: METAPLANAR REFERENCES

Celephaïs is a city in the Kindred Metaplane, known for its turquoise architecture. Black Moon orbits the Shadow Metaplane and features a labyrinth of stairs, canyons, and caves, all carved out of black stone.

- › That seems clear enough. They want the Disians to teach them how to open the types of metaplanar gateways they want to have. Do we know what they were willing to pay Dis to make that happen?
- › Lyran
- › Somewhat, due to some more evidence I have.
- › Elijah
- › Ay, you've got an answer waiting around every corner here, aincha?
- › Chainmaker
- › I've been working on putting this together for a while. Anyway, this last one had some codes in it to try to conceal what they were talking about, but I've changed them back to the real terms for clarity.
- › Elijah

INTERIM REPORT 14A

These mofos ain't messing around. I haven't seen a city this paranoid since Denver, right after Ghostwalker came in. But at least that made *sense*. You knew what was stressing them. In Dis, who knows what the hell they're worried about? It's a huge city, an unending sprawl that doesn't go all that high but plunges several stories underground, and I'm sure the residents have never been counted, or anything close to it. They don't have a clear ruler, there's no identifiable threat waiting on any border, and no word of plans to invade the area or any part of the plane. But pretty much every damn resident acts like if they don't look every stranger over up and down ten different times, then the entire city will fall.

What I'm saying is, trust has been damn hard to earn. And it hasn't been entirely clear what they're looking for.

Sometimes the problem dealing with metaplanar beings is that their thought process is entirely alien to us, and we can't approach it in any way that will help us make a bargain. Sometimes they don't want anything but pain or misery, and they don't offer us enough in return to justify giving it to them. That's not the case in Dis. Their wants are knowable. They want power, they want pleasure, they want comfort, just like the sentient population on our plane. They are also capable of bargaining and making trades, so we have a lot to work with. It's just about convincing them to work with *us*.

I know that's not satisfactory, but I hope that explains some of the delay we're dealing with.

INTERIM REPORT 15

I'll start by addressing the question in your last communication. Yes, it's entirely possible that the ass-dragging of the Disians when dealing with us is part of a bargain made with someone else. I can't rule that out. But it's also possible that they don't like us, or in general they're closed to outsiders, or we breached protocol early on in some way I haven't figured out. If I knew what the problem was, I could work on it. But I don't have clear evidence of anything, so I just have to keep working on general trust-building, rather than addressing a specific cause.

- › What's interesting to me is that this is diplomacy conducted by an amateur. There are literally centuries of guides on how to do this sort of thing, but I get the impression this person is just making it up on the fly. These guides give you advice for when your sponsoring entity is recognized where you are and for when it's not. The fact that that whoever sent this person couldn't find someone who knew how to do the job is telling.
- › Fianchetto
- › Which raises a good question: Who is this person working for?
- › Frosty
- › Someone who does not want to be known. Officially, the individual is employed by the blandly named Metaplanar Studies Institute, which is an initiative of the Center for Continual Education. CCE is the rare nonprofit that subsists entirely on individual donations—no corporate donations, no private grants, no government funding. Their largest donor is Angelica Wright, a retired personal injury attorney in DeeCee. After that is Deion Turner, trust-fund baby from Denver. Then Frankel Güttmacher, a Swiss hotelier. I have not been able to link those three, or any others of their major donors.
- › Elijah
- › Can we at least confirm that they're real people?
- › Jimmy No
- › They are. I briefly met Turner and Wright, and I had a conversation with Güttmacher once. He's old enough to

remember the Awakening, and he's always been fascinated by magic, so he finds fulfillment in supporting magical research. He was aware of and conversant with many of MSI's recent activities, but he has no knowledge of Dis.

Now, I hope at this point some of you have your shadowrunner senses tingling. Little-known research outfit? Mysterious benefactors? Unknown connections? Sounds like work for shadowrunners, right? Damn right it is, and I know who's paying. Message me.

▶ Elijah

So, with that out of the way, on to recent activities. I'm getting a better handle of the interests of the people I've been talking to. I've divided them into three groups. The Nativists have a Dis-first point of view—they want to protect the city and help it prosper, usually in that order. Dealmaking with them will be rough, as their protectionist views keep them from doing anything besides deals that seem like clear wins to them. Even a balanced win-win deal makes them nervous, as they worry that strengthening any entity that is not them could come back to bite them in the hoop someday.

Second is the Traders. They're the best prospects. They're good at amassing extra of anything they have and then finding someone who wants that excess and who can give them something useful. They have a gift of a singular focus, in that they worry about what they're doing and don't care a bit about what's happening out of their sight. Are you taking what they gave you to buy an empire? Or build a horrific patchwork monster? Or slaughter dozens of innocents? It doesn't matter to them. If you get directly in their way, they'll deal with you then. Until then, they've got stuff to do.

Then there's the third group. The Nativists are difficult to deal with, and the Traders offer possibilities, but the Apocalyptics? Steer clear. They'll want to make a deal with you. They'll likely be the first people who approach you, welcome you to the city, and offer to help you be comfortable—for some small fee. They'll be anxious to make more deals, and a lot of them will sound good, but the thing I'm telling you right now is this: all of them are Faustian. All of them will result in a higher cost than you expect, and all of them, in the end, have destructive goals.

That's what brings me to the story of our first envoy. I finally have enough information to tell it coherently—at least, the first part of it.

- ▶ I suppose that might explain why they sent this unskilled person—this individual wasn't the first choice.
- ▶ Fianchetto

So, Envoy arrived in Dis four months ago. Proceeded cautiously, since we didn't (and still don't) know how to deal with the place. He had a Roto-

Home to carry some stuff and act as a shelter so he could be as independent as possible right from the get-go. No rent to pay, no bargains to enter into. That's all fine and good, but it's not easy to establish yourself as a person of substance who demands attention while living in a tent. So the Envoy spent a few days with Shape Stone and Shape Wood spells, and boom, he had an office with a room for sleeping in back. Was he allowed to build on the lot he selected? Who knows? Dis property ownership is not tracked carefully, if at all. The general culture says that if you want to assert ownership, your biggest job is figuring out how you're going to back up your claim. That means that procedures for establishing ownership change from neighborhood to neighborhood, or even building to building. The point being, we don't have a record of anyone opposing the location of the consulate our Envoy established.

He got attention. Erecting a building (though a small one) in a couple of days will do that. He demonstrated magic skill and experience, which is the most important currency in the city, but he didn't do it in an ostentatious way. He established a space for himself, and that was it. He got what he wanted—he got visitors.

- ▶ This first Envoy definitely seems more skilled than his successor. Plenty of braggarts and blowhards think their job on arriving in a new post is to let everyone around them know how lucky they are to have them by speaking loudly about their skills. Show that you can be useful, show that you have skills, and show that you are willing to listen, and you'll get farther.
- ▶ Fianchetto
- ▶ The core of diplomacy is figuring out what people think you can get for them and why they want it. Our correspondent notes that "magic skill and experience" are the main currencies of the city, but unlike nuyen, those things aren't transferable. So what is it the Disians think they're going to get?
- ▶ Traveler Jones
- ▶ Direct spellcasting talent can't be transferred, but there's more to magical abilities than that. Knowledge of specific spell formulas can be transferred. Specific applications for spells (like the techniques the Envoy used to make his home) can be transferred. Knowledge of how to use, find, create, and refine reagents can be shared. And abilities can always be put in the service of someone else's cause. Those are all things people of Dis look out for.
- ▶ Frosty

The earliest visitors were the least cautious—desperate, or unsubtle, or both. They disguised their intentions poorly or not at all. The Envoy wrote that his initial job was to listen patiently and politely reject them—turn them away without them feeling rejected. Mission accomplished, but

too well. He kept the early visitors on his side, but he alerted the more experienced forces that he was someone to be reckoned with. So they prepared his reckoning.

I've been able to fill that much of his story in. The remainder is still murky. The Envoy kept his wits about him, as far as I can tell, and the powers of the city led him into a careful trap. He didn't over-reach, didn't suddenly get over-excited about some deal that he should have known was too good to be true. He kept a cautious pace. And they got him anyway.

How they got him remains unclear. I still don't know if he's dead, if he's in the city somewhere, or just what the disposition of his person is. But as we all know, he's gone. They got to him somehow. What they thought he could deliver to them was less, in their eyes, than what they could gain by taking him out.

It all comes to the same thing, the thing I've been circling since I started reporting. What do the Disians want, and how do they want to get it? Yes, magic is their currency. But we don't understand how they spend it, or what they want to buy.

More in the next report.

- > I suppose it's becoming more clear now. Not only was this person their second string, but the person they had sent who had actual diplomatic skills had failed, possibly as a function of those skills. So they went a separate direction with their second envoy, just to see how the Disians would react. Understandable, but I wonder how the subject in question felt about being used as, essentially, an experiment in a hostile metaplane.
- > Fianchetto
- > We also haven't gotten to who is sending him. It's not Aztechnology, because we already have a separate bundle of activity for them. It's someone who could mount two metaplanar expeditions in a matter of months. So it's someone powerful, but we kind of assumed that already.
- > Cosmo
- > Read on. More clues will be forthcoming.
- > Elijah

INTERIM REPORT 16

I could do a whole thing about power, and if we want money to get power or vice versa, and how power is about controlling others while giving yourself maximum freedom, which is a problem when more than one person wants power, which everyone does, but that wouldn't end anywhere especially illuminating. Can we agree that people get power to help them do their thing? I'm going to assume any readers of this agree, just to make my life easier.

Two out of the three factions I mentioned before—the Nativists and the Apocalyptics—are

quite focused on the idea that non-Disians might be a threat to them, and so they need to be contained. The Traders are not necessarily unaware of this threat, but they think they can contain it—if they are strong enough, it doesn't matter how much strength they give to their potential enemies, because they'll be strong enough to contain them. And what better way to cut off hostilities than to make someone your partner instead of an enemy?

There are individual differences, and of course there are times when greed and appetite overwhelm sense and planning and anything else, but if you look for a general pattern, what you'll see is a drive to gain power in order to preserve Dis as it is.

I could go on a whole other lecture here about whether people want to preserve it as it *is* or preserve it and make it *better*, but that involves more nuance about intra-city politics than I am prepared—or qualified—to discuss. And it doesn't really matter for the story I'm trying to unravel.

I've learned one important thing since the last report: It's not always easy to tell if someone is a Trader or an Apocalyptic. Some Apocalyptics are skilled at making their terms seem fair, burying the full cost in long-term agreements, small print, or elegantly ambiguous language. So a newcomer to the city, unfamiliar with the ways of the factions, may mistakenly enter into a bargain with an Apocalyptic—especially if they're really in a deal-making mood.

The picture I've developed is that the previous Envoy came to town, got set up, and started making bargains. Some of them seem like they might have been pretty good, but that doesn't matter much, because I'm pretty sure one of them was really bad. And that's why he's gone.

But I don't want to share too much before I get more confirmation. I hope the next report will have the details.

- > Fian-o, if the first envoy is as experienced as you think he is, how did he get caught up in a disastrous bargain so quickly?
- > X-Prime
- > It's not easy to say without all the particulars, but you always need to beware of the situation where you are set up to fail. Clerks who edit a statement—either innocently or maliciously—can cause a spiral that drags the diplomat down fast, especially if they don't have a good support apparatus. Which would be the case for a new diplomat in Dis.
- > Fianchetto

INTERIM REPORT 17

First the good news: the Envoy is still alive. The bad news is everything else.

They got him in a variation of one of the old noorseekee con the Soviets used in Afghanistan last century. The idea was to show the Envoy some-

thing of purported value and do what they could to convince him of the value. It works best when the value of the thing is directly tied to the thing a person wants. Usually, that's money. In the Envoy's case, it was knowledge. Specifically, knowledge about the workings of Dis.

About a week into the Envoy's stay, he heard mention of something called the Desolation Codex. The reference was casual, and the speaker said they didn't really know much about what the codex was, but they had heard it mentioned around the city. Mentions came every few days, in a way that piqued the Envoy's interest. Then what do you know, the Envoy gets a gift from one of the city's merchants and, with some astonishment, identifies it as a page of the Desolation Codex—a fine but not unheard-of gift. He looks it over. It's an alchemical recipe, a decent one that gets better when using reagents native to Dis. The Envoy, as part of their work, regularly talked to other visitors to Dis, and many of them expressed admiration of the page. Some of them even paid to have long look at it. The Envoy figured they were on to something. They didn't make it their main work, but they kept their ear to the ground. They found a lot of dead ends, but after about three weeks of work, they found a second page. This one was part of a spell formula, a complex spell for animating complex lifeless objects. It was interesting, and again the Envoy found people willing to pay to have a look at it.

The Envoy wasn't under any illusions. They knew finding more pages was going to be an uphill battle. They got a third page—it was just an illustration whose context they didn't understand, but it as still an additional page. A few scholars came by to see the three pages, cash in hand or favors on the offer. The Envoy felt they were doing a good job building power in the city. They kept their eye out for a fourth page.

They heard another rumor and chased it for two months. At one point, they almost had their hands in it when it was sold right out from under them—to an unknown buyer, of course. They kept after it while looking into what forms of payment they would have to lay down. It became clear that they wouldn't have enough cash—unless they took out some kind of loan. But with the interest the pages were getting, and the payments visitors were bringing, a loan would be paid back with no problem, right?

So now you see where this is going. The Envoy takes out a big loan to buy a fourth page. The fourth page never materializes. The people interested in the three existing pages dried up. The Envoy's debt mounted daily. Soon, people came to collect.

So that's where the Envoy is—the debtor's prison of Dis. A simple description of a complicat-

ed problem. What is Disian debtor's prison like? Where is it? How do they collect? The next part of my job is to find those answers.

And maybe answer a whole drekload of other questions. Where are the pages the Envoy got? Were they genuine pages? Is there even such a thing as the Desolation Codex?

This is what this place throws at you.

- › People are still telling stories about the Desolation Codex? And others are still falling for it? Thank ghost for all the new suckers born while I was reading this, because that keeps the wheels of con artistry turning.
- › Lyran
- › I wouldn't be so cavalier about the Codex. Yes, it's been the subject of a ton of lies and cons, but every time I convince myself to believe it's nothing more than a scam or a fairy tale, I receive a hint that there is something more to it.
 - That said, I don't think there's a chance in hell that this envoy got three pages of the book in such a short time. The Disians identified a weakness in him and played right into it. That's admirable precision, as well as something to be wary of.
- › Frosty
- › The Codex is not found. It seeks.
- › Man-of-Many-Names

INTERIM REPORT 18

I don't think they know what I've found out, or else they wouldn't be trying to sell me on what they have. They've started on the Desolation Codex scam. Subtly, of course. Just mentioning it casually. Watching for my interest. I'm playing it cool, not blowing them off, but not leaping at what they're dangling in front of me. Part of me would love to jump at it so I could track where the Envoy went by following them directly, but the obvious worry is that I'd become as lost as they are, and that isn't good for anyone. Especially me.

I'm going to work this totally outside the normal channels. I've got someone I trust. They'll poke around. Find people who have experience with this sort of thing. Because if there's one thing that every big city I've ever been in has in common, it's that it's really easy to get bled dry.

INTERIM REPORT 19

Not much happening. I miss my dog.

INTERIM REPORT 20

It's a pain, but the regular coding switch I signaled in the last report is really needed. They're watching. Carefully. No precaution is too much.

I don't have the information I want, but I'm getting there. I know this much: debtor's prison here isn't a place. It's a state of being.

INTERIM REPORT 21

There is a lot going on here, but I can't stop thinking about my dog. I just want to get him out on the lawn, you know? Watch him run around.

COVER MEMO

Sorry I had to get out of there so fast, and I will forever be grateful that you pulled me out. Everything went down much faster than I expected. You have my full report, transmitted securely, but I want to make sure you look at what it says about the Envoy. He's both a victim of torture and the product of one of the strangest transformations I've ever seen. I didn't get to talk to him, so I don't know how much of him is left inside the shell. But at least we know they have an interest in keeping him alive, because a walking mana battery doesn't come easily.

- > "Walking mana battery"?
- > Chiron
- > Yes, that phrase caught my attention to, so I've tried to find out more. As near as I can tell, it's a person who becomes a walking mana flow, built to be the companion of spellcasters and adepts to boost their abilities by their mere presence. As our friend indicated, it's not entirely clear what happens to the individual—if they retain their personality, or even their will. But they at least retain their mobility, and that's enough to gain the interest of any researcher who hears about it.
- > Elijah
- > I know this disclaimer can go on pretty much anything big corps do, but we all know this is totally evil, right? It's blood magic, but worse, as it doesn't even have the decency to kill its victims or give them a chance to recover. It makes people into tools. Which, yes, the megacorps do every day, but this is on a different scale—and you have to believe if they figure out how to do this efficiently, they'll bring this to a merciless scale. I'd anticipate every corporate mage getting two or three walking mana batteries. It's an entirely new form of slavery, and they're really eager make it happen.
- > Jimmy No
- > I wish I could say this story is full of shit, but it's not. I hadn't heard all these details before, but I had some inkling about this last part. The good news is, the way I heard about it is from some people who want to resist it. With Elijah's permission, I'll throw another document into the stream here.
- > Rainbow
- > By all means.
- > Elijah

CURRENT FRONTIERS IN ASTRAL PRESERVATION

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION, ASTRAL SPACE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Let me be clear at the outset that all the traditional threats to astral space exist and do not seem to be on the verge of disappearing. We have a threat we have to deal with, but it's not a thing we can shift resources to from some other area—it's something we have to address while still doing everything we're doing.

The problem we're facing is the commodification of mana. Many parts of magic have already undergone this process, including reagents, spell formulas, and the teaching of Awakened abilities. Mana, though, has been one of the last remaining fully democratic resources left on the earth. It is available to all, regardless of where you live. Yes, there are ebbs and flows and a few downright mana voids, but for the most part, if you're on the planet, you can find mana.

The corps have done a great job commodifying the things we need to live: food, water, shelter, medical care, and so on. They develop a scarcity paradigm, and part of that is a narrative that those that don't have enough don't *deserve* to have enough. This paradigm comes with a simple principle that people don't pay for something they can easily access.

THE LOWDOWN: ASTRAL SPACE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Initially formed by a bequest from the will of the great dragon Dunkelzahn, the ASPS eventually separated themselves from the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research and the Draco Foundation to find their own way. Their diverse funding base includes the great dragon Hestaby, and among their 150 members are some who are considered the world's foremost experts on astral space. Their dedication to preserving the integrity of astral space has led them to directly taking on those they see as threats, including their ongoing bounty for insect spirits and shedim. The organization has been led since 2060 by Ibu Air, a free spirit.

- > I'm always relieved that they haven't figured out how to charge us for air.
- > Nephrene
- > Clearly you don't live in a city where filter masks are everyday wear, and the rich buy fancy ones that look good with whatever outfit they're wearing.
- > Chainmaker

This is not a new area of work. One reason we have had to fight so hard against toxic mages messing up the manosphere was that some of the corps were subsidizing them. This is the most direct way to a scarcity paradigm—weaken the manosphere enough so that fewer and fewer have access to it. It took them longer than it should to notice the obvious weaknesses in this scheme, namely that it only works well if you can guarantee your Awakened individuals can stay in places they control, where the mana is fresh and healthy. We all know that the world does not allow us to operate like that frequently, and if you're destroying mana that you might eventually need, then you're systematically hoisting yourself on your own petard. Corporate toxic mages still exist, of course, as they still have multiple roles to play, but we've noticed that they're more focused on aspecting the manosphere than simply ripping it apart. It's a small benefit, but still worth something.

Their strategies have changed. There are at least two ways to make people poor: take away their wealth, or simply make what they have worth less. For a while, toxic mages were aimed at accomplishing the former. The corps are now more focused on the latter.

The key to understanding this is that, like most commodities, you are only truly rich in mana when you compare what you have to what others have. This sounds crass, but it's just simple reality. Your army of one hundred soldiers is fine until it meets an army of five hundred. A car with two hundred horsepower will do well in races, right up until it meets a car with three hundred horsepower. And a spellcaster using normal levels of mana does just fine until they run up against a spellcaster who seems to have perpetually double the amount of mana to draw upon. If that happens regularly enough, the spellcaster who had felt wealthy enough when it came to mana will begin to feel poor.

- > Are we saying that all the mana manipulations the corps are looking into are about nothing more than money?
- > Rainbow
- > Maybe, but that would be because to the corps, there is nothing more than money. Money buys things, people, governments, weapons, and anything else you need. Money is everything, in the hands of those who know how to use it. Does anyone doubt that the Big Ten knows how to use it?
- > Cosmo

The plan, as far as we have been able to determine, is that corporate mages who are part of this effort will go into the field with a significant advantage because they can pull in extra mana, either through the people accompanying them or



through distortions to the mana field that benefit them. Once they show that they regularly go out with greater power, they'll move to the next stage: Introduce a product. It likely will be a high-end product, because it loses its value if everyone gets it. Wealthy mages will have a reasons to give the participants in this project gobs of money, while the corporate spellcasters involved will also maintain a power edge over most of the Awakened people in the world.

The morality and ethics of this aside, I cannot conceive of a way that this will be good for the astral plane. It's possible it won't be exceptionally bad, but that's the best we can hope for. We know astral space bends and warps under strain, and the means we have been observing will put quite a strain on it. Given that the astral plane is still experiencing effects from the Great Ghost Dance of more than six decades ago, it's very difficult to imagine just what effects will hit the astral plane and beyond and how long they will last.

The simple fact is we cannot wait to find out what these effects will be. We cannot let the people working on these projects feel that success is a possibility. We need to discourage them as powerfully as possible. As I hope will be clear to everyone, this will not be accomplished through strongly worded memos or protests. They must be directly undermined.

- ▶ ASPS going against megacorps? That contest isn't at all close. I gotta find someone who will let me bet in the corps in this one, because that's easy money.
- ▶ Slamm-0!
- ▶ Wait. Read on.
- ▶ Elijah

We could not do this on our own, of course. We need allies. Fortunately, we have them. Everyone reading this should know about the five allies we have (in this area and this area only): Blackstone, Filament, Loesser, Peach, and Wolf Kingdom. If those names mean nothing, then you don't have a high enough clearance to be reading this. You can read on if you want, but you won't be able to understand what we're talking about. Those who know, will know.

Collectively, we've taken to referring to the five allies' partnership with us as the Concord. While the individual goals of each members are various (occasionally directly in conflict), we are united by the idea that the likely end results of the efforts we are seeing would be to give certain groups a strong edge over when it comes to magic and to distort the manasphere, possibly beyond repair. Each member of the Concord has a strong reason for not wanting to see that happen.

The divergence of talent within the Concord allows us to take on a wide variety of approach-

es. Obviously, I won't connect individual Concord members to specific tasks, but here are some of the tasks we can undertake with the expertise and resources we have at our disposal:

- Extensive investigatory powers that could help expose criminal aspects of this particular magical research, leading to possible prosecution of those involved;
- Astral repair work beyond our normal capabilities to undo any damage they inflict, or access to those who can damage the astral plane to interfere with constructs they may be developing;
- Access to Corporate Court filings normally not released to the public;
- Reagent gathering, harvesting, and processing information that can help us repair damage;
- New developments in healing and protective magic; and
- Direct assaults on organizations involved in twisting magic to punish them until they stop, including compromising or completely eliminating key personnel.

Those are obviously broad descriptors that need specific plans. That is our work going forward.

As part of that work, we need to stay current as to the requirements our allies have put upon us, as they are evolving and (fortunately) subject to negotiation. Here is where the requirements stand at this moment:

- Peach and Blackstone have conclusively stated that there are no obstacles to them being involved in the same operations—the past is the past, and most of the people working with us weren't involved in the previous difficulties anyway.
- It likely goes without saying, but Filament will have no front-line roles.
- Loesser is not as skittish as we thought they might be. We can throw them into rough work, just not the most direct corporate assaults.
- Wolf Kingdom's value is going to be incredible. The information sources they can provide are numerous and multi-variate, and their access is impressive. Our main caution is to avoid over-using them.
- The relationship between Wolf Kingdom and Filament is complicated and occasionally hostile. Neither is openly admitting to this, but an organization as wily as Filament demands caution. They could agree to work with Wolf Kingdom simply as a way of leading them into a trap to serve one of their many other goals.
- At the risk of being obvious, Peach and Loesser will be strongest when it comes to planning, and Wolf Kingdom will excel at

implementation. Filament and Blackstone are the wild cards, with diverse skill sets but a lack of clarity as to how far they are willing to commit to this cause.

That is where the situation is at present. We are in the strongest position we have ever been, but we are also about to wage a larger war than we have ever fought. We cannot be prepared enough.

- > Now you know the scope of this whole affair, though plenty of details are left to be filled in. I trust you all have information that I don't know, and now is the time to share. With the help of the admins, I've provided a bunch of headers to help organize the conversation. Have at it.
- > Elijah

THE PLANE OF DIS

- > I've been there, and while Fianchetto may be right about our memo writer's lack of diplomatic skills, their observations are accurate. Their categorization of Nativists, Traders, and Apocalyptics is overly simplistic, but I can't deny those three strains of thought exist in significant amounts in the city.
- > Frosty
- > Descriptions of Dis keep focusing on the city part, but what kind of land is outside the city?
- > Traveler Jones
- > Nothing. The city is the plane, and the plane is the city. It ends in unclimbable, impenetrable walls, or a swirling mist that puts you right back where you were if you attempt to jump into it. It's tremendously large—most attempts at mapping it put it at over 250,000 square kilometers. I should note that those attempts invariably fail, as they are full of indeterminate grey areas, and many of the areas they have mapped have altered since the map was made. Yet while the streets and buildings are given to change, none of the locals ever seem confused about directions. They are tremendously annoying.
- > Frosty
- > Cities without farms and ranches die.
- > Nephrine
- > First, the city is infinitely complicated, with farms in abandoned lots, vertical farms, and other creative ways to use space. Second, magic. Never underestimate it. Dis has more spellcasters per capita than we do, and some of them are enslaved to produce the city's needs. If you know of a spellcaster that went missing when visiting Dis, there's a decent chance they're in the food factories. And if they are, you should free them. Those places are horrible.
- > Frosty

- > I'm a little disturbed that you know so much about a place many of us had never heard of until now. Feels like you're keeping secrets.
- > Lyran
- > Of course I am.
- > Frosty
- > Dis sits in an uncanny reality, so close to ours but askew, twisting the eye, disturbing the senses. It fools you into thinking you can understand it.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > MoMN has been there, too. Are you going to lecture him about holding information from you?
- > Frosty
- > I always assume he is.
- > Lyran

THE DESOLATION CODEX

- > Mythologies of the world are full of mystical books of this sort. The Necronomicon, the Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses, the Clavicule of Solomon, the Book of St. Cyprian, the Book of Thoth, and the Cipher Manuscripts—those and more have captured people's imaginations and sent people chasing after them for centuries. I don't want to say none of those exist (yes, the Necronomicon was made up by H.P. Lovecraft, but since the Awakening, people have borrowed that name for their own magic endeavors, so reality has kind of followed fiction, in the throw-it-in-a-blender style of the Sixth World. But I digress), but when the time spent searching for these tomes is compared to the benefit derived from these tomes, the ratio is quite lopsided.
That's a long way of saying that my guess is that anyone chasing after this supposed Desolation Codex for some promised power is going to end up more disappointed than powerful.
- > Ethernaut
- > The ultimate power of magic is to transform belief into reality.
- > Man-of-Many-Names
- > MoMN is right. Was there a Desolation Codex in ancient times? Or even a decade ago? Who knows? But people have talked about it, and that has led to some conception of what such a book might be, which means people with talent have taken steps to make that conception a reality. The real question (and I'm going to sound painfully like MoMN here) is not what the Desolation Codex is, but what will it be?
- > Frosty
- > A lot of what Elijah shared with us above is about the corps finding ways to enhance magic for themselves, either by channeling mana through rifts or (and I still shudder as I think about this) turning people into walking mana wells. It stands to reason that they are also working on ways to diminish mana

- when it serves them. I would expect the Desolation Codex to collect knowledge along those lines.
- > Winterhawk
 - > That makes sense, since I've been hearing this come up in some circles interested in this sort of thing.
 - > Goat Foot
 - > That last line is vague to the point of uselessness.
 - > Cayman
 - > I understand, and I apologize, but we all know the importance of discretion, and how in some circumstances it's critically important.
 - > Goat Foot
 - > Yeah, of course, but it would help if you could give us a little something to dig our fingers into.
 - > X-Prime
 - > She already did. Secretive organization, uses magic to fight magic and even reduce it. How many groups meet that description?
 - > Lyran
 - > Do we know where the Draco Foundation and Atlantean Foundation fit in this picture? Obviously all of this is solidly in their wheelhouse. What are they going to do about it?
 - > Mika
 - > Draco is obviously involved and interested—I don't think it'll surprise anybody to know that much of my work to gather this information was done on Draco's dime. There's been outreach to the Atlantean Foundation, and I expect joint operations between the two groups, since the potential problems at hand are large.
 - > Elijah
 - > But if one got their hands on this Desolation Codex before the other, would they share?
 - > Winterhawk
 - > Probably. Eventually.
 - > Elijah
- > Not to mention the fact that we're not overly skilled at creating rifts. Certain spirits, of course, are much better at it than us, so they're playing a role in this research. Hopefully, the corps learned from Horizon's spirit research of the '70s and are working with willing participants.
- > Jimmy No
 - > This is at least one of the areas where Dis comes in. Dis is a cosmopolitan city—unlike, say, the Metaplane of Fire, it holds a wide variety of spirits, meaning you can find interesting assemblies of powers and abilities among the residents. Since many of them are immigrants, the astral gateway power is pretty common among the residents. They also have considerable knowledge about metaplanar travel. Honestly, it's the ideal spot for conducting the type of research we're talking about.
 - > Winterhawk
 - > So if mana doesn't normally flow through rifts, what do you have to do to make that happen?
 - > Fianchetto
 - > That, of course, is the big question. The Antarctic rift (which is now lost and possibly closed) showed that it was possible, and piles of effort have gone into studying why it happened and how to replicate it. The current theory has things operating something according to some basic siphon principles. Siphon physics get surprisingly complicated, but the general idea is that fluids will move from an area of higher potential energy to lower potential energy. The research is focusing on what "potential energy" means when it comes to mana and how you can affect it.
 - > Elijah
 - > Don't leave us hanging! Just how is the research trying to pull that off?
 - > Lyran
 - > They started with the obvious—the idea that a mana ebb would be a lower-potential-energy area and a mana flow would be a higher-potential-energy area, but that turned out not to work at all. Some success has been seen by casting a bunch of spells in one spot to briefly lower its potential or gathering spirits or other Awakened creatures in a spot to raise it, but there is enough weirdness in the data to keep anyone from drawing firm conclusions. At least, conclusions from anyone who is willing to share their results with me.
 - > Elijah

RIFT RESEARCH

- > One of the fun things about magic theory is how you learn something, you learn a second thing, and then you learn a third thing that tells you whoops, the first thing you learned has changed, or is now obsolete. Keep that in mind as we talk about this.

The other important thing to keep in mind is that mana typically does not flow through rifts. What is being attempted with the rifts is unnatural (for certain definitions of "natural"). It takes work to do what is being attempted.

- > Frosty

SEELIE UPDATES

- > Some context may help us understand any other updates you all have on the Seelie Court, so let me provide a few updates. The biggest one is the trial of Duke Flowerpot after accusations from Court Executioner Donal Viltharion. The end result was a curiously split verdict—Flowerpot was found innocent of the charge of murdering Gristle Teres and was further not found to be a member of the Shadow faction, but in a shocking addition to the verdict, the Shadow faction was judged to exist.

That threw the Court into an uproar (and saved some face for Viltharion), and the Court has since been consumed by the game of guessing who Shadow faction members are.

To make things weirder, not long after the verdict was delivered, courtiers arrived in the Great Hall to find that one corner was now occupied by a large, black chunk of tourmaline hanging from the ceiling as a pendulum. An alphabet template sat beneath it, and the pendulum was found to be very responsive to questions. Interrogation revealed it to be a tool for delivering messages from the Shadow faction to the Court.

This spurred speculation and chaos. Some courtiers demanded the immediate removal of the pendulum, while others quickly denounced it as an obvious fake. But detailed investigation showed that the pendulum had a magic signature distinct from any other faction or known signature, and it perpetually functioned to provide answers—not always satisfying answers, but answers nonetheless. The Court is now in an extensive experimentation phase, as they work on different questions to ask the pendulum and different templates to put under it to prompt a variety of responses from it.

The pendulum, rather predictably, has been vague in its answers, but occasionally it provides responses that send murmurs through the Court. For example, one courtier put a template with the names of the major factions on it and asked the pendulum where most of its members come from, and it answered Death, Dragon, and Hanged Man. That has been especially bad for Dragon, and they are fighting as hard as they can to not lose Court influence as a result of this accusation.

What does all this have to do with the subject at hand? As you may know, the fact that our plane now has increased access to the Court is not universally popular among courtiers, and the supposed confirmation of the Shadow faction's existence has led to speculation that the Shadow faction engineered the Yellowstone Anomaly.

This, then, could be one of the reasons the Aztlan soldier was encountered in the dungeons, as there certainly are people in the Court who would love to talk to the people involved in initiating the Anomaly to better judge their intent and suss out any connections they may have.

- > Winterhawk
- > One reason people may have encountered Raymundo in the dungeons is that they went down to the dungeons looking for people imprisoned there for being suspected Shadow faction members (though that would not be the official reason for their imprisonment, of course). If I were looking for Shadow faction members, I'd start there.
- > Ethernaut
- > The Court has indeed been extra tense lately, which has strongly affected the jockeying for the evening banquets. The Queen's Banquet remains a highly coveted spot, but the Regency and Cyprian have become more popular than ever, as they allow high-level discussions without the pressure of the Queen watching over everything. If you want to get information on the latest Shadow suspects, go to one of those. People don't even

like to say the word "Shadow" where the Queen can hear it.

- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Let's be upfront and clear that the Court hates every bit of this research Elijah's talking about. They want fewer rifts and gateways, not more. They definitely don't want large-scale experiments with the manosphere. I know we'll talk about it later, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the Court were one of ASPS's codenamed allies.
- > Frosty

WALKING MANA WELLS

- > I have started three different comments with the intention of dismissing this concept as impossible, but each time I find some little loophole or possibility that makes me say "Welllllll ..." which, sadly, means I can't just dismiss the idea. I can say it's far beyond anything we have ever seen, and the mechanics involved are very difficult to conceive. We know intense emotion can influence ambient mana, but this is typically not seen on an individual level, and the reports of these people—or things—portray them as mostly mindless, rather than continually in the thrall of some powerful emotion that would enhance mana.

Setting the question of possibility aside, this is clearly morally reprehensible. It's slavery—nothing more, and definitely nothing less.

- > Lyran
- > The one piece of good news in the accounts I've seen is while the people used as mana wells may lose their personality while they are being put to use, their personality and knowledge is quashed, not eliminated. If the controlling force is removed, the person could well be returned to their former self.
- > Frosty
- > If this is indeed a thing that's possible, you'd have to use Awakened people, right? Not just some anybody off the street?
- > Ecotope
- > Probably, but even that much is unclear. We know about the association between mana and life, so it's possible that the subject just needs to be alive. Tap into their mana, enhance it, and set them loose. Though they won't go far, since something happens to their brain, as we've seen.
- > Winterhawk
- > But have we actually seen these people/things in action, or are we relying on other people's accounts?
- > Kay St. Irregular
- > Maybe? I was in the SOX recently (due to poor life choices), trying to get a good night's sleep without getting fatally contaminated, when a team chasing toxic bounties tore through my chosen hiding spot. The spot had been chosen because I happened to know a mage who lived there (long story), and since she was sheltering me, I was more than a little worried about what the team would do to me if they found me (the

bounty they were chasing was for the toxic, of course, but they might look for a bonus if they took out one of the mage's associates). I worked on making a stealthy getaway, hiding behind the craggy rocks and the mutant trees. At one point I had a view of the bounty hunters as they traded magical blows, magic sizzling over the irradiated rocks, and I got a look at the hunters. It was a party of six, but only two of them were casting spells. The other four were flanking them, two on each side, and they were weirdly stationary the whole fight. The toxic mage noticed this and took two of them out, and the lightning sparking from the bounty hunters notably dimmed. I took a look at the auras of the other two—while they looked quite different (a male human and a female dwarf), their auras were identical. It was weird enough to be memorable.

- > Jimmy No
- > If someone has been able to develop this (horribly immoral) new toy, what were they doing with them in the SOX?
- > Winterhawk
- > Excellent question.
- > Elijah

ASPS AND THEIR PARTNERS

- > So we have five allies identified by ASPS, and ASPS seems quite excited by them, which means they're not just piddly little operations (like, say, the ASPS). Who do you think they lined up?
- > DangerSensei
- > The fact that our writer thought Loesser may be "skittish" is revealing. The first thing it tells us is it's not one of the Big Ten, as they're pretty much never skittish about anything. It also wouldn't be a mercenary group and probably isn't a law-enforcement corp. So what's left that's useful? Could be an AA not used to the rough-and-tumble of the big shots, or one that's recently been wounded (Maersk?). Or perhaps an academic institution providing extra magic and metaplanar knowledge. Or a financial corp there to provide cash, but not muscle?
- > What motivation would a bank have to intervene to preserve the manasphere?
- > Ethernaut
- > They might have a large amount of outstanding loans to groups that could be hurt by mana disruption.
- > Mr. Bonds
- > One of the obvious points is that Peach and Blackstone have some base enmity—which isn't the most rare thing in our world, but it's worth noting. Wouldn't it be fun if they were Ares (maybe they're Peach, in honor of their new Atlanta home) and the UCAS?
- > Traveler Jones
- > Does the UCAS really have anything worth offering to any alliance these days?
- > /dev/grrl
- > That point is tough but fair.
- > Cosmo
- > Wolf Kingdom interests me. First, it's name is more flowery than the others. Second, the access they provide is highlighted. Could it be a spy group—Aegis Cognito or something? Lawyers? I'd guess the Black Lodge, since their access is impressive, but they don't openly ally with anyone. A national government is also a possibility, what with "Kingdom" being part of their code name.
- > Haze
- > And what's then up with the potential conflict between Wolf Kingdom and Filament? The poster makes it sound like Filament is a subtle information—if Wolf Kingdom is something like Aegis Cognito, it would be an extraordinary organization that could out-subtle them.
- > Kia
- > All the information we need is in the names. "Wolf Kingdom," translated to Latin, is Lupus Regnum, signifying the initials L.R., which stands for Lou Romanoff, a new vice president with Aztechnology North America. "Filament" refers to the light bulb, supposedly invented by Thomas Edison but really invented by Ebenezer Kinnerlesley of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Ptolemy II of Macedon called the Jordan city of Amman Philadelphia, and Spinrad Global has a regional office there. Peach pits are a source of Laetrile, which has been used by Zeta-Imp Chem in some of their cancer-fighting drugs. "Blackstone" refers to magician Harry Blackstone, which connects to famous twentieth-century magician David Copperfield, who shares a name with a Charles Dickens character. The Dickens Program, of course, is one of Evo's most infamous initiatives. "Loesser" refers to legendary songwriter Frank Loesser, who wrote Guys and Dolls, which is full of mob characters, making this a clear reference to the Mafia. That means the five allies are Aztechnology, Spinrad Global, Zeta-Imp Chem, Evo, and the Mafia.
- > Plan 9
- > Of course they are. Don't know how we could have missed all that.
- > Sunshine



WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

POSTED BY: LYRAN

As we've seen in this download, there's plenty of weird drek going around, and no one knows everything that's happening. It doesn't help that the situation on the ground changes moment by moment. So what do you do when you encounter a tear in the fabric of reality? Or a missing soldier who has suddenly returned to our plane of existence? Or two copies of said soldier? And if you're looking into any and all of these phenomena, who else might you run into out there, and what kind of help or obstacles might they present? Here is a rundown of some of the groups that have demonstrated a clear interest in what's going on, what their interest is, and what kind of activities they're involved in.

SPOTLIGHT: BLACK LODGE

POSTED BY: AXIS MUNDI

After hearing from Lothan and KC, I figured out that a bunch of us old-timers are somehow caught up in all of this. As you know, I retired from running years ago. You know why. So when I got a call from a contact I hadn't heard from in a decade, I was hesitant to step back into the life. However, favors owed found me out on the streets looking for a woman named Helena Richter who'd gone missing one night in Brussels. I never found her. If I'm being honest with myself, I doubt the woman ever actually existed—at least, not under that name. Instead, what she led me to was a conspiracy that I wish was not real. One thing is certain: I should've stayed retired.

- > Guys, I tried to get in touch with AM after he uploaded this file and I couldn't. Anyone know what happened to him?
- > Dr. Spin
- > I have a sick feeling sticking his head up above the ridge got him noticed and those old problems he was hiding from might have found him.
- > Bull

The night I was dragged out of retirement, the body of Hunter Wagner-Blake's research assistant turned up at the bottom of Puget Sound, half a world away. The only possession on her was a commlink with a single contact. That contact happened to be the name and number of the alias I use when I am in that part of the world. When my friends in the Emerald City let me know what was going on, I checked the datastore associated with that identity and found an encrypted file waiting for me. It must've been triggered to send on a deadman's switch. Only now am I starting to realize the connection to Helena Richter and unravel this gordian knot.

Not a lot of people are familiar with the name Hunter Wagner-Blake. He holds the Witver Arcanology Chair at Karlsruhe Institute of Magic and Technology. More of us in the shadows are familiar with his father, Jonathan Blake, CEO of Centurion International Services. Hunter is an afterthought in the Blake family, staying in Germany close to his mother, a former S-K executive. Those who travel in the circles of magical research know him as a devoted scholar who doesn't rely on familial wealth for promotion. He has instead gotten ahead thanks to a keen understanding of how and why magic works the way it does. Yesterday, Hunter Wagner-Blake was also found dead, an apparent suicide in his home. His death triggered a subroutine that contacted the same datastore that his assistant left the encrypted file on and delivered the encryption key. The encryption key didn't completely open the file. I was prompted to provide specific information about Helena Richter I could've only learned through the course of my investigation. Once I did, it popped open. After reading it, I know it was the Black Lodge that killed Wagner-Blake and his research assistant, and they probably disappeared the person calling herself Helena Richter.

- > That checks out. Members of the Black Lodge are absolutely insidious. They are not the type to bang down your door with a team of runners. They are more likely to capture a sample of your hair and slip an area-effect spell down the manastream as you are picking up your kids from school, and then make sure you are held responsible for the results.
- > Haze

I don't want this file in my possession any longer. I'm not sure, but I think he meant for me to go public with it in the event that I *couldn't* find Helena Richter. I'm giving you the entire file here below.

UNCOVERING THE BLACK LODGE

I grew up in a small town near the grounds of the Osnabrück Pagan Temple. Beside the temple is a small chantry chapel that is quite public, but rarely visited by anyone. When I was seven, I asked about the chantry. My mother told me it belonged to the Black Lodge, and I should speak no more of it. I suspect others like me have had similar experiences. You've heard the name Black Lodge. Everyone knows the group's name, but fewer people believe they actually exist. They hide in plain sight and keep people guessing at shadows. Perhaps you were told stories of secret rituals carried out in the dead of night. They exist in the same breath as the boogeyman and Santa Claus—a construct often spoken of in terms of the meaning projected by the speaker. I believe this is what makes the Black Lodge so misunderstood. Even as I write this, I don't begrudge the Lodge for what happened to me. You must understand what drives them in order to appreciate their methods.

The Lodge recruits heavily from post-doctoral magic programs, often under the guise of high-nuyen research grants. Once they get a potential member in their sights, they perform an extensive deep dive on their family history, relationships, and any other thread they can pull on to find out what makes them get up in the morning, and how that information can best be used to promote the Lodge's true purpose. It was in this fashion the Lodge found me and manipulated me toward their cause.

Despite that, I am not writing this purely out of revenge or a deeper need to do good. I realize that publishing this document means not only my death but exposing allegiances that threaten my father's safety. But he made his choices, and if this sliver of truth can help advance our understanding of the Lodge and what they have helped to unleash, then I have done a service to my colleagues and to the positive exploration of magic.

- > It's like he is trying to sound selfless and wholesome, but at the core it's really a giant fuck you to his father.
- > /dev/grrl
- > Not entirely. Wagner-Blake's record is squeaky clean. He consistently avoided funding and research he saw as a corruption of what he felt magic ought to be and stand for. In truth, he's been a bit of a pain in the ass for folks like me trying to carve out a small profit moving magical finds. His philosophies seem more aligned with the Illuminates of the New

Dawn than they do the Black Lodge. That could be why he decided to speak out, and ultimately what led to him being killed.

- > Am-mut
- > Okay, so now we are treating IOND as the benevolent magic users of the world?
- > Winterhawk

There is a divergence of philosophies growing within the Lodge. The threads of this can be seen as high as the Lodge of Mordred, though the structure of the Black Lodge suggests that awareness of this divergence, or at least the powers that give voice to it, goes much higher. There is talk of rogue lodges whose explorations into magic differ from the mission of the order as a whole. There is a growing rumor that members at the highest level are no longer in agreement on how the order should proceed. In spite of all this, the work continues. The events that transpired in Toronto a few months ago were created in part by the manipulations of the Black Lodge. Evidence of the Black Lodge is everywhere around us, hiding as it always has: in plain sight.

FORGED IN PURPOSE

The history I've been able to uncover suggests the organization predates the Sixth World. We have all seen the evidence of magical beings who existed prior to the Awakening, most notably the writings of Ebran the Scribe. However, those beings are always non-human. The teachings of the Black Lodge suggest the order was founded in the time before our modern world by a human, maintained by humans—magically active or otherwise—throughout the organization, and their mission continues to this day. Before we get into any discussion about that mission, I will point out that unless you travel in the highest circles of society, you have likely never encountered a member of the Lodge in the flesh. The organization carefully controls and culls its membership based on standards reflective of their ultimate goal: power.

The Black Lodge works because it offers members that which they want most in life. For some it is power, others belonging, while still others seek immortality. All of this is within the reach of the Lodge and powered by magic beyond individual understanding. As a result, membership in the Lodge is practically a religion. Potential members are drawn to the order through the belief that magic existed prior to what has become known as the Sixth World and was handed to the care of true humans. They believe elves stole this power and manipulated it to their own means, upsetting the balance and eventually bringing about the down-cycle of magic that led to the Fifth World. This history is collected in a series of texts the order refuses to publish on the Matrix but makes

available in semi-public meeting houses known as chantry houses.

I am compelled to believe this history. In my (albeit brief) research, I discovered elements of this story in many forms of classic mythology. It follows in the eschatological beliefs of many pre-Awakening tribal cultures, including the Hopi myth of a locust returning to the lower world and taking with it the knowledge of magic, is spoken of in the texts, though the Black Lodge's literature suggests that the relationship between the magic-bearing locust and man was far more complex and resonates in our present interactions with bug spirits.

The historical course of magic as interpreted by the Lodge also correlates with the myths of the Aztecs, who referred to *nextlahualli*, or payment of mystical debt, as the reason for human sacrifice. The history presented by the Lodge suggests that this sacrifice comes as a result of how magic was first brought into the world, and ultimately argues that the continuation of such practices by non-humans and even dragons is what triggered the cycle of magic to end. The texts speak often of the role of non-humans. According to this history, the six mythological invasions of Irish folklore can be ascribed to attacks from beyond by the non-humans we call metas. This is not to suggest that the Black Lodge is anti-meta. In fact, several of the members I encountered were meta or had metahuman familiars. What is worth noting is that there are no known elven members of the Black Lodge. All questions I asked about the relationship between the Lodge and the elves were met with the same answer: I am not prepared to learn the truth.

- > Sounds like standard brainwashing practices to me. Speak of a greater truth, announce that there is one true enemy, and tell the victim that once inducted, they will become soldiers in the fight and receive knowledge and other rewards. It is the same playbook used from the early crusades through the jihads all the way up to Jonestown and beyond. You can't believe any of it is real.
- > Snopes

In spite of my father's involvement, I did not learn of the Lodge from him. I am a scholar mage, and perhaps he feared that I would join and one day rise higher than him. For whatever reason, he shielded me from the Lodge. Despite that, his actions were the breadcrumbs that fed my understanding. It was my pursuit of Helena and her drive to draw me into this organization that revealed to me that my father was a member of the Black Lodge. He would soon prove to be the barrier to my ascension.

MEMBERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

Though debate exists over the true size and reach of the Lodge, some numbers are clear. The



Black Lodge is essentially a closed organization. Membership is only attained when an existing member dies or is otherwise removed. The organization is a collection of small lodges situated throughout the world. Each sub-lodge consists of six members plus a seventh member from the tier directly above, who leads the particular lodge. Each tier is named after a figure from myth or history so as to reflect the level of the lodge. At the highest level is the Lodge of Merlin, otherwise known as the Black Council. This lodge is led by the Penultimate Master, a figure whose identity is known only to those in the Lodge of Merlin.

Each member of the Lodge of Merlin leads one of six Lodges of Morgana. Those six lodges are assigned to a different continent (save for Antarctica, which presently has no lodge). Each member of a Lodge of Morgana leads their own Lodge of Mordred, and so on. This structure follows the successive tiers, with members spreading out to infiltrate countries and states across the globe. This is a coordinated effort, with leadership deciding where each lodge will be headquartered, and ultimately who composes that group's membership. Each lodge leader is essentially responsible for six members, who in turn are responsible for six members of their own, all the way down the pyramid to the base Lodge of Nostradamus, where members are first recruited into the order. By this formula there

are exactly 9,331 initiated members of the Black Lodge, split between 1,555 lodges worldwide.

- ▶ These lodge titles are ranks. In truth, individual lodges may go by a specific name. For example, there is a Lodge of Rasputin embedded in the leadership of the Seven Society at the University of Virginia. Often the Black Lodge will infiltrate existing secret societies in order to spread their influence and, ultimately, recruit from within those powerful ranks.
- ▶ Arete
- ▶ Is that what happened with the IOND?
- ▶ Respec
- ▶ You have it backwards, Respec. The Illuminates of the New Dawn are led by Rozilyn Hernandez, who, if you believe the rumors, was formerly a Lodge of Morgana member who fell out of favor with the Black Council. Hernandez was too visible and frankly too powerful for the order to kill outright. So instead the Lodge has been working to infiltrate the IOND and take it over from the inside.
- ▶ Plan 9
- ▶ Hernandez didn't just fall out of favor with the Lodge. She is deeply religious, and once her membership in the Lodge became known, she was approached by the Vatican and basically told that the Lodge could not be trusted. She was given the choice to leave the Black Lodge or leave the church. We can see what

choice she made. Since then, the Black Lodge and IOND have been jockeying for influence. That jockeying extends to relations with spirits and planes, as well as among metahumans.

▸ Plan 10

Official members of the Lodge are initiated magic-users. I call the members of these lodges “magic-users” pointedly. Not all initiated members of the lodges follow the same tradition. The Lodge has specific language for the different magical persuasions. Those who follow shamanic traditions are called “Guides.” Those who practice hermetic magic are called “Judges.” In fact, this diversity is part of what makes the group appear so benign. The order itself is not seen as one magical order but several localized by lodge.

While the Black Lodge has nearly 10,000 initiated members, this does not account for its deep reach into the corporate, political, and even academic spheres across the globe. The truth of this follows the realization that ultimately led to my discovery of the motivations behind the Black Lodge, and, as you are reading this, my death.

BY THE NUMBERS: BLACK LODGE MEMBERSHIP

Lodge of Merlin: 1
Lodge of Morgana: 36
Lodge of Mordred: 216
Lodge of Rasputin: 1,296
Lodge of Nostradamus: 7,776

RULE OF TWO

Since the rise of early European literature, the term “familiar” has been used to describe the myth of a companion, generally an animal or spirit, who aids the magic user in the mundane world. In more recent times, the term was attributed to the vampires of popular fiction who sent forth these familiars to do their bidding. What we have long excused as myth is the foundational principle behind the Black Lodge. Every member of the Lodge has a familiar who is always a highly placed member of society in control of considerable financial, social, or political power. This is a condition of membership. You cannot become a member of the Lodge without a capable familiar. In fact, the political, social, or economic power of the familiar directly correlates to the rank of the magic-user.

I cannot speak to the minds of the highest council. My father never achieved such a reach. I can say that even as a former agent to Dunkelzahn and now a CEO of an A-level corporation, his political and financial reach was not enough to help his Master achieve even the Lodge of Mordred. I can only imagine the power commanded by those at the very top.

While magic-user and familiar are considered ordinal pairs, I have witnessed Lodge members attempt to raise their profile by recruiting more powerful familiars and even attempting to steal familiars away from one another. This is how I came to be involved with the Black Lodge. My position at university affords me a great deal of control of both resources and access to experimental magical processes. Someone within our local Lodge of Rasputin found the length of my reach compelling. She approached me under the guise of romance. I can only assume she believed that falling in love with her would soften me to her cause. We were involved for several months before she revealed herself to be a member of the Black Lodge. In that time, she learned much about my life, my family, and my history. However, her interest in my work was primal. We spoke about it as much as our affections.

- This research he is hinting at is no small study. Wagner-Blake was the lead researcher into alchera for Karlsruhe. Multiple corporations, including Saeder-Krupp (which he was raised in), tried to lure him away from the university. The work he did made him a prime extraction target in the region. I personally know of two attempts that were thwarted by his security detail. That’s why I perked up when I heard he’d been killed.
- Mihoshi Oni

I knew only that she was an independent researcher for the DIMR. She spoke little about the work she did, claiming to be bound by agreements that limited what she could say. Still, I met her colleagues and her friends and presumed I knew all that could be known about her life. When she finally revealed herself, I was both surprised and compelled to accept her offer. My partner knew me well. She made me feel safe and loved. She understood my work. Though I am left to wonder if all of that was a manipulation, you must understand that the value of that companionship outweighed my understanding of what it truly meant to become her familiar.

Familiars enter into this relationship because they are seeking something they cannot otherwise obtain. Before seeking a familiar, the magic-user will study their target, rooting out their deepest flaws and desires. They will use this knowledge to formulate an approach that allows them to create a lasting bond between them. For some that bond is romantic, others seek friendship, and still others crave the pairing of master and apprentice.

- Being an alchera specialist definitely made him a valuable asset to the Black Lodge, but why try to recruit him as a familiar? Why not approach him to become a direct member?
- Jimmy No
- Wait, is nobody going to talk about the fact that she worked for the DIMR?
- Bull

In the Black Lodge, you are always working toward the mission of the order, but your only trusted friend is your familiar. The only way to gain rank in the Black Lodge is by a member ranked above you dying or being supplanted in some other way. Members seek to undermine each other at every turn. While the six of your specific lodge are fighting among each other for recognition in the eyes of your leader, there are other lodges at the same level doing the same thing. In this fashion, many world conflicts are shaped.

- > Is he saying that world wars are built on silly little lodge fights?
- > Respec
- > Yes. What he isn't saying is that there is a social code in play to forbid killing other members in order to move up the ranks. That code is lessened when it comes to familiars. Having Wagner-Blake as a partner could help an existing member move up the ladder. Bringing him in as a member involves removing someone in your circle you already trust and understand and replacing them with someone who may soon have the clout to surpass you.
- > Lyran
- > This explains what I've been seeing coming out of Tianjin and Shenzen. There is a small but powerful collective of Monads in Tianjin who've aligned themselves with a coven of witches. On the surface, it doesn't make any sense, but when you factor in the Black Lodge, the Monads provide the witches with a type of reach they wouldn't otherwise have. Likewise in Shenzen, there is a Triad led by a Crow Shaman named Lao Long-shing who is reputedly tied to an AI named Pai. Again, it makes no sense outside of the context of this so-called Black Lodge system. In both cases I am left to wonder: What is the partner trying to get out of this?
- > Clockwork

THE MISSION AND THE METHOD

I first became aware of the deeper agenda of the Black Lodge in the early '70s when nearly one thousand people died or went missing during an incident at the Dunkelzahn Rift. While there has never been a satisfactory explanation of what happened in DC, it is clear that the Black Lodge, IOND, and the Draco Foundation all were engaged in either completing or disrupting a massive ritual. I wondered how so many powerful objects and people could be brought together so covertly, but more importantly I questioned the purpose of that ill-fated ritual. I believe the Black Lodge was trying to open a door. I believe the organization exists for that singular purpose—to open the doors better left closed and to seek to understand and perhaps control what lies beyond. There is an appeal to what the Lodge wants to obtain, but the reasons behind their want are what held me back from committing completely.

I was recruited to the order by Helena Richter. She approached me first as a friend and later as a romantic interest. It was during this second phase of our relationship that I discovered she was part of the Black Lodge. Very quickly I began meeting other members of her lodge and their familiars. I must note that I never was introduced to Helena's familiar. I was meant to replace this individual, which meant they were kept in the dark during all of this. Helena belonged to a Lodge of Rasputin, which meant she controlled her own Lodge of Nostradamus. I met these individuals as well and learned they were primarily concerned with researching alchera, as was I.

- > I've heard a little about this. Apparently some members of the Black Lodge think alchera can be used as a bridge, moving an individual from one alchera site to another. It is a false hope.
- > Lyran

Not long after meeting the six members of her lodge, I had another surprise visitor. My father arrived on my doorstep with a warning: Stop working with Helena Richter or there would be dire consequences. Even then, he would not directly explain his role in the Black Lodge, but when I told Helena what happened she grew alarmed. She explained to me that my father was familiar to a powerful mage from the Lodge of Rasputin who had intentions of ascending to the Lodge of Mordred. As my father's only heir, it was easy to see how I could be seen as a threat to this member. Should anything happen to my father, all of that wealth and power would transfer to me and thus to Helena.

My father warned me to walk away from Helena, but I could not. The very fact that you are reading this file suggests that my father took action against me in order to prevent Helena from gaining more power. I know the kind of man my father is and I knew continuing to work with Helena would be dangerous to us both. However, she and those like her within the order have a higher purpose, which aligns closely with my reason for being. I could not turn away.

When I first discovered Helena's purpose, I was intrigued. You see, the Black Lodge in and of itself is not an evil organization. Even if you choose to experience our world in such binary terms, the actions of the Lodge itself do not necessarily promote any one fixed perception of evil or good. The Lodge exists to investigate, explore, and ultimately capture new forms of mystic power and potential. They seek to know power, pure and simple. They seek access to the higher realms and to unlock the mysteries that await there. I sought out the Lodge for that reason and was encouraged to become a member myself.

This mission extends beyond the purely mystical. Part of the mission of the Lodge is to shape

policy and guide power in the way a shepherd controls their sheep. They seek a managing hand in how our world functions as well as who has access to worlds other than our own. Again, this facet of the mission is public. It is widely politicized in the open-access chantries across the world.

These chantries operate as front operations and are legitimate as they come. In truth, these points of sale are operated by dyed-in-the-wool members of the lower levels of the lodge, whose familiars are steeped in the skillsets of PR and image manipulation. They are responsible for presenting the public image of the lodge as well as creating enough of a false impression to confuse those who would look too closely. The lodge thrives on disinformation. They try to spin out as many false tales about their order as possible. In the wake of the Yellowstone Anomaly and the events at Casa Loma, the Lodge attempted to shift blame to everyone from the Wuxing corporation to the local government to a mystical invasion by the people of Tír Tairngire. This type of messaging helped me understand that not all in the lodge seek power for the betterment of mankind.

- ▶ That last one gained some traction, especially in the Humanis circles. For that group, everything that happened up north was part of a covert effort from within Tír Tairngire to rally extraplanar allies to their cause.
- ▶ Sunshine

It is difficult to uncover the truth about the Black Lodge, because members of the organization never speak of the Lodge proper; instead they fall back on Chatham House rules to distribute information to outside interests. When the Lodge speaks or acts, it is through the everyday voices you trust or it is through the secretive organizations who we already know to control a considerable measure of the world's power. Their existence is woven into the histories of the Freemasons, the Bilderberg Group, the Knights Templar, even the Illuminati. The influence doesn't stop at secret organizations. They have members and familiars situated within all of the AAA-rated corporations. They have their fingers sunk so deeply into Stark, Theissen, and Van der Mer that it is impossible to tell if that organization speaks with their own voice or that of the Penultimate Master. Likewise for the Apep Consortium.

- ▶ For those who are interested, Chatham House rules mean that anything said in the meetups is free to be used, but neither the speakers nor participants in the meeting or their affiliations may be named. The idea is to build stress-free alliances, so the speakers can share data and not worry about retribution for sharing secrets.
- ▶ Kay St Irregular

Black Lodge is up to something that goes beyond opening doors. The same historical documents that suggest that the Lodge existed pre-Awakening also suggest the Black Council had a relationship with the Dis long in the past. Much like the arguments that Lovecraft's Cthulhu came not from his imagination but his memories of seeing these creatures, the written history of the Black Lodge suggests that the council was not initially formed here but in that distant realm. Now the door is open again, and the Black Lodge had a hand in opening it.

PUSHING THE RIFT

My father's final warning came at my doorstep. He appeared there without security detail on the evening following the discovery of the Rothenberg alchera. He knew of my relationship and my recruitment to the Lodge. He knew of the research that was about to begin at the alchera site and warned me that sharing that research with Helena would put us both in jeopardy. Knowledge is indeed power, and so little is known about these strange new phenomena. He presented me with an ultimatum: leave Helena and share my research with him or lose his protection. I chose love. I suppose I chose death as well.

I shared my research on the Rothenberg alchera with Helena and the Black Lodge. The knowledge exchange flowed both ways. She told me what she knew of the Plane of Dis. At the time of my recruitment, the central purpose of Black Lodge operations was establishing connections with Dis. The Black Lodge views the passages to Dis in the same way people of the UCAS view their Bill of Rights—they were set there to be used and defended. To that end, the order is building a relationship with the faction referred to as the Nativists to allow members of the Lodge entry and safe passage through the endless city.

Helena's own lodge is primarily focused on accessing alchera. Her research coalesced with my own. We were both concerned with the energies being siphoned off from those who accessed alchera, and specifically studying where that energy is going and why. She explained that other lodges are focused more on metaplanar gateways and astral portals. She confessed that work is also underway to stabilize astral portals in order to be able to provide predictable entry and exit points. When I pressed her on this, she told me that Wuxing was heavily involved in that work. What scared me the most is how freely she talked of corporate collaboration. As with the magical groups, Dis is seen as a place of power, and corporations want to be able to access that power freely.

Learning how deeply the Black Lodge was entwined with the corporations gave me pause. It became clear to me then that while some, like Helena, have intentions aligned with my own, there

are many others in the organization who do not. I began to collect more data on the Black Lodge and soon learned that the group is in pursuit of an artifact known as the Desolation Codex. This item and other aspects of power offered by Dis underlie the true goals of the organization. The Black Lodge seeks to control access to Dis and to distribute the power that can be wrangled from that twisted place.

- ▶ This is an unfair interpretation of the organization. While there are indeed some who wish to control and even limit access to Dis, the majority of members seek only the knowledge that such a place can offer. Black Lodge members are driven by wonder. What greater wonder is there than the metaplanes? You can find manipulators in every group, but that does not define the group itself.
- ▶ Xiè
- ▶ Just so you know, things have not gone well for Black Lodge apologists here, historically.
- ▶ Frosty

In the end, my work and research did not go unnoticed. The Lodge monitors the web and mentions of Dis in the same way they monitor magical research to ferret out possible recruits. I remember the warning my father gave me, and I know now that it was true. As of this writing, Helena has disappeared, and I have gone into hiding. The Black Lodge demands loyalty beyond blood, and he has chosen his master over me.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILES

- ▶ I've worked with a crew to put together some quick profiles of groups who are interested in magical phenomena and would likely have an interest in the emerging alchera. If you get involved in this mess, you'll likely run into some of these in one way or another, so it would be good to know who you might be up against.
- ▶ Lyran

ALEPH SOCIETY

Type of Organization: Private nonprofit organization
Membership: 90
Headquarters:
Areas of Expertise: Free spirits, hidden magic

THE BASICS

The Aleph Society's purpose is simple but alluring: They want to find a way to bring magic to

those who cannot use it. Whether they're burned-out mages or mundanes who never Awakened looking for a taste of power, the members of the Aleph Society have given decades of effort to challenging one of the core tenets of Sixth World magic: that it does not go to those whom it has not chosen. The Society doesn't mess around with its efforts—they have focused on building connections to powerful spirits through ancient tomes known as the Book of Gaf and the Book of Tak, and reports say they are seeking two other books, the Book of Dru and the Book of Obe. They aren't exactly sure what would happen if they managed to make pacts with all four spirits, but they're pretty sure it would be remarkable. They just want it to be the right kind of remarkable.

Sierra LaGuardia leads the Society with a ruthless efficiency, and her management style seems to have the approval of Gaf, as the two are reported to have a strong relationship. Gaf's abilities remain unclear, but the fact that it is likely both powerful and ruthless is not at all comforting. The Society hasn't gotten regular enough results from Gaf to reach their goal—if they did, we'd be hearing about it a lot more—but they must have made enough encouraging progress to keep them chasing down this path. Their growth has been slow, but it's been happening, as they sort through potential members and find the ones who fit best. Their careful selection process means each new member brings strength without diluting their dedication to the cause.

- ▶ LaGuardia will still punish anyone who crosses her, but she's gotten better at cultivating friends. She knows her numbers are small and that friendships are important, so she's worked harder to cultivate allies. Still, she'll cut a bitch when she needs to.
- ▶ Kat-o'-Nine-Tales

WHAT THEY WANT

This is simple: They want the books of Dru and Obe. Those are means to the larger end of bringing magic to the non-magical, but they are clearly focused on those means. The Society might have worked on parallel tracks in the past, looking into spirit pacts while also working on other possibilities, but these days it's all about the tomes. That means tracking down any and all rumors of the tomes and their locations.

The Yellowstone calamity was a blessing for the Society, as it greatly expanded the reach of the searches they could conduct. They have been active in building connections to the Seelie Court, and speculation says that at least one of their new members is also a courtier. They're also building connections to as many metaplanar entities as possible to help broaden their potential reach. It's not clear if they have connections to Dis at this point,

but as knowledge of that plane spreads, they'll be increasingly likely to make connections there and find out what the residents know about the books they seek.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

Obviously they're looking for information on where the books might be, but how? There are only ninety members, and it's a big world, full of people who are adept at hiding secrets. These secrets don't uncover themselves; you need a network and connections to hear rumors, follow leads, and otherwise insinuate yourself into places where others would rather you not be. Accomplishing those things requires power, and the Aleph Society has decided to gather cash to access that power. They followed the long tradition of people looking for a high-margin cash business: They turned to drugs and other illicit substances. The Society may have only ninety members, but it has an army of "associates" that help it generate cash by selling BTLs, tempo, and other drugs. At this point in their existence, they have a good-sized war chest, and their associates have a lot of experience in what they do. As is the case with many organizations in this stage of their development, they're more in an acquisitions mode than an entrepreneurial mode. That means they don't enter a new market by sending someone in starting to drum up new customers from scratch. Instead, they find people who have already done that and acquire them. You can't just buy a street gang or up-and-coming drug-dealing cooperative, of course; you have to find a way convince them to work under your aegis. The Society knows two things these up-and-coming gangs want: a reliable supply and protection from competitors. The Society is skilled at both of those things, thanks to decades of experience in this area.

- ▶ We've been talking about the Aleph doing this for years. Drug trafficking gets erratic attention from law enforcement—sometimes they chase it down when they need a high-profile bust, or when some new and trendy drug is upping the overdose toll. Why hasn't someone decided to make a name for themselves by exposing the Aleph's trafficking network?
- ▶ Nephrite
- ▶ That's a good question. One of their secrets is a certain modesty of scale. They may not have many members, but the people they allow in have wide connections, which allow them to have global operations. They have never tried to ramp up their operations to the scale the Ghost Cartels attempted, and they have never tried to dominate narcotics traffic in a single city. Simply put, they don't put a target on their backs, so no law-enforcement organization feels compelled to take a shot.
- ▶ Red Anya

So the Society has a good flow of cash and a sizable war chest. How are they using it? They're buying stuff. They struck gold in the past year when one of the small presses they had started was purchased by Pentacle Press. As a result, the owner of that press, Society member Junot Tanzini, received a seat on Pentacle's advisory board, giving him tremendous inside information about what Pentacle is looking into and why.

Sometimes their methods are more reportorial than business-oriented, and they use their money to buy their way into important networks. Multiple regulars on the Grand Tour are reputed to be Society members (though they are not anxious to share this, due to the Society's drug-dealing ways), which, if true, would give them access to some of the most cutting-edge gossip in the world. They also, supposedly, have someone working as a producer on the Wu Quints' MeFeed, an MIT&T trustee, and an Indian Union governor.

We all know, though, that the upper ranks of power are sometimes the last to know about ground-breaking developments, not the first, and the Society knows the importance of keeping an ear on the ground while watching the skies. Their drug-dealing operations are decent in this regard, but it's the rare street gang that has any knowledge of obscure magical artifacts. The gangs that *do* know this sort of thing are ones that deal in Awakened drugs, since they tend to have relationships with talismongers and the like. They use those connections to listen for any rumors that might take them closer to the books they seek.

- ▶ They have also built connections with Wuxing geomancers to see if they can find any geographic patterns that might help them learn where the books are. Rumors say they have people spending a fair amount of time in Awakened Sheba recently.
- ▶ Elijah

ASTRAL SPACE PRESERVATION SOCIETY (ASPS)

Type of Organization: Private nonprofit organization

Membership: 200

Headquarters: Chicago

Areas of Expertise: Astral phenomena

THE BASICS

As directed by Dunkelzahn's Will, the Astral Space Preservation Society was begrudgingly established by the Draco Foundation and the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research (DIMR) in 2058. The late great dragon envisioned an organization that would study and protect astral space, creating a bridge between its denizens and meta-humanity. Neither the Draco Foundation nor the



Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research had any interest in supporting the Astral Space Preservation Society, and the organization floundered with no budget and a board of directors that viewed their newly assigned positions as career enders. The board suffered an appalling degree of turnover, replacing half of the eight members in the first quarter alone. Regardless, the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research directed the organization to begin massive research projects, including research into Dunkelzahn's Rift, tracking of toxic domains worldwide, and unraveling the astral disaster in Chicago.

After two years, the Astral Space Preservation Society stabilized under the leadership of Ibu Air, a free spirit who believed in the mission statement established by Dunkelzahn in his will. As the executive director, they secured funding from third-party sources, most notably the great dragon Hestaby. By 2062, Ibu Air had tripled their operating budget and wiped clean a one hundred million nuyen debt. In 2064, the Astral Space Preservation Society severed their ties to the Draco Foundation and the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research, much to their displeasure. Over the next decade, the Astral Space Preservation Society gained prestige as one of the world's leading authorities on astral space and associated phenomena, with offices across the world.

Unfortunately, the Astral Space Preservation Society took a major hit when Hestaby was ousted from Mount Shasta, and several board members were killed when the Shasta Shamans were wiped out. Following the Dragon Civil War, the Astral Space Preservation Society found itself in the midst of a financial disaster, projecting a quarterly deficit of nearly forty million nuyen in 2077. The Astral Space Preservation Society's image was tainted by their association with the disgraced great dragon, and they lost nearly all of their financial support. In a last-ditch effort to secure steady finding, the board of directors eventually accepted a large contribution from Wuxing, giving that corp far more influence than it used to have with the organization.

WHAT THEY WANT

The Astral Space Preservation Society was established "to monitor potential abuses of astral space and its denizens; to protect the rights of denizens of astral space; to establish a set of parameters that will facilitate a working relationship between spirits and metahumanity; and to create a sanctuary in astral space for beings in search of a safe retreat" (from Dunkelzahn's Will).

The organization is dedicated to exploring means for free spirits and metahumans to coex-

ist while ensuring the sanctity of astral spaces. To meet these goals, they've positioned themselves among the foremost authorities on the collected topics relating to the astral plane and the spirit world. They exist in a cycle of maintaining relevance so they can continue their work so they can maintain relevance—while applying their research toward fulfilling their mission statement.

Currently, their aims remain ostensibly unchanged, though access to the collected knowledge of the society is fully available to the megacorporation's magic services division.

- > It's insanely frustrating to see the ASPS dive deep into corporate pockets.
- > Axis Mundi
- > Because that's so much worse than pushing a dragon's agenda?
- > OrkCEO
- > In this case, I'm going to go with "yes, much worse."
- > Frosty
- > ^^^
- > Ethernaut

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

With renewed funding and an injection of Awakened membership, the Astral Space Preservation Society continues their research on astral phenomena such as ley lines, mana ebbs and warps, and sites of power. The organization is still regarded as the foremost authority on alchera—astral terrain that manifests in the physical world—and teams are deployed to research each occurrence as it's detected. A long-term agreement with the UCAS to study Dunkelzahn's Rift resulted in several open publications, but the UCAS government supported a lot of that research under their InfoSec program.

- > This is where corporate sponsorship gets problematic. You can be sure Wuxing wants everything the ASPS has, including all the classified reports they turned over to the UCAS.
- > Axis Mundi
- > Not sure how Wuxing is supposed to get classified documents from ASPS just because they're giving extra cash.
- > OrkCEO
- > They'd have access to the source material and reconstruct the documents that the UCAS wants to protect.
- > Snopes

In addition to their research, the Astral Space Preservation Society is actively involved in reducing and repairing damage to the astral plane.

They monitor blighted locations, studying the effects of urban development, toxic dumping, and war on the astral background and working to mitigate those effects when they can. In Chicago, where a series of horrific events have all but ruined the astral plane, they've been instrumental in repairing some of the destruction. The lessons learned there continue to apply in locations around the world.

These studies also extend to spirits and Awakened or dual-natured creatures. Besides recording the effects of astral phenomena on such entities, they also catalog various magical threats, such as shadow spirits, insect spirits, and the shedim. The Astral Space Preservation Society has lost more than a few members over the years to these dangers.

- > I remember when they almost lost an entire team in the Javanese Republic in the early '60s, their first big look at something horrific since the bug invasion. Between the ASPS and the Javanese military, they got a handle on the situation, but not before a bunch slipped away in host bodies. They still don't know what those were—nobody does—but there's an open contract on any that get brought in.
- > Ethernaut
- > Actually brought one of those freaks down a few years back. Tough fragger, but worth the payout.
- > Clockwork
- > I can't imagine. Had my fill of bug hunting in Chicago these past few years. You can have it.
- > Jazz

All of the research contributes to the Astral Space Preservation Society's goal of establishing a free spirit haven in astral space. There hasn't been any public confirmation of their success in this endeavor. There is speculation, however, that the organization has found a suitable metaplane for the sanctuary, with access through gateways established at several offices throughout the world. These rumors surfaced several years ago, and those following this particular topic are hard-pressed to understand why the Astral Space Preservation Society hasn't made any official announcements. A few think the project stalled out when Hestaby delivered her speech to the United Nations in 2073, when backlash against the speech affected them directly.

The Astral Space Preservation Society is open to most Awakened individuals with a desire to advance their aims through research and practical application. Members can expect to deploy in small teams to various locations worldwide as new opportunities to further their studies are discovered and prioritized.



ATLANTEAN FOUNDATION

Type of Organization: Private Research Foundation

Membership: 20 million

Headquarters: Atlanta, CAS

Areas of Expertise: Magic, Atlantis, Magical Artifacts

THE BASICS

The myth of Atlantis is probably one of the most enduring myths in the world, a shining utopia lost to the ages and sought after by explorers and adventurers spanning the millennia. The Atlantean Foundation was founded in 2012 out of a renewed desire to recover the ancient knowledge lost when Atlantis sank beneath the waves. This idea might have been laughed at in the years before the Awakening, but since its founding the Atlantean Foundation has ballooned to more than twenty million members and has expanded its purview to all things magical. Its membership boasts individuals from many different walks of life, from academics to your everyday street mage who wants to learn more about what it means to be Awakened. Most of them do nothing more than provide an annual donation, but others volunteer or are otherwise engaged with the foundation's mission.

With a massive infusion of nuyen following Dunkelzahn's death, the most prolific trideo production studios in the CAS, and a seat on the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research's board of directors, the Foundation has a massive amount of pull in the magical world. If the actual city of Atlantis is ever going to be found, they're the most well-placed group to find it.

- ▶ The Foundation has already found artifacts that are of Atlantean origin, or at least they claim they are, but it's still not clear if they'll ever happen upon the actual location of the lost continent—or what might be there if they find it.
- ▶ Frosty

Outside of Seattle, you'd be hard-pressed to find a city that actually likes having the AF around. They never do anything so untoward that they'd get kicked out of a place, but most cities tolerate their presence at best, seeing them as little more than scheming, power-hungry treasure hunters. Fortunately for them, that reputation doesn't seem to dampen the popularity of their trid shows and other forms of media designed to engage the general public.

WHAT THEY WANT

What the foundation is after is pretty simple

and hasn't changed much since their inception. They have expanded to other realms of magical research and study and often support or fund other projects that suit their purposes, though they still make noises about supporting their founding goal of discovering the lost city of Atlantis and any artifacts related to it. The AF leads frequent expeditions attempting to accomplish this, though the exuberance of some of their membership have led to the occasional accusations of theft on the part of an overzealous agent.

The foundation is quick to deny these accusations, of course, and their PR department is skilled enough to usually spin things their way with ersatz sincerity and slick words. People frequently know that they're lying, but they just do it so *well*.

At its heart, the foundation is about the same thing most of the Sixth World is about—power, plain and simple. Their chosen means to get it is making sure that when an artifact is uncovered, the Atlantean Foundation lays claim to it.

- > Their methods keep getting more sophisticated—they're way past the stage where they take an item and pretend they had no idea who owned it. They have forgers who make some of the best fake ownership certificates around, helping them feign legitimate ownership. Slip them enough nuyen, they might forge something for you, too.
- > Kat o' Nine Tales

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

Beyond their everlasting search for Atlantis, the AF dedicates a good deal of their money and efforts toward new magical research, actively seeking out like-minded groups or other projects that prove interesting to them. The more recent fluctuations in energy and occurrences of astral phenomena have set many of the foundation's magical researchers scrambling to figure out what was going on, though if they've reached any conclusions, they've been particularly tight-lipped about it. Given their close connection to the DIMR, it wouldn't at all be surprising if they were involved in the Institute's efforts as well.

- > Of course, if they eventually find Atlantis, there's no guarantee that they won't just keep the discovery for themselves. Greed has a way of worming into even the most charitable organizations. And the Atlanteans aren't that.
- > Jimmy No

The better question is: "What aren't they doing?" With as many pies as the AF has their fingers in, the foundation has numerous avenues through which to spread their influence, procure valuable artifacts, or do whatever else it is they want. Combine that with how ruthless they can be when something stands between their agents and something they're after, and the AF can be a real problem for

the average runner sent after some magical knick-knack Mr. Johnson has his eye on. That doesn't mean they're not above employing someone from the shadows to fetch it for them, of course, which can add a whole other level of complication if whatever they're after is a hot commodity. No one likes a double-booked event.

Whatever their true agenda is, even if it's to be the one at the end of the show with the coolest toys, they're definitely a group to look out for. The fact that we don't know what it is they even plan to do with all these artifacts or the city itself should they ever get their hands on it means that they could be a seriously big threat down the line. Lucky for us, even the powerful tend to need anonymous agents and plausible deniability.

- > Sadly, that only works for us if their aim is to be the biggest fish in the pond. If it comes down to something more apocalyptic, we're kinda fragged, aren't we? Not that I'm all that into playing heroics, now. No thank you. I'd rather get paid.
- > Morgana
- > I wouldn't worry about that too much. Even if they've gotten their hands on much of anything, artifact-wise, I doubt any of it points toward the actual city. More likely that they're just interested in overall power. The same as any of the corps.
- > Frosty
- > I dunno. Atlantis disappeared for a reason, right?
- > Morgana

CHILDREN OF THE DRAGON

Type of Organization: Public religious organization

Membership: 5,000 Awakened, 350,000 others

Headquarters: Prince Edward Island, UCAS

Areas of Expertise: Dragons, cults, metaphysics

THE BASICS

What began as a small magical society has now grown into a legitimate religious organization with some standing. In the late 2057, after Dunkelzahn's death, David Dragonson was granted a vision of a being that he referred to as the Great Dragon. According to this vision, Dunkelzahn was the embodiment of the Great Dragon's will on earth. The vision was transformative, leading Dragonson to abandon his old life and become a devoted follower of the Great Dragon, with Dunkelzahn as their prophet or avatar or something. He revelation told him that Dunkelzahn had not actually been assassinated, but rather had sacrificed himself to save humanity from some greater, unspeakable evil.

Dragonson established the Children of the Dragon in a church on Prince Edward Island, and his

message of Dunkelzahn's martyrdom of Dunkelzahn proved to be a phenomenal recruitment tool. Dragonson's charisma was another asset—members referred to him as the Messenger for the Great Dragon.

The Children of the Dragon engaged in multi-pronged outreach to spread their message, and their membership and donations surged. They eventually held chapters in many parts of the UCAS. By 2070, they had spread internationally, with chapters in the Front Range Free Zone, the California Free State, and the Confederation of American States.

The Children faced their greatest challenge in 2061 with the emergence of Ghostwalker from the Watergate Rift. A young member of the Children, Joshua Morningstar, saw Ghostwalker erupt out of the Watergate Rift as a sign from the Great Dragon that Ghostwalker was Dunkelzahn reborn. He began to question Dragonson's purity and adherence to the Great Dragon's vision, and within a year had declared himself to be the true Messenger. He and his group of followers went west with Ghostwalker to Denver and established themselves there as the Church of the Dragon Reborn.

The schism caused by Joshua Morningstar's departure from the Children of the Dragon forced Dragonson to open his doors of leadership, allowing for a more democratic process. He realized that with the Children of the Dragon growing so rapidly, there would be other challenges to face, and he wasn't willing to handle those challenges alone. He recruited a group of High Initiates from the most faithful members of the church. These High Initiates helped Dragonson steer the resources of the Children toward worthy causes and charities.

For many years, the Children of the Dragon sparred publicly and privately with another organization closely associated with Dunkelzahn: the Draco Foundation. The Draco Foundation treated the Children of the Dragon as naïve sycophants, while the Children of the Dragon felt that the Draco Foundation had squandered the gifts of Dunkelzahn. This feud seems to have been put on hold for the moment though, as the Draco Foundation recently appointed High Initiate Alexis Glimmer-scale, a changeling, to the Draco Foundation's Board of Directors.

- › Why does everyone assume that when someone is granted a vision of the truth, that person must be insane? Dunkelzahn saved us all from a mass-extinction event, even if no one else could see it. He plotted his own assassination, because no one else knew the truth. He was a great dragon, in more than one sense of the word.
- › Plan 9

- › Seriously, not this bulldrek again. Look, we know that blood magic was involved in the death of Dunkelzahn. If he was so great, why would he use blood magic?
- › Snopes
- › To a dragon, all magic is equal.
- › Frosty
- › That's a great segue to a rumor I've heard recently about the Children of the Dragon using blood magic in some of their rituals. Any truth to that?
- › Thorn
- › I'd rather talk about Dragonson himself. The man has to be nearly seventy now, and his ascetic lifestyle has left its mark on him. He's giving fewer public appearances, and when I see him lately, he looks like he's closer to ninety. There's not much before Crash 2.0, but I found a couple of interesting tidbits: He used to be called David Emerson, and he was part of Dunkelzahn's campaign staff during his run for president in 2057. Before that, he might have had a criminal record for fraud and embezzlement from the 2040s. Hard to say for sure; the photo I found sucks (seriously, 2D facial recognition is so bad) and he used a different name.
- › /dev/grll
- › I'm interested in pursuing both angles. If anyone wants in, let me know.
- › Thorn

WHAT THEY WANT

The Children of the Dragon want what most religious orders want: peace, harmony, and a brotherhood of (meta)humanity. They also want relics and artifacts of dragons, which they believe can be used to bring themselves closer to the Great Dragon. Whenever one of these rare antiquities resurfaces, count on one of the Children to be around to try to acquire it. They are not above using their funds to hire disposable assets to help recover these relics. With more rifts opening up, they'd be very interested in discovering whether these rifts could connect them to artifacts—or even to Ghostwalker's point of origin.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

Because of the reach of their chapters, the Children of the Dragon can look for draconic artifacts almost anywhere in the western hemisphere. However, their teachings have yet to find a foothold in Aztlan or the eastern hemisphere. The High Initiates and Dragonson himself have pushed to get new chapters built in these regions, sending missionaries out to spread the gospel.

- > These missionaries need escorts in some of these regions. They are usually unarmed children, barely old enough to vote, and they are sent into some of the most dangerous regions of the world to try to convince people of their ideas. And when I say that they are pacifists, I mean that very literally—they don't even wear armor. They believe that their faith (and a healthy dose of magical ability) is enough to protect them. Still, if anyone's looking for some babysitting work, let me know. I know someone there, and I can facilitate introductions.
- > Picador

In addition to spreading the gospel to other regions of the world, the Children of the Dragon are heavily involved in metaplanar exploration. David Dragonson is a high-level initiate who has traversed some of the most dangerous and far-flung metaplanes in search of the plane of his god. While his searches have never revealed the divinity he seeks, they have borne fruit in other forms. The Children of the Dragon have been working with various other organizations to publish their findings, which they happily give away. The Yellowstone event was a big moment for many of the organizations that seek to further understand the metaplanes. While many of these organizations have launched exploratory expeditions into the calamity, the Children of the Dragon have used this opportunity to further research the now-closed Watergate Rift. They are planning on a major expedition to get past the defenses and attempt to open the Rift so that they can maybe find Dunkelzahn. They believe that the recent spate of magical energy has given them an opportunity to emulate the effects that created the Rift in the first place.

- > Wait, so these guys want to create a massive explosion in Foggy Bottom? And they're okay with the collateral damage because they believe that it's warranted, or what? Ghost take all zealots.
- > Kay St. Irregular

One other area of interest has grown out of a recent dispute between Nadja Daviar of the Draco Foundation and Hestaby, the now-ousted dragon of Mount Shasta. There were concerns that this dispute would ripple through the Children of the Dragon, much like how Ghostwalker's appearance created the Church of the Dragon Reborn. The fact is that Dragonson is getting up there in age, and Dunkelzahn is a history lesson to most of the church's newest members. Hestaby is a dragon that they have grown up with, and they see her as more relatable than a dragon whose most noteworthy interactions with them are through history trids.

- > People are so quick to forget the Darktooth? This makes me weep for this world.
- > Orange Queen

COTTINGLEY LEAGUE

Type of Organization: Private non-profit organization

Membership: 170 and growing

Headquarters: Virginia Beach, Virginia, CAS

Areas of Expertise: Faerie, portals, ley lines, research, investigation

THE BASICS

The Cottingley League is a recently formed group, headed by Linda Frances Moore, a descendent of Frances Griffiths, one of the two girls who perpetrated the Cottingley Fairies hoax in 1917 and 1920. A mage who specializes in summoning, she received her training at Edgar Cayce's Association for Research and Enlightenment in Virginia Beach, where the League is currently based. Though still associated with Edgar Cayce's A.R.E. herself, the A.R.E. does not sponsor or assist with the Cottingley League's activities in any way.

- > Don't be so sure about that.
- > Winterknight
- > What makes you say that?
- > Ethernaut
- > He pays attention.
- > Bifrost
- > Oh, it's you again. Why do you keep showing up when we're talking about the fae?
- > Ethernaut
- > It's what I do. I know things and share them.
- > Bifrost

Moore assembled the Cottingley League from a few interested members of the A.R.E. staff, and the organization quickly grew. It found interested parties in several cities, most notably Seattle, DeeCee, Denver, and Cheyenne. Their recruiting efforts occur mostly via social networking and other Matrix channels. Anyone expressing interest in the fae may be approached, especially if the subject has magical ability.

Most notably, Moore has reached out to those factions of the Seelie Court that are seeking to grow relations with metahumanity. It is currently unknown whether any of those factions have responded.

- > It's known.
- > Bifrost
- > Then please, enlighten us.
- > Ethernaut

- > The Comet faction jumped at the opportunity, sending a few members to assist the League. They're keeping it quiet because Comet doesn't want their association to be publicly known. I'm not sure why.
- > Bifrost
- > Wow, a straight answer. Are you sure you're fae?
- > Ethernaut
- > Never said I was fae. I just know their world.
- > Bifrost

WHAT THEY WANT

The Cottingley League seeks to strengthen existing and build new connections with the Seelie Court. They hope that allying with the fae will facilitate this goal, and that with both fae and metahumanity working together, more bridges between the worlds can be established intentionally, using the Yellowstone Anomaly as a model. They are likely to pursue any potential resource that might possibly aid them in accomplishing this goal, no matter how tenuous or unlikely.

When it comes to more immediate goals, the Cottingley League wants to obtain as much information about the Yellowstone Anomaly as possible. Publicly available research data is limited, so they've begun making inquiries to acquire additional data. They have contacted several corporations and organizations, requesting to share information and resources to make research easier. Unfortunately, their requests have so far been ignored or rebuffed.

They're also seeking resources: finances, ritual and reagent materials, research facilities, and qualified talent to aid in research and investigation regarding portals, metaplanes, and astral phenomena. They're not too picky about how they get what they want, either. As long as locations can be secured and no one will come looking for the materials they obtain, they're happy. Scientists of all branches of metahumanity have been approached for recruitment, as have metasapients and spirits.

- > Translation: More runs for us.
- > Kane
- > Scientist extractions are fun. Academics and the universities who employ them often have little business sense, and it's not always hard to get them out of their contracts. The trick is explaining the real world to the person you're extracting, and why maybe they should come with you to go someplace else.
- > Nephrite

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

The Cottingley League needs research data in a bad way and has failed to gain what they need through open, honest methods. Therefore, the League has been making quiet inquiries about acquiring data not available to the public so that they can continue their private investigations into the Anomaly. They have also asked the Sioux Nation government for permission to send a group to study the Anomaly directly, but they have thus far been denied.

- > Their inquiries haven't been that quiet. People are starting to notice that they're hiring shadowrunners. Notice, and disapprove.
- > Traveler Jones

Moore has been attempting to acquire property in Cottingley adjacent to the beck (stream) where the original faerie photos had been taken. Even though those photos were admitted to have been faked, Moore believes the symbolism alone makes that location ideal for creating the first stable, metahuman-generated portal to the Seelie Court—as opposed to continuing to rely on the unstable, accidental Yellowstone Anomaly.

A few leading members of the Cottingley League disagree with this approach, believing that searching out existing pathways to the Seelie Court that are rumored to exist is the more reliable course. As a result, they have thus far blocked Moore's efforts to purchase property in Cottingley, wanting some kind of evidence that purchasing the property would help accomplish their goals before making such an investment. Moore isn't opposed to their idea, but she's still pushing to get the property.

- > Okay, I'll bite—why does she want stream-side property in Cottingley so bad?
- > Slamm-O!
- > That's an excellent question. I've wondered, myself. I'll let you know if I find out.
- > Bifrost
- > Has anyone told the League that those pathways her people are wanting to find are rare, sometimes dangerous to use, and jealously guarded?
- > Frosty
- > They've been told. Apparently, they developed selective hearing loss.
- > Bifrost

Rumors about the Cottingley League performing experiments to create gateways that allow travel to the metaplanes have begun to surface, likely resulting from their efforts to study the Yel-

lowstone Anomaly, and possibly other portals and similar phenomena. These rumors include sizable explosions of magical energy that left bodies behind in several different locations in North America, Great Britain, and Europe. So far, the incidents haven't been definitively linked to the Cottingley League, but the circumstantial evidence was enough to bring the League to the attention of law enforcement.

- > Lyran, did you write this? It doesn't sound like you.
- > Ethernaut
- > I might have gotten some help.
- > Lyran
- > Don't tell me.
- > Ethernaut
- > Bifrost knows his stuff. I checked!
- > Lyran
- > I said don't tell me.
- > Ethernaut

CRACKING THE BONES

Type of Organization: Membership association
Membership: Around 1,000 formal members, with many more affiliates
Headquarters: New Orleans, CAS
Areas of Expertise: Voodoo magic, rural justice

THE BASICS

Voodoo is not a common faith in the Sixth World, but this group provides a chance for practitioners to network and organize. Their current focus is on causing trouble for corporate and governmental interests in rural CAS and neighboring areas. Though they're not yet a tight organization, they are becoming more coordinated as the world around them is getting harder to deal with.

As a loose federation, the group is based in (but not tightly contained within) the CAS—there are members from Athabaska to Aztlan, as members go wherever they feel they would be of use. They move as often as they feel the call of the road (or as local law enforcement or corporate interests catch up with them).

With their community connections and lack of restraints, they are often first on the scene when something big happens, even when they don't usually have the power to exploit their rapid deployment.

WHAT THEY WANT

Cracking the Bones has always been more driven by the needs of its members than by a larger organizational agenda. As the corps continue to

slowly crush the life out of the world, its members feel an increasingly urgent need to push the boot off their neck. Day by day, the group is responding to the unstable world around it by communicating with each other more, and this is leading the former loose alliance of houngans and mamba to be more united they have ever been. The group has always helped those in need around them, and members are doing their best to help those who are falling behind. They do this by building up ground-level social networks and groups, as well as by making spiritual and magical friends.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

As the group gets more organized, voices are coming forward in the loose affiliation as more focused organizers. This is leading to tension from some of the old guard, who lament the previously headless organization structure, but it is definitely starting to lead to results. On the chaotic border between the CAS and the Caribbean League, members have organized large-scale damage and resistance to the interests in the area. This is leading to whole blocks of former agricultural land being effectively uncontrolled as the corps see the cost as not worth the expense, and the two competing nations tacitly granting the areas nominal autonomy (while still technically claiming the areas).

The group is growing but still doesn't have many direct members to complete the task that they are setting themselves. They are building friendships and networks among those who have been sucked dry by warfare, piracy, and corporate greed and don't have much money or weapons, but their origin as a voodoo initiation group has allowed them to build significant magical knowledge of the areas they operate in, as well as building up social capital with free spirits.

The group is growing and succeeding on the fringes of society, but so far it hasn't created enough of a nuisance that it is profitable to take them down. They are spread out and working in many areas to build influence; by the time they finally pop up on the radar, established interests may find that they are much more difficult to get rid of than they thought.

On the ground, you are likely to find members working to make friends and build alliances with those in the lowest rungs of society. They aren't picky about the company they keep; you might find a member helping out the local street doc or warding and summoning spirits to help protect a Halloweeners headquarters. As long as they can influence people to help each other out, they will work with just about anyone.

On the downside, as the organization grows and pushes itself out there, it is becoming harder to maintain cohesion and direction of thought. The group has never been strict about its membership,



but now that they are motivated and building influence, there are some agitators who seem to be in it more for power than for the good works.

- ▶ This seems to be the way for growing groups—as soon as they hit a certain number of people, the original focus is lost, and it all becomes too much. You often get the original members in conflict with the new upstarts and pushing in new directions. The old-timers get a sudden shock when they realize they don't represent the majority anymore. It's a real risk point for an organization, but if enough of the old guard evolve, and enough of the newcomers realize that there is deep experience and knowledge with the founders, then the whole group can move forward, changed but stronger. Other groups snipe each other and try to trip up each other while wrestling for control.
- ▶ Magister

Despite the activism and internal ructions of the growing group, there are still core members who are interested in growing and developing their magical skills. Members of the group are also watching the lands, the alchera, and other developments with a crow's eye. The connections they are building to the land and people are leading to the ability to exploit magical developments to benefit their long-term goals. With so many people and spirits as friends, and with access to remote rural areas and parts of cities ignored by others, members of Cracking the Bones often hear of weird magical happenings and

are able to trek out to investigate them. They lack the raw power needed to hold the areas if someone else is determined to push in, but being the first magically competent observer on the ground is often very useful. Some members sell the information to fund their other efforts, while others share data with groups that will use it for noble purposes. Occasionally all that they can do is swipe something interesting to examine later in their lodge.

- ▶ I was visiting a friend not long after the Yellowstone incident happened, and they had a strange, shiny saber just stuck in a plastic umbrella stand in their lodge. When I asked about it, they just said that it belonged to some surly queen and that they had smuggled it out before the corps arrived. I checked out its aura, and it nearly blinded me.
- ▶ Chainmaker
- ▶ Do you mean the Seelie queen?
- ▶ Frosty

DRACO FOUNDATION

Type of Organization: Private charitable foundation

Membership: Approximately 12,000

Headquarters: Washington, FDC, UCAS

Areas of Expertise: Trust and probate law, magic arcana, dragon culture

THE BASICS

On August 9, 2057, the great dragon Dunkelzahn was sworn in as the first (and thus far only) great dragon president of the United Canadian and American States. Unfortunately, only a few hours after being sworn in, he was assassinated. In an amazing act of foresight, President Dunkelzahn prepared for such a contingency, which was revealed when his last will and testament was read publicly six days later, on August 15. The will specified exactly how the great dragon's assets were to be distributed. Part of that vast wealth was given over to one Nadja Daviar, Dunkelzahn's vice president and longtime associate, to establish the Draco Foundation. Founded as a private charitable foundation, the Draco Foundation is tasked with ensuring that the great dragon's wealth and assets are allocated and spent in accordance with his wishes. Given the sheer magnitude of Dunkelzahn's wealth and the breadth of individuals and organizations addressed in Big D's will, the Draco Foundation has interests spanning the Sixth World. Though it is unified by executing the vision of the former president's last will and testament, given its growing reclusiveness, change in apparent leadership, and rumored squabbles among its six-member board of trustees, there is speculation that power is doing its normal thing—causing disruptions among those who hold it.

WHAT THEY WANT

In theory, the Draco Foundation's goal is simple: Ensure that the last will and testament is executed in a manner keeping with Dunkelzahn's wishes. The reality, as is typical in the Sixth World, is much more complicated. Board chair and former UCAS Vice President Nadja Daviar was once the glue which held the Draco Foundation together and kept its true purpose on course in an increasingly chaotic world. Unfortunately, after a nine-year disappearance, Ms. Daviar returned to the Draco Foundation and became mired in a range of troubles. Her sudden return prompted several members of the Draco Foundation Board of Trustees to resign. Replacement members were eventually appointed but not without controversy within the foundation, and a once-unified board was left adrift from their original purpose. Squabbles and conflicts about the organization's ultimate purpose sprung up among the senior staff. In an effort to rein in the personal politics that were interfering with the foundation's mission, Daviar recommended Rex Coll be appointed as executive director to the board. After his surprisingly prompt approval, Coll took over day-to-day operations.

Since Coll's ascension to executive director, the Draco Foundation has become more insular. Many of its smaller offices across the country have been closed, and its larger offices in DeeCee, Se-

attle, Denver, and other major cities have become appointment-only destinations, a reduction from their former policy of allowing public visitors once a month.

- Coll's doing more than consolidating offices, chummer. He's cleaning house. And you better bring a mop, because from what I hear there's a lot of bloodstains in the carpet.
- The Smiling Bandit

In the 2070s, the Draco Foundation was working behind the scenes to promote dragon and drake rights, which isn't always an easy proposition when you consider how the dragons have been set against each other and not entirely willing to grant rights to their peers. While Dunkelzahn certainly would have wanted dragons to advance into mainstream society, the activities generally went beyond the Draco Foundation's original mandate. Coll hasn't said anything about this publicly, and his chilly demeanor and distinctively corporate persona seem more appropriate for a megacorp boardroom than a charitable foundation. Further retreating from the public eye, Coll sees to it that most organizations and individuals that take it upon themselves to closely examine the activities of the Draco Foundation are directed to speak with the Board of Visitors. This group's members include the mysteriously emancipated digital intelligence known as Pulsar and former UCAS President Betty Jo Pritchard, who has been surrounded by a seemingly endless stream of controversy for decades.

- But she's also managed to keep her head out of the muck. She's tough, older than the hills, and a straight shooter. Which means she's honest, but also that she hits what she aims at.
- Kay St. Irregular

Regardless of this behind-the-scenes shuffling, the Draco Foundation maintains that its singular purpose is, was, and shall always be the execution of Dunkelzahn's last will and testament.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

In decades past, the Draco Foundation prided itself on transparency and integrity by proudly and publicly providing documentation and evidence to prove that their sole purpose and all their endeavors were geared toward their objective of executing Dunkelzahn's will appropriately. While the increasingly reclusive Nadja Daviar continues to assure an increasingly skeptical public that the Draco Foundation's purpose and actions remain as true as they did over the past two decades and change, the deafening silence from the Board of Trustees and ever-increasing obfuscation being cast by the Board of Visitors under the blanket excuse of "delicate public relations in these chaotic times" has cracked the organization's once-heroic image.

- ▶ I'll tell ya what they're doing, omae. They're gettin' dirty, just like everyone else. Or at least, they're paying good nuyen so someone else gets dirty for 'em. More and more I been hearing about Johnsons hiring runners, and a quick dig is showing it all goes back to that boardroom in DeeCee. Those suits pretending to be white knights on Big D's behalf ain't doing nothing but hiring soldiers for their own private wars. Just like everyone else.
- ▶ Scorch

As the Draco Foundation becomes more and more secretive and insular, rumors continue to spread that the Board of Trustees has developed a fissure, leading to all kinds of internal tensions, while the Board of Visitors runs interference to keep the public from becoming aware of any trouble. Nadja Daviar used to have the board firmly in her back pocket, but that's no longer the case. Rex Coll seems more interested in running the Draco Foundation like a megacorporation instead of a charity and seems willing to cut a deal with the highest bidder as long as it benefits the Foundation—as he defines “benefits.” Other trustees are following his lead, making backroom deals with any corporation or organization with even the thinnest tie to Dunkelzahn's will in an effort to curry favor and build their own power bases.

- ▶ Building power through a nonprofit organization is not always the easiest thing to do. If the government is going to let you get away without paying taxes, they're going to give some extra scrutiny to make sure you're not using your special status to just amass a personal fortune.

Except, of course, that we've all heard of people who have done it. There are a few tricks to it. You can't be sloppy. A megacorporate manager getting a large sum of money after securing a big contract is normal—it's just a bonus, and it's something everyone does. For a nonprofit, though, if you earn a direct reward from the organization's activities, that's called self-dealing, and it'll get your tax-exempt status revoked. So you've got to be a little subtler.

The board level is the exact right place for these shenanigans to take place. Here's one way people like to make it work: People sit on a board because they have a certain expertise or reputation. A lawyer, for example, has both legal knowledge and connections in the legal world. When the board has legal questions, they can carefully advise them in such a way that might push business toward someone close to them. The legal firm gets a lot of business, some of it focused on the nonprofit world. They need some outside expertise, so they hire a consultant to help evaluate some organizations. They go with one of the more reputable consulting firms, and they of course make sure to make a small public announcement of the deal. The consultancy sees a nice little bump in their stock prices. And our board member who got this ball rolling? He happens to own some shares of the consultancy—not a majority, of course, and perhaps not even voting shares—and he sees a sudden jump in

his net worth. And all that went on is people gave advice about who other people should work with.

- ▶ Mr. Bonds

Meanwhile, Daviar's isolation and reduced involvement with the Foundation has led many to speculate that she is looking to leave the role bequeathed to her by Dunkelzahn. Other rumors include accusations that she has retreated completely from the public eye after falling under the scrutiny of the UCAS Senate Select Committee on Paranormal Affairs and the ire of Orange Queen Hestaby. Some conspiracy theorists have even speculated that Daviar has seized much of the Foundation's resources in the wake of its apparent circling of the wagons in an effort to engage in her own private campaign of retribution against those within the organization who have turned against her. There's even speculation that in her increasing secrecy, some combination of all three may be the case.

Regardless of the individual objections of the Board of Trustees and the many members of the Draco Foundation, its activities are spread out across the Sixth World, whether they be private, governmental, corporate, astral, or any combination. The sheer expanse of the things addressed in Dunkelzahn's will spreads the Foundation's influence.

So where do they fit into the issue of the new alchera and rifts? As you would expect with a divided organization, it depends on who you talk to. Generally speaking, the Foundation has always had a less-than-comfortable relationship with the for-profit magic sector embodied by the megacorps. The Foundation's sibling organization, DIMR, is certainly more allied to the study-magic-for-the-joy-of-learning school of thought than the strip-mine-magic-for-profit school that the corps represent. Part of Coll's work with the organization and the board, though, has been to make at least parts of the organization more comfortable with the corporate school of thought. They follow the same line that the private sector has used since the days of Adam Smith—that markets are leaner, hungrier, and more nimble than the public sector, so they naturally have a higher drive toward innovation.

If the corps can help them better investigate alchera and rifts, then Coll is likely to gain an increasing amount of sway within the Foundation, as they'll see the benefit of his way of thinking. If the corps are seen as driving the increase in alchera and rifts, or, even worse, driving instability in the manasphere, Coll will be put in a difficult spot trying to defend his point of view.

In the meantime, the Foundation does not have a clear mandate to interfere with these operations one way or another. One interesting wrinkle is the bequest of “ancient path cards” to Lady Brane Deigh of the Seelie Court. With the recent interest in the Sixth World Tarot, some dedicated Dunkelzahn fans have been wondering if there is any

connection between the two. The Threshold card, which appears to show astral or metaplanar disturbance, the Four of Batons, which shows an astral event (according to some interpretations), and the Eight of Batons (showing an electrical explosion in the sky some believe is magical in nature) all have been interpreted as foreshadowing the metaplanar rifts we're now seeing. Tracking down and studying these cards is a growing area of interest in the magic world, and some Draco Foundation representatives are leading this charge.

- ▶ Don't forget the Queen of Cups, which many people think is an image from another plane.
- ▶ Lyran
- ▶ This is not a surprise. Batons (or wands, in older tarot decks) is the suit of energy and spirituality, so it's only fitting that it would be the suit covering these current events.
- ▶ Winterhawk

DUNKELZAHN INSTITUTE OF MAGICAL RESEARCH

Type of Organization: Private non-profit research

Membership: Approximately 8,000

Headquarters: Boston, UCAS

Areas of Expertise: Arcane research, pararchaeology, arcane education and research

THE BASICS

Like the Draco Foundation, the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research was born from a grant provided in Dunkelzahn's will. Though it was initially intended to serve as the administrative arm of the Astral Space Preservation Society, the relationship between DIMR and the ASPS has become more than a bit chilly in the decades since the post-mortem endowment from the great dragon brought both organizations into existence. While the ASPS is focused on the astral plane and the protection of spirits and their reality, DIMR takes a more corporeal approach to their concerns by analyzing magical relics and talismans in an effort to better understand how magic interacts with the physical world. DIMR scholars travel the globe researching mana surges, para-archaeological locations, and magical relics. In fact, many prominent academic organizations such as MIT&T and Harvard bring their own discoveries to DIMR scholars for analysis. The Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research is the best in the world at understanding and unlocking tesma and foci, and since its inception their services have remained in constant demand.

The DIMR's Board of Directors has remained amazingly stable over the decades, with its mem-

bership comprising officials and scholars from some of the finest educational institutions in the land, including Thomasin Martyn (of the Oxford Royal College of Magicians and current chairman) and Eهران the Scribe (world-renowned magical scholar and former member of Tír Tairngire's Council of Princes). Eهران maintains a full-time position at the DIMR and manages the organization as a whole. The Institute's central office in Boston is one of the most physically, digitally, and magically secure buildings in the city, easily rivaling any local AAA megacorp holdings. This, combined with Eهران's draconian orders, allowed the DIMR to survive the CFD outbreak and subsequent lockdown of Boston in 2076.

The mission of the DIMR remains as it ever was, in spite of the squabbles and debates that board members hold behind closed doors: to research, understand, and catalogue any and all discoveries and insights as they relate to magic. This includes magical training of Awakened individuals. The Institute has a particular interest in understanding tesma and foci, which seems to have grown into an obsession over the past few years and has brought them to cross purposes with many other groups and organizations. But unlike the increasingly corporate Draco Foundation and their smaller cousin the Astral Space Protection Society, the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research seems to be as strong now as it ever was, both at its home office in Boston and its many satellite offices across the world.

WHAT THEY WANT

All of the senior staff at the DIMR remain dedicated to their unified purpose, but due to the diversity of membership in its board of directors, many of its senior personnel disagree about how to accomplish this. Ostensibly, the organization's goal is simply one of understanding and education regarding all things magical. In reality, the DIMR has become a society of obsessive relic hunters traversing the globe at the first hint of the presence of a significant magical artifact. Teams of arcanarchaeologists arrive at new dig sites, often within mere hours of their discovery, and have become more and more aggressive in the past few years in their efforts to lay claim to these locations. Accusations of poaching sites from other organizations and nations (particularly Aztlan) have been levied against the DIMR, though rarely publicly. Instead, a growing conflict has been brewing in the shadows, with the Institute taking more and more aggressive measures to ensure their dominance in these matters.

In addition, the DIMR works closely with MIT&T, Harvard, and other institutions of higher learning by taking artifacts discovered by members of those groups into their custody for study. Thus far, no accusations of theft or conveniently

misplaced artifacts have been reported, but the scrutiny on the DIMR is growing with each year. The most significant finds brought to their attention are studied at the central office in Boston, and meticulous records are kept (and protected aggressively) in the vast libraries of DIMR.

Finally, a growing cadre of well-educated mages is coming out of the DIMR, often to immediate employment by that organization. While some say that Ehran and the board are creating their own private army of mages, the Institute itself simply claims that in these dangerous times, it is important that all Awakened beings receive the most exhaustive and comprehensive magical education possible.

- ▶ If they want a private army, more power to them, because I trust DIMR to train mages with some sense of ethics more than I trust the corps.
- ▶ Old Crow

- ▶ When power accumulates, it goes wrong. That's what the whole history of humanity is about.
- ▶ Fianchetto

- ▶ I know we live in "dangerous times," because we always have, but what is DIMR seeing that makes this more dangerous than usual?
- ▶ Nephrine

- ▶ They have been as careful as anyone in studying how mana flows, and they've seen a lot of "unaccountable irregularity" (academic-speak for "weirdness") in the manasphere since the Yellowstone disaster. They might be the least surprised of anyone by what's going on now, and I think they are geared up to fight it.
- ▶ Lyran

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

In addition to research and education, DIMR maintains dozens of active para-archaeological dig sites and research facilities across the world. Satellite locations exist in Athens, Karlsruhe, Prague, Neo-Tokyo, Bangkok, and several other major cities around the globe. The DIMR suffered a blow with the chaos in Denver during the late '70s, and the twists and surges in energies led to the DIMR pulling most of their people out for their safety.

In recent months, several members of the DIMR board of directors have taken a more active hand in the activities of the smaller satellite branches of the organization, with Dr. Edward Oden of the University of Chicago returning to Chicago and Casey Williams of the Atlantean Foundation returning to Atlanta to take direct control of the DIMR offices in those locations. Whether this is an effort to shore up Institute presence and assets in those areas or to further personal agendas remains to be seen.

They've also been quick to respond to some of the new astral phenomena, occasionally having people on the ground before anyone else gets there. They're gathering information, but so far they're not telling anyone what they're seeing.

- ▶ And there are people who would pay good money to know, in case you missed the blinking red light at the end of that paragraph.
- ▶ Jimmy No

ILLUMINATES OF THE NEW DAWN

Type of Organization: Public charitable organization

Membership: Inner Order (800 magicians); Outer Order (several thousand, mostly mundanes)

Headquarters: Washington, FDC UCAS

Areas of Expertise: Arcane research, education, public advocacy

THE BASICS

Everyone knows about the Illuminates of the New Dawn, because it is one of the largest independent magical societies in the world and one of the most influential special-interest groups in North America. It has also been inexorably intertwined with the New Century Party in the UCAS and CAS and is now a core caucus of the Technocratic Party in both nations and part of similar parties in other countries. Additionally, its adoption of advocacy and support for technomancers and Emerged synthetic intelligence, as part of the organization's and NCP's founding principle to coordinate and combine the use of magic and technology, has become both an albatross around the neck and a sign of pride within and beyond the organization.

Founded by Professor Rozilyn Hernandez of Georgetown University in the 2030s, the IOND never sold itself to its members or to the public as an exclusively magical organization. Professor Hernandez wasn't a professional who stuck exclusively to magic, which made her different than many of her contemporaries, who sought to learn and master as much of the new art as possible. She was a sociology professor by training, and her interests and expertise brought the Illuminates and herself numerous contacts and influence in the capital of the last state superpower. The group attracted hermetics, especially those from influential and privileged backgrounds, and that cachet helped the organization grow enough in size and influence to allow Hernandez to eventually make a run for the UCAS presidency in 2057 as the New Century Party nominee.

Since that time, the Illuminates have been involved with (but not leading) almost every major

magical phenomenon or activity of the last twenty-five years. As a relatively milquetoast technocratic organization with no overt agenda, it's been allowed to spread within the ranks of government and corporate magical corps as well as attracting non-magical affiliates and adherents. With the rise of Horizon, it found a natural partner that stood in the ranks of the Big Ten, giving both access and resources to spread their message of techno-magical inclusion and innovation. The fusion of the New Century Party into Technocratic parties around the world has paid dividends in expanding influence and shaping orthodoxy with regard to magical, technological, and emergent regulation and overall policy. It is the magical equivalent of the friendly face Horizon and Technocrats and others love to put forward to show that all of these new and strange magical phenomena aren't really dangerous, they are just new opportunities to be understood and controlled by the experts and the sensible realists. In other words, by them. And if we just let those people do their jobs and not interfere, everything will work out fine.

With Professor Hernandez having taken an emeritus position last year, the Illuminates are now led by a cadre of dedicated but younger acolytes who were ostensibly chosen because they represent the meritocratic and aspirational goals and nature of the organization, individuals who are ambitious and intelligent, who represent a cross-section of magical and social demographics, and who all toe the party line. This line focuses on inclusion and diversity of thought being critical to expanding the market of ideas, and it also addresses complex thoughts and practices to bring technology, magic, and other esoteric forces like technomancy together to move the organization and society forward toward the New Dawn the organization strives for. They have been emphasizing that recent events and the survival of metahuman civilization through the upheavals and catastrophes of the last century served as a crucible forging them and the rest of us into something ready for the future. A future they will shape so long as we allow them.

WHAT THEY WANT

The Illuminates of the New Dawn want what all powerful people want: more power. The subtext to the point about them leading us into the future if we allow them has always been "because you don't know any better, and since you can't be trusted, we will take power by force if necessary." They have magical and non-magical members throughout institutions and systems of control and influence, and they promote each other to ensure mutual advancement and control. In effect, they should already have that force in spades. However, as with any conspiratorial group—magical or otherwise—the Illuminates are only as powerful as

their focus on their goals. In this case, the factional infighting of people with the stridency of progressivism and the egomania of your average hermetic initiate have dulled that focus to the sharpness of a NERPS ball.

But aren't the Illuminates just tools of the Black Lodge now?

Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it doesn't matter.

The IOND still does what it is best at: collecting information and allies. Internally, it may be as cold as an assassins' convention, but externally this allows the group to be seen as an open, tolerant bunch of weirdos giving the most ruthless political and corporate snakes a chance to earn some cred with people that the public can't fear are going to take over the world because the group's public image is transparently, even humorously, so open about that goal. So while the Illuminates interact with magicians and mundanes alike, often because the group is an extensive web of intellectual and social resources with some amazing arcana, it is inexorably intertwined within and among the Big Ten. Based in DeeCee and concentrated in (what's left of) the UCAS, it could be intertwined with everything involved in the collapse of the UCAS—or with none of it. Figuring out what's really the case is part of the adventure here.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

This is the million-nuyen question. The Illuminates know they can't control everything, but they hope to control a fair amount of magic for those who *do* control everything (which would at least give them a seat at that table). They have been working to acquire access, influence, and control over many leaders and fields where magic can be studied, controlled, and wielded. The challenge is that there are numerous other organizations with the same relative goals, and all of them are drawing from the same wells.

As a kind of public face of magic, Illuminates of the New Dawn members and affiliates work to tamp down concerns about magical phenomena, which has kept them quite busy in the wake of magic's role in damaging the UCAS. Naturally, they insist there's no correlation between the number of Illuminates within security organizations that have spent the last fifteen years studying the techno-magical processes that allowed Winter-night to nearly end the world and the remarkable speed and efficacy of the blackouts in critical UCAS metroplexes. Once you start looking in that direction, you might notice that the IOND is large and diverse enough to be involved in every major magical phenomenon of the last fifty years: sweeping Mt. Kilimanjaro of hostile spirits; the containment and eventual reopening of Chicago, Boston, and now Detroit; the Yellowstone Anomaly; the Los Angeles Deep Lacuna; the Ring of Fire eruptions



of 2061; and III Corps disappearing. The Illuminates desire the authority and power to manage and contain activities for their benefit, in coordination with other like-minded groups for whom they have made themselves indispensable. They don't seek a magocracy, not like the Black Lodge does—they just want to be the executives in charge of how magic shapes our world.

Of these groups, the two that keep coming up in relation to the IOND are Black Lodge chapters and Roman Catholic organizations. The IOND was founded at Georgetown University, the oldest Jesuit-run university in the Western Hemisphere and located in Washington, D.C. That Hernandez was a Sociology professor and not part of the School of Occult Studies allowed her and the earliest Illuminates to emphasize that they operate at an arm's length from the Church's own magical activities, especially any involving the Jesuits or New Jesuits themselves. Still, that distance was not enough to keep IOND off of Aztechnology's shit list, putting the Illuminates in the rare position of being banned in both Aztlan and Tir ná nÓg.

MYSTICS AND MAGICKS

Type of Organization: Arcane Service Provider (Aztechnology subsidiary)

Membership: Approximately 28,000

Headquarters: San Diego, Aztlan

Areas of Expertise: Arcane research, commercial magical services, education and training

THE BASICS

Mystics and Magicks might not be a brand we are especially familiar with in the shadows, but John Wagemage almost certainly knows about them, as they're Aztechnology's arcane service provider subsidiary. And I'd be shocked if most of us don't know of their work. For those who don't know, an arcane service provider (ASP) is the outfit that does all those nice magical defenses we keep running into. Most people think of wards when the subject of arcane services comes up, but ASPs are more than just ward makers. Most ASP corps offer ritual magic to those who don't have access to it, mostly anchored rituals, but a skilled ritualist can turn their hand to almost any ritual. Ever wondered who the mom-and-pop hardware store turns to for magical tracking? Or who the simsense starlet turns to for those ritual health treatments that are so in nowadays? Yup, in both cases they turn to an ASP.

- ▶ ASPs are some of the biggest recruiters among college students. Ritual magic benefits from bodies more than most types of magic, and while the ritual leader needs to be skilled, any magician can add their power to a ritual with only a few days or weeks of study. So ASPs often recruit both those skilled in ritual magic and also the students who haven't shown much promise in other areas of thaumaturgical studies. And the churn is high, as ritual drain can be a major slitch. But the pay is good, and being part of a ritual team can be a cushy life.
- ▶ Covenant

Mystics and Magicks is a very typical ASP in most respects, offering their services like any other, both to third parties and to other Aztechnology subsidiaries. It's not uncommon to see M&M teams at NatVat plants, though usually as advisors or as part of R&D programs, or at Medicarro clinics bolstering the local magical healers with additional numbers. Ritual magic offers so much and is so versatile you could run into M&M personnel at any Aztechnology facility.

WHAT THEY WANT

In principle, this is simple: They want to make money. Mystics and Magicks is a corporation, after all. They're always looking for new markets to move into while also expanding their market share in existing ones, but with so many competing organizations (both corporate and not-for-profit), it isn't always easy. In business, like on the streets, you have to have an edge: something you can do that no one else can or something you offer that no one else does. Mystics and Magicks has several such edges, both in rituals they offer that aren't widely known to many other mages and in their use of practitioners of almost every known magical tradition. This enables M&M to offer "ritual empowerment" services to almost anyone on the planet.

M&M has another capability that separates it from most ASPs, one which I'm sure many here will find exceptionally un-earth shattering: blood magic. While not widely advertised, it is nonetheless something that M&M can and does offer to certain clients and in certain situations. I'm not saying every ritual performed by a team from M&M will use blood magic, or that every M&M ritualist is a blood mage. But some of them are, and not just those who follow the Path of the Sun. Blood magic enables ritualists to do things most mages would find exceptionally taxing if not downright deadly. On top of that, rumors say there are unique blood magic rituals that are useful to the right clients.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

It's all very much business as usual right now for Mystics and Magicks, with a few extra things going on. There's always someone who needs arcane

services, and the contracts for those services usually have rigid and strict timelines that must be met, or else there are serious penalties. So at any given time, there are M&M ritual teams in numerous locations around the globe carrying out their usual work activities, but lately they've been up to more.

It goes without saying that each team is composed of magicians, usually all of the same tradition. But ritual magic isn't an exclusive skill-set, which means these teams can and do have a wide array of skills and capabilities, and they're often used to working with each other. It's rare for M&M ritual teams to be masters of offensive or defensive magic, so one on one, they're usually not as great a threat as a dedicated combat mage from a security corporation. But when they have the benefit of numbers (sometimes a dozen or more, since the largest wards need truly staggering numbers of mages to erect), on average they're more powerful. This means running afoul of an M&M ritual team is not something to take lightly.

- ▶ I'll echo that! A friend of mine had a job against an A-rated corporate facility. Their recon said that there were no wards or other significant magical security on site. Unfortunately for them, the day they were doing the job, a large group of people showed up. My friend's team didn't pay them too much mind, until that group let loose an impressive fusillade of combat spells. Turns out the corp had hired M&M to erect wards to protect their premises, and my friend picked that day to go in. They got the job done, and my friend is enjoying his new arm.
- ▶ Hard Exit

Another part of the usual duties for a Mystics and Magicks ritual team is observation. No corporation, least of all a subsidiary of the world champions in knock-off copies, would pass up the opportunity for a little corporate espionage. Ritual teams are uniquely placed, since the laws of magic sometimes mean they have valid justification to enter supposedly secure areas while providing their usual services.

- ▶ Or they can use such magical reasons to con their way into those areas, often relying on the ignorance of mundanes to the finer workings of magic.
- ▶ Winterhawk

This opens, quite literally in many cases, doors for ritualists to become covert sources of information. This data is then fed back to R&D, who pass it along to Aztechnology corporate intelligence and other subsidiary R&D departments. Lately, though, these departments have been paying more attention to data that crosses their path related to things outside the usual areas of interest for an arcane-services provider.

It might surprise some to know that a corporation like Mystics and Magicks has its own re-

search-and-development department, especially given their place within Aztechnology. But in reality, most of the nuyen that goes into arcane research goes into more flashy aspects of magic: metaplanar exploration and mapping, development of new spells and enchanting practices, and the discovery of new exotic reagents all receive more funding than ritual magic and the other aspects offered by ASPs. But a small fraction of a multi-trillion nuyen global budget is still a large sum. And there are always barriers to push, knowledge to gain and expand upon, and discoveries to make. Then there are the R&D scientists and scholars who turn those discoveries and new knowledge into services that can be sold to customers. Everyone is always looking for that next big thing.

Or the first big thing.

The appearance of soldiers appearing from ghost knows where has raised several questions across the globe. Where have they been? Where have they come from? How did they get there? But the question the R&D division of Mystics and Magicks has been asking is: Why haven't they aged as much as they should? This has raised the specter of the fountain of youth once again, something that's been sought for thousands of years. If there are magical ways to prevent or reverse aging, such knowledge would be of tremendous value to whomever can bring that to market, and some of the research scientists at Mystics and Magicks believe ritual magic will be the key.

- > So some eggheads think these alchera and the missing soldiers hold the answer to eternal life?
- > /dev/grrl

- > I wish them luck, but I'm not holding my breath.
- > Bull

- > The planet is already overpopulated; eternal life is the last thing it needs! Metahumanity living even longer, able to grow even more—no thanks!
- > Ecotope

- > The distance from blessing to curse is rarely more than a single step.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

- > For once I agree with MoMN. Eternal life sounds like one big party, but it's often far from it.
- > Red

- > At least, if you were immortal, you wouldn't have to watch your friends die of old age.
- > Bull

To further their goals, Mystics and Magicks have placed some of their teams worldwide on alert. Suddenly, these ritual teams have gone from arcane service providers to a sort of part-time magical fast-response

unit. Ordinarily this would border on disastrous, placing personnel untrained in security procedures and tactics into harm's way, but their rudimentary training in espionage fieldcraft, combined with their sheer numbers and the wide range of skills within each team, has given them an advantage. Whether that advantage lasts or not remains to be seen, but in the meantime these M&M teams have acquired several subjects to debrief and have managed to examine several alchera and other phenomena closely before other interested parties arrived on site.

Mystics and Magicks is also using the distraction provided by the current situation to expand their market share. With so many eyes looking toward the current mysteries, M&M has been signing contracts as fast as they can and leveraging their expertise to play on fears regarding the alchera and reappearances to entice reluctant parties to sign up for some service or other. Acting in ways similar to the hysteria when the shedim first appeared in 2061, M&M has been touting their services as the best way to safeguard people and property. Those in the know will scoff at this, but as Mystics and Magicks has proven time and again, magic itself is a mystery to most mundanes, and those mundanes will believe almost anything they're told by a mage who sounds like they know what they're talking about.

Taking on additional contracts and diverting some of their personnel away from their regular duties means Mystics and Magicks is spreading itself very thin, so they've adopted two main approaches. First, the M&M recruiters are becoming much more aggressive in their attempts to head-hunt students from colleges and other institutions who show a gift for ritual magic and other aspects of thaumaturgy your typical ASP prizes.

- > They were pushy fraggers before, but lately they've become ten times worse! I had to intervene recently when one of the recruitment agents wouldn't take no for an answer. He'll be out of the hospital in a few days, and since he's blacklisted at all campuses in Seattle, I expect he'll be moved elsewhere.
- > Canis

Second, M&M recruiters are casting their net wider by going to community colleges, high schools, and community-education centers looking for any individuals with the talent who would like a cushy corporate mage job. Expanding the pool of people they're willing to recruit by reducing the minimum age of applicants as well as sending recruitment agents to institutions in much more deprived areas, Mystics and Magicks is drawing in large numbers of magicians of all types and traditions. This massive ramp up in recruitment will have a very swift impact on M&M operations worldwide, allowing them to pursue their new goals. Whether this becomes a permanent direction remains to be seen.

OMNISTAR

Type of Organization: Private megacorporation
Employees: 750,000+
Headquarters: Atlanta, GA CAS
Areas of Expertise: Magical research, education, applications (security, forensic, medical)

THE BASICS

OmniStar is the emergency services blob that brought together Manadyne, which had been flailing and bouncing around independence and dependence on NeoNET/Novatech for years; DocWagon, which was being edged out of markets by Aztechnology and other competitors worldwide; and Lone Star, which is flush with cash thanks to a resurgence in large contracts. They're also rumored to be trying to drag Aegis Cognito into the fold, though Spinrad's acquisition of the intelligence group hindered that goal.

One reason they want Aegis is there are overlaps between Lone Star, Manadyne, and Aegis Cognito, notably their intense desire to exploit and maximize extraplanar intelligence collection, analysis, and operations—espionage on the meta-planes and in astral and mundane space. Ares has been among the earliest players in this field, but Lone Star has clandestinely been the leader in this area, along with the UCAS DIA. With the expansion of Spinrad Global and recent upheavals in the UCAS that threaten the fiscal future of the military that has been exploding in size for the past decade, those DIA resources ended up part of Aegis Cognito—sometimes officially, sometimes not.

WHAT THEY WANT

OmniStar is, on Earth, all about maximizing scope of services. From education to enforcement to cleaning up when things go wrong, their magical resources have been focused on serving those ends: training magicians, using magicians to enforce the law (public and private, criminal and administrative), and providing medical and other holistic services in addition to DocWagon's famed armed-response abilities. They want information, expansion, and critical information they can use to concentrate control in their centers of power.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

OmniStar has a better foothold into Asia, especially China, because of Manadyne's membership in the Pacific Prosperity Group. Lone Star, DocWagon, and smaller assets that OmniStar is pursuing want to fill a gap that has been left open far too long. This has also meant working with Spinrad Global, and specifically Aegis Cognito,

on gathering and exploiting information. One of those exploits dates back to the time Manadyne was part of NeoNET, when Aegis collected and restored data that went through Manadyne about the fallen megacorp. OmniStar is paying Aegis a fortune for information and political services to corral influence over UCAS units that are now in foreign nations or under uncertain financial states. It's collecting and analyzing the massive wealth of information that comes from Lone Star's global operation as the leading licensing and regulation service corporation. In effect, they are consolidating magical information and research, then concealing it from everyone they can.

THE ORDER OF ST. SYLVESTER

Type of Organization: Catholic Magical Investigation group
Membership: 250
Headquarters: Vatican City, Rome
Areas of Expertise: The Sylvesterines have large libraries filled with magical knowledge. Their records note interesting happenings that occurred even before the Awakening, and they have a cadre of support people who collate, cross-reference and link records across the world and history. Equally good at investigating in force, playing detective, and doing research, the only thing holding this group back is that it doesn't have enough people to chase every lead they uncover.

THE BASICS

The return of magic to the world created vast upheavals among the faithful of many religions. The Catholic Church at first disbelieved and then railed against the unstoppable cycle of mana, putting forth the view that becoming an ork or troll could be reversed with enough prayer and devotion. The church also taught that magicians had powers stemming directly from Satan. When the Awakening continued, and it was found that there were people of unimpeachable faith who had goblinized or who had expressed magical talent, the Church began the slow process of examining its own beliefs, culminating in the election of the moderate Pope John XXV and the publication of an encyclical called *In Imago Dei* in 2024. The attitude of Catholicism toward magic has varied over the years, but currently it has settled into an area where it is not necessarily sinful to have magical talents or be a metahuman. Metahumans now have all of the rights and abilities that humans have, and the church would rather have metahumans filling the pews than nobody. Magic is treated a little differently; it is not necessarily a sin to have magical talent, but magic is viewed as a force that can lead to corruption.

To assist magicians of the faith, the church strongly encourages magicians with talent to join one of the holy orders. The Order of St Sylvester has a mandate to investigate magical phenomena on behalf of the Vatican and is happy to recruit magically active Catholics for the task. Almost every magically active member of the Order practices theurgy or is an adept who draws his power from theurgy, which is a tradition that fits magic into a Catholic worldview. The Order also has the purpose of bringing a moderating counterpoint to growing conservative influence on the church. Contrary to rumor, Catholics who are not magically active are welcome to join the larger society as analysts and custodians of information, although they will never be on the front lines.

WHAT THEY WANT

Members of the Order swear an oath to witness and document unusual magical occurrences in order to accumulate knowledge for the Church. Magically active members typically go out in twos or threes to investigate any unusual situation, either on their own initiative or when ordered to check on something for the church elders. The Order is also expected to assist local bishops when needed. The order finds and investigates magical happenings and then reports back to the library with their findings. Sometimes these findings can be used for profit or leverage by the church, but most of them have no immediate use and are stored away in vaults that lie under the Vatican.

There is a temptation for the church to use this knowledge to recruit members or find funding, but with a few exceptions, the order has resisted this and seems content to build their own knowledge. The members seem interested in magical artifacts and magic knowledge, hoping to apply the magic they are investigating to the tasks they are undertaking. Magical weapons that members find are highly valued, and they bring admiration and appreciation from other members of the order. This leads to the situation where promising items are gifted to a superior before they have been fully tested. So far, this hasn't caused any problems.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

The upswing in magical alchera and unexplained mystic events has sent the Order into frantic activity, attempting to investigate and document everything they hear about. The Order is rapidly expanding the staff of clerks behind the scenes who perform the research, happily recruiting from seminaries and lay personnel who have an aptitude and who are able to take a job with the church. Where there is too much work for the Order, or where the details are too sketchy and the rewards too meager, the Order has been hiring de-

niable assets to investigate or retrieve items. This can be a boon for runners who are low on cash, but the missions tend to provide little intel and less support. Of course, for some runners, the promise of a good payoff can be all the support they need.

Fortunately for the Order, some of the research is bearing fruit. Most of the magical activity is unexplained and seems to be unexplainable, but the Order has found a few patterns in the chaos, and these have led to significant magical events. In particular, a series of omens in Constania County, Romania, revealed a cave with strange and unusual creatures. After study, it appears as though there is a kind of merging between animals and spirits that has survived in this isolated cave for a very long time. In any case, after documenting their findings, the Order sold the information and access to the cave for a phenomenal amount of nuyen, enough to fund the entire Order for several years.

Oddly, not long after this transaction occurred, the leader of the investigating team parlayed her newfound prestige into a wider organizational leadership role, leading a group of teams to several other magically active sites. Not only is she finding these sites at a much better rate than chance would normally allow, she is also rising rapidly in reputation and respect in the order. In fact, it appears that the only thing slowing down her meteoric rise is the influence of the Vatican bureaucracy. In any case, she is favored to become the bishop leading the Order as soon as the cardinals can meet to confirm her in the position. She is known as Piele Alunita in Romania, and still likes to return to Europe when she can.

- ▶ Don't forget that Pope Sixtus VI was a Sylvestrine once. He tries to watch over them without incurring the wrath of less-friendly cardinals.
- ▶ Goat Foot

PENTACLE PRESS

Type of Organization: Public corporation

Membership: 800

Headquarters: Manhattan

Areas of Expertise: Magic-related publishing, reagent gathering, distribution

THE BASICS

If you're a hermetic magician, you've almost certainly heard of and bought something from Pentacle Press. As the largest publishing company for magical texts in North America, they have a ubiquitous presence in hermetic circles. While shamanic texts are interesting, shamans just simply don't have the financial backing of hermetics. Hermetics can be found in academic and corporate circles, and those processes generally lend themselves much more easily to being taught through publishing and distribution.



Shortly after the Awakening, Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies decided to establish a couple of companies to help them with internal magical hiring, supplies, distribution, etc. Pentacle Press (not to be confused with fellow MCT subsidiary Pentacle Distributing) was established to help MCT train their newly acquired magical assets by providing a standardized system that could easily be followed by even the most inexperienced magical novices. A few years later, Pentacle Press was publishing monthly newsletters to the hermetic community as a whole, starting with *Hermetic Digest*, a way to make sure that hermetic magicians were keeping abreast of the latest developments (most of which were fueled by MCT, naturally). The success of *Hermetic Digest* led the company to publish other newsletters, such as *Magician's Monthly* and *Thaumaturgy, Innovation, Magic (TIM) Talks*.

In 2072, Pentacle Press opened a news agency called HNN (Hermetic News Network), specializing in providing up-to-the-minute news about magical events and happenings. Their press agents have gotten interviews with dozens of unique Awakened individuals, and they broadcast a regular show called *TIM Talks* where they have celebrities and influencers talking about the issues that are important to them and providing updates on new techniques and developments. They also have

a regular show talking about the economics of magic, and their breakthrough came when covering the fall of orichalcum values across the world. HNN is notable for having a unique cadre of reporters who are free spirits. Their most successful reporter is Deaver, a free kindred spirit who can traverse huge distances in a near-instant and can be on-site within moments of an event.

Pentacle Press became so successful that MCT decided to merge it with their other publishing company, Ambrosius Publications, in 2077. Ambrosius had been a very successful educational materials publisher, but Pentacle had a leadership focused on the future, and Ambrosius had been stuck in the past. Within a year, Pentacle had taken over responsibility for publishing almost every hermetically aligned textbook in the western hemisphere.

Anyone in North America who has studied magic at a university has used a textbook published by Jackson Scholastic. Jackson Scholastic is Pentacle Press' educational arm. They provide textbooks, testing materials, tutorials, and even administer tests for universities across the world. By far their most successful textbook is the *Manual of Practical Thaumaturgy*, which sees use in almost every hermetic training program. They also offer certification programs for those looking to prove their capabilities to Human Resources departments.

- > Combined with Magic for Mundanes, Pentacle Press can basically influence the whole world's perspective on magic. And since the perspective of magic by users has an impact on the astral plane in ways we don't fully understand, this means that if they become truly the only game in town, they would become tremendously dangerous to the magical world.
- > Magister
- > Sorry, I'm not really clear on this. How would Pentacle Press become some sort of evil magic boogeyman?
- > Respec
- > If the astral plane is influenced by the perspectives of practitioners, and the practitioners all agree that things work one way, then it will work that way. Thus, the practitioners who aren't hermetic (in this case) would lose at least some of their magical ability. Just like how diversity is critical to maintaining an ecosystem, diversity in traditions is critical for the overall health of magic in the world. Universal Magical Theory (UMT) nearly accomplished this within a few short years of being proposed.
- > Lyran
- > Nature always finds a way to correct its mistakes.
- > Man-of-Many-Names

Pentacle re-branded Ambrosius Publications as Ambrosius Software after their merger. Several of their applications are now recognized as being phenomenal software tools customized for magical users. Most programmers have a hard time connecting with the magical mind, and UIs are never designed for those who can sense the astral plane. Ambrosius was already known for its virtual assistant, Grimmy the Grimoire, who made a huge impact on social media due to being adorable and informative. The agent was purpose-built for use by Tír Tairngire but quickly was repackaged as a personal assistant for magicians everywhere.

- > "Adorable?" That's not a spelling of "hideously annoying" that I'm familiar with.
- > Slamm-O!
- > People started loving it ironically, then they forgot to stay ironic.
- > Lyran

Thanks in part to the success of Ambrosius Software and Jackson Scholastic, Pentacle Press pushed for (and got) resources to assist them with their next phase for global domination: the Matrix. The Matrix is generally a very difficult place for magicians, as things don't always interface the way one would expect, and very few Matrix materials are written with magicians in mind. Their latest project pairs some of the brightest minds of Ambrosius Software's Matrix designers with the best trainers that Jackson Scholastic has to of-

fer. Pentacle has partnered with some of the best minds at Mitsuhamma to build the world's first host that can accurately simulate magical effects. They do this by using Jackson Scholastic's training materials, including the words, gestures, and movements to know which effects are being created. In addition, Ambrosius' software monitors the user's neural network to determine which parts of their brain are being used, in essence "reading" the will of the user. These all combine inside an extremely powerful host to create simulations of the magical effect that would be performed in the real world.

This is a huge step forward toward integration of Matrix technology with magical research. But for Pentacle Press, of course they would go this direction. They're a company that is constantly on the edge of both magic and technology, so it only makes sense that they'd be the first to unify the two.

WHAT THEY WANT

HNN is constantly looking for new material. If there is a magical event of significance, odds are good that HNN will show up on site quickly. They owe a lot of this to their superstar free spirit reporter, Deaver. It's understood, however, that Deaver is holding out on his next contract renewal with HNN. Rumor says he's looking to connect to one of the bigger news organizations in the world.

- > Fame is a mighty drug, but with free spirits, the question is always what they're going to do with a seven-figure salary. I mean, they don't need to eat, right?
- > X-Prime
- > Whether they need food or not, they can always materialize and enjoy all the pleasures of existing in the flesh. That, plus the power money offers, can provide plenty of incentive to chase the almighty nuyen.
- > Jimmy No

Similarly, *TIM Talks* is constantly looking to make interviews with those who are important within the magical community. This might be a researcher who is pushing the boundaries, a discussion about metaplanes, examining how auras are impacted by stress, or almost anything that can prove to be interesting. There are reports that some fae may be willing to discuss topics that are relevant to the Yellowstone calamity, and those folks would indeed be in high demand for a *TIM Talk*.

- > The Court is all a-twitter with these rumors. Speculation runs high that anyone who'd publicly discuss those topics would weaken the Court, and therefore must be a member of the dreaded Shadow faction. Those who want to go public are working behind the scenes to lay the groundwork for talking without immediately becoming outcasts.
- > Frosty

Any time there's an academic study to be published, Jackson Scholastic wants a piece of it. They have an online library of scholastic articles, journals, and studies. In order to preserve their revenue stream, they need exclusive deals, which drive membership subscriptions for those who want to look at those exclusives. Pretty much any hermetic academic makes their living off these research papers, so naturally Jackson Scholastic wants to find ways to get these papers without paying through the nose for them.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

In order to do all the things described above, Pentacle works to stay on the leading edge of magic research and advancements. The alchera situation is a clear example of that, and they're really eager to make sure no one knows more than them. All cards are on the table—stealing formulas and draft research from academics, shadowing metaplanar expeditions, chasing rumors of lost relics, posing as DIMR operatives, whatever it takes to get knowledge. This definitely includes chasing down rumors of alchera—the more active and dangerous the manifestation, the more important it is to get info. Basically, if you can tell them something they don't know, you can get them to pay you for it. Just remember that they know an awful lot.

UNITED TALISMONGERS ASSOCIATION

Type of Organization: Private business association

Membership: 275

Headquarters: California Free State

Areas of Expertise: Telesma and reagents

THE BASICS

The United Talismongers Association has been very busy in recent years, and they aren't just operating in or near the California Free State. What started out as a small local organization with the goal of ensuring that the megacorps couldn't establish a monopolistic hold on reagents and foci in their area has grown beyond its original scope.

The UTA is a legally registered magical group that requires all members to have a SIN and be a licensed magician. If they hadn't become very good at working within the shadows as well, they would have remained local and ineffective. Their financial data is carefully and cleverly doctored to hide the huge amount of off-the-books trade they engage in. Working in opposition to megacorporate interests while also maintaining the façade of a purely legal business has required them to build up an impressive network of magically talented social

engineers and information brokers. Their need to move goods of questionable legality makes them reliable sources of employment for many smugglers and coyotes. Most of their influence and established smuggling routes are on the West Coast, primarily centered around the coastal cities of the California Free State but extending as far south as Amazonia and as far north as the Athabaskan Council. Ever since the Yellowstone Anomaly became known to them, they have been very active in the Sioux Nation. The opportunity to engage in trade with fae from another metaplane was something the UTA did not want to see fall completely under megacorporate control. Over the course of the past year, UTA President Tamara Nimbus has spent more time in Sioux and Brocéliande than in California. With the Sioux Nation military focused on the chaos in the UCAS, the Yellowstone Anomaly became more accessible to them.

WHAT THEY WANT

The UTA are known primarily as talismongers, but the sudden and more frequent appearance of alchera has put information about magical phenomena in high demand. By pursuing its interests in talismongering, the UTA has found itself in a position to acquire and trade that information. Those who have already become accustomed to trading in secrets and favors in their dealings with the Seelie Court find their expertise and knowledge in very high demand. This has elevated UTA's importance in many circles, but most especially shadowrunners. The relatively lucrative talismongering trade—much of it off-the-books—allows the UTA the ability to hire off-the-books professionals whenever they are needed. Being a provider of off-the-books magical goods makes them generally popular among Awakened shadowrunners.

- Just make sure you know your metacritters. Don't take on a job to retrieve a basilisk egg without knowing a fair amount about basilisks.
- Jimmy No

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

The UTA exports reagents, foci, and other items of interest—obtained through connections in the Seelie Court made by Ms. Nimbus and her agents—to magicians. Learning quickly from her rivals in the Illuminates of the New Dawn, she has often employed shadowrunners to undertake unusual missions within Brocéliande or near the Yellowstone Anomaly to win the favor of one or more of the factions of the Seelie Court. The UTA also hires teams to escort and defend magicians sent to harvest reagents near the Yellowstone Anomaly, which is patrolled regularly by the Sioux Nation Military as well as competed over by rival magical groups.

When alchera suddenly became more common, the UTA immediately sent representatives to study a variety of them in North America. These representatives are seasoned magicians with experience competing against megacorporations and other magical groups for arcane resources. Their apparent policy is to hire local shadowrunners to guide and protect them, and in some cases perform counter-operations to interfere with the investigations of other parties.

- ▶ Want some fun? Run interference when the UTA and IOND are messing with each other. They're slinging illusions and manipulation spells back and forth while trying to counter each other, and your whole sense of what's real slowly leaks out of your ears. It's a trip.
- ▶ Hard Exit

Their bitter rivals in this endeavor are the Astral Space Preservation Society. Recently relations with the Illuminates of the New Dawn and the UTA have thawed, and the organizations have cooperated to overcome heavy megacorporate opposition. Both groups tend to view the ASPS as nothing more than a subsidiary of Wuxing.

To those of you looking for someone to hit up about getting paid to check out weird magical drek, the UTA has shown the greatest interest in what magical theorists call "materialized alchera." They seem very interested in observing the phenomena as they occur, but also in gaining access to the locations for study after temporary alchera have ceased. The UTA doesn't directly investigate the vanishings and reappearances of people, but have been willing to trade information or expertise to interested parties in pursuit of the answer to that particular mystery.

One of their more publicly known operatives is Rocky, a particularly charismatic free spirit who takes the material form of a handsome male elf. He

claims to have been a shaman's ally spirit and to have only vague memories of his former life. The UTA provided him with material and legal assistance in gaining legal citizenship and a SIN, which was issued by Evo. When the Yellowstone Anomaly became widely known, he took the opportunity to establish the first UTA branch office in the Sioux Nation. What he has done there since has been to set about making deals to move reagents and other magical goods from Brocéliande and into the cargo holds of smugglers, as well as legal shipments off to Seattle. From that point, they are shipped mostly to other destinations. He's been very successful in doing so, navigating the local politics of the Sioux Nation with natural ease. He has established a reputation as a skilled negotiator with an uncanny knack for knowing what someone wants and how to provide or procure it. In addition to making himself very useful to a wide range of people, he has also collected an astonishing array of dirt on all of them. Not every shadowrun for the UTA involves running errands for the fae or collecting reagents—Rocky pays well for paydata he can use as leverage for motivating rivals to play nice.

- ▶ I've done some work for the UTA, though Rocky insisted on being called "Mr. Johnson" in spite of our established acquaintance. I requested payment in foci and reagents at a more favorable value than I would have expected to earn as nuyen, and they were eager to pay it. If you find yourself with a similar opportunity, you may find better compensation by bartering for arcane goods, favors, or secrets instead of cash.
- ▶ Bifrost
- ▶ Don't let your guard down with these fraggers. They're ever so charming and friendly. Very non-threatening. Don't forget for a second these are people who make deals with the Seelie Court.
- ▶ Clockwork



HIRING BOARD

- > I gather this stuff here with fair warning. If you see a payday that says ¥¥¥¥¥¥¥¥, you should either expect to lose friends, your life, or earn every trickle of that e-cred with your blood, sweat, and tears (or gear lube and hydraulic fluid for you heavy metallics).
- > Slamm-0!

ON CALL TALENT

Location: Global
Timeframe: Monthly retainer
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

Wide array of positions available. Full operating team needed. Team will be on call and prepared for immediate transit to global locations. On-site investigations and site security may be required. Additional remuneration options to be determined during negotiations if efforts are required. Locations will involve arcane phenomena up to and including potential alchera exploration.

INSIDE INFO

This job is all about globe-hopping adventure. The initial low payment deters those looking for a payday but the contractor, none other than Kellan Colt, is willing to spread profits for successful operations that add information about why this is all happening. She will send explorers to any and every alchera on the planet, and the gamemaster has the chance to create adventures of a global, historical, and even fantastical nature.

GLOBAL SECURITY AND RECOVERY

Location: Global
Timeframe: Monthly retainer
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

Highly skilled on-call talent for asset acquisition and recovery on a rapid-response basis. Tar-

get positions could be mobile or stationary, but all individuals must be ready for mobilization within thirty minutes. Additional remuneration for extreme risk, distance, or active time is available but not guaranteed. Relocation to rapid-response sites will be necessary, and multiple transitions in the month could be needed to fulfill staffing needs.

INSIDE INFO

As a counterpoint to Kellan and her low initial offer, a corporate Mr. Johnson for one of the world's numerous magical groups (Draco Foundation, Illuminates of the New Dawn, Apep Consortium, etc.) is offering a little more money but also wanting a little more returned to them.

These jobs can get called to the same spots all over the globe, and even offer a counterpoint to other runners, but anything recovered from the work will belong to the corp. That's the problem with working for The Man.

MAGELLAN EXPEDITION

Location: Antarctica research facility
Timeframe: 1-2 Months (travel variance)
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Virtual contract accepted (Y/N) ... Yes ... File details released.

Our agent, codename Magellan, has gone missing from a privately funded research station located at 72°13'09.48" S, 139°08'06.43" E. The station is operated by one of the Big Ten—which one doesn't matter, as they have pulled back from primary operations here and left a small security contingent (approximately six individuals, variations possible). This job is an immediate operation. Assets will be required to immediately begin transportation. Current intel has oppositional assets also being engaged (and additional ¥ if encountered).

Payment is for the return of agent, acquisition of site data on research activities, and/or information advancing research into metaplanar exploration. Additional details available during extended transit communications.

INSIDE INFO

Lothan the Wise does the hiring here and sends the runners down to check out the now-docile research station in Antarctica. The site is quiet in terms of frequent metaplanar gateways but can be activated with relative ease. The problem is an agent of Dis is embedded in the security staff and would love to send a few more sources of life force over to the other side.

The investigation here is a The Thing-style horror. Isolation and relying on those you don't trust are the key threats.

ANTI-OP ASSETS NEEDED FOR EXTENDED OPERATIONS

Location: Global
Timeframe: Contractually indefinite
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ (extra ¥ possible with extended operations)

BRIEF

A rising tide faces the shadows. We can sit back and let it fall upon us like the insects, the shedim, and the head cases, or we can step forward and make an effort to halt this before it starts. The clues are there. They're not easy to see and sound like conspiracy to many, but we cannot afford another assault. How much fear can one world live with? Have you ever walked into a job, heard "They started acting different" and then sadly realized there is not, one, or two, or even just three revealed avenues, but now myriad and now another? We cannot trust those among us even now. If the shadows are to survive—for it is we who are hit the hardest—we need to defend ourselves and not play corporate pawns for another insurrection. They protect their sheep with numbers, but we do not have that, especially those of you touched by mana.

So now for the truth.

Power. Not in the form of money or clout, but pure unadulterated mana. Magical portals are being opened all over our globe, more frequently of late, and I have witnessed little of our increasing mana levels hypothesized by UMT. Not that I trust that corporate created drivel, but I at least feel the ebb and flow of mana in cycles had merit. But our flow seems stemmed by something.

The job, for I have said enough to offer you insight or display a madman. A small, but skilled and dedicated, team is required to halt active arcane phenomena and investigate the instigators of said activity. Several active sites will be immediately available for transport and investigation as well as high-speed response to spontaneous threats.

It's vague, but it's shadow work, it's good for us, and it pays. What else do you need?

INTELLIGENT TEAM NEEDED FOR AMAZONIAN EXPEDITION

Location: Amazonia
Timeframe: Immediate, two-month commitment
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Team needed for active insertion into Amazonian location. Activity on site will include arcane investigations, threat assessment, and potential metaplanar exploration.

Activity in the region operates on a lunar cycle. Operations will ensue approximately three days prior to new moon and last through two full lunar cycles.

Location reports active and mobile metaplanar shifts alongside alchera activity (meaning you will see another world). This site is deep in the Amazonian rainforest and requires survival skills for this region (bonuses available for individuals adapted or modified for the environment).

Activities potentially include threat assessment, threat deterrent, arcane investigation, threat elimination, as well as site, equipment, and personnel security.

Plotting and design of a moon chart as well as identifying local lunar phase abnormalities will be provided by separately contracted staff.

Full commitment expected. Payment broken into initial (25 percent), bi-weekly (10 percent), and completion (35 percent) installments. Contract negotiations will include staff loss and next of kin remuneration.

STREET SWEEPER NEEDED

Location: Seattle, Redmond District, Fall City

Timeframe: Immediate

Pay Range: ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Employer needs local assets to stop the operations of a local drug dealer by the name of Planesender. Criminal operation would need to be tracked and the offender then chased off or removed. Operations will occur near the Salish-Shidhe border. The individual is likely Awakened but tends to operate independently.

- ▶ Addendum: This job has been offered and paid repeatedly. The dealer's name must be a pseudonym being taken on by others. Reports also indicate parallel operations may be active at any given moment.
- ▶ The Management

GHOSTS RIDERS IN THE SKY

Location: Pacific to Olympia Region, Salish-Shidhe (Air/LAV transportation a must)

Timeframe: Immediate (contract engages weekly)

Pay Range: ¥ ¥

BRIEF

I'm Lancaster Jones, and I'm looking for a group of adventure seekers to discover the true final end of the Ghost Flight. What is the Ghost Flight? Read my articles and you'll see. What we know so far is that this is a flying and mobile alchera of World War 2-era airplanes that come in from the Pacific and fly into the Olympia region of the Salish-Shidhe Nation.

I need a team to track the flight, potentially cross into the alchera (if possible) and investigate the history of this event. The arcane nature of the event lends itself to a team of individuals with magical knowledge, but transportation and vehicular skills mean at least one technically skilled individual is necessary.

INSIDE INFO

One proposed ending of the flight is an early Awakening of a dragon in that region. The planes were coming in for a kamikaze run on Seattle and awoke the sleeping dragon. The dragon died, but its hoard was taken over by Urubia and Kalanyr, who came here to the region earlier in this century before heading to settle in Seattle.

The planes entered into a dogfight with this freshly awake dragon and were brought down, but they fatally injured the dragon in the process. The dragon then pulled all the plane wreckage into its den before succumbing to its injuries.

After the dragon dies, the alchera does not break. Instead, the alchera holds until a small group of government agents and a group of soldiers come into the area to cover up the event, allowing another bit of history for the characters to interact or meddle in. This allows an alchera to act as a gateway to the past to witness the dragon dogfight and potentially meet or assist the dying dragon and then deal with the agents and the cover-up. After dealing with the cover-up, the alchera fades, and the team is left back in the den or the forests around it. The team can then consider visiting the den in the modern era, and the gamemaster can go wild from there.

In the modern era, Urubia and Kalanyr came here and split the hoard, and Urubia was left with the den, including the planes and several other items of historical but not monetary value. She rarely visits the site, but she keeps arcane wards on the area. Disturbing this place could lead to work for her as she identifies the runners.

DIS CLAIM

Location: Atlanta

Timeframe: Immediate, with possible work extending for four to six weeks

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥ (Possible Bonus)

BRIEF

Discreet, sensitive personnel needed for investigation and diplomacy. Work is for an Atlanta-based organization with expertise in magical and astral phenomenon. An individual has presented themselves to us claiming to be an official representative of the plane of Dis. Their authenticity and motives need to be discerned. Every step of this needs to be done carefully.



SEEKING MR. WRIGHT

Location: Seattle, Redmond, Plastic Jungles
Timeframe: Immediate
Pay Range: ¥ ¥

BRIEF

No, this is not a dating ad in the wrong place. We are going to go after Mr. Stanley Wright. We need a team to head into the depths of the Redmond Barrens to figure out what is wrong with Mr. Wright. This individual has been luring squatters into a “good life” from which most do not seem to be returning. As they’re squatters, no one has truly dug into their fate, but a few concerned friends have addressed the issue and gathered funds and favors in order to make an effort to correct the situation.

Here’s the deal. We’re hiring a team to check out and tail Stanley Wright. He normally makes his visits in the Plastic Jungle, a section of Redmond, and entices a small group of squatters to join him in his van for a short drive, promising hot meals and new utopia. He rarely gets more than a handful of people, but it’s enough for the rest of us to be concerned. I’ll be honest—this is as much a look into whether he’s some psycho as it is to check out whether he is telling the truth. No sense in lying here in a land of anonymity.

INSIDE INFO

Stanley Wright is a free spirit, and he’s luring squatters to a peaceful little “suburbia” alchera. It’s wonderful and blissful, but it also slowly drains them of life.

The alchera is accessed by entering a house in what was once the quiet little suburb of Duvall. Among the previously well-manicured lawns and perfect houses that are now overgrown and crumbling is a robust Tudor-style home with extensive vines growing over the front, a cobblestone driveway with thick patches of grass, and a heavily overgrown lawn. Around the rear is a double garage—this is where Wright will pull his van into.

The home itself is the gateway, with the front door and the entry inside the garage opening up to a home in perfect condition. If anyone enters and then leaves again, they walk out into a beautiful version of the neighborhood where this house is nestled. All the houses in the neighborhood are in perfect order and there are plenty available for immediate occupancy.

Those who agree to stay only have to agree to maintain their home and the home next door. During the process of doing so, the person will slowly be drained of life over the course of six days (one point of Essence per day), and on the sixth night will be picked up a group of four figures in black robes that move between the houses each night to clear out the fallen.

How much of this the runners experience is up to the gamemaster and their story. A contact could be taken, maybe even a family member down on their luck, or a police contact who was investigating the mix—whatever it takes to get the runners to delve deeper. If they don’t engage in the house maintenance, they don’t suffer the loss of life, which means that several of the lazier members of the suburb have been here for quite a bit. A few of them could hint at what is going on, but only Wright knows how to get back out to the regular world.

The pay isn't great, but the connections in the community will be, and the pay should be worth following a trickster in a van and seeing what kind of shady activity he's up to.

MILE-HIGH METAPLANAR EXPLORERS NEEDED

Location: Front Range Free Zone, Mile-High Realm Metaplane

Timeframe: Immediate to completion

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

I need a team willing to journey to the Mile-High Realm, a metaplane connected to Denver, and look into activities on that plane, since it could be affecting ours. Experience on this metaplane would be a benefit due to the nature and design of the job, but basic instruction can be provided.

Within this realm, chests are being delivered, the contents of which is my concern. Discovering their contents is the primary job, with an effort to halt their continued delivery being a secondary goal if the contents prove harmful.

At least two groups are operating at odds in this realm: the dissonants and the Veil. I have a connection from the Veil that could operate as a local guide but would likely be reluctant to engage in any overt activity against the realm or the dissonants.

While events in this realm do not directly affect our plane, there is some connection between these chests, our plane, and something going on in this plane.

INSIDE INFO

The chests being delivered contain crystals charged with mana that has been harvested from the physical plane through the Mile-High Realm that are being delivered to the realm of Dis. The dissonants are operatives of Dis, but they make their efforts in the Mile-High Realm appear directed at that realm, not the connected physical reflection. Each chest has up to 5,000 mana worth of crystals, though some crystals are loaded without a full charge.

DUNGEON DELVE

Location: Seelie Court

Timeframe: Two-week investigation

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

The dungeons of the Seelie Court are a mysterious and ever-changing place—like most of the rest of the Court. It's not clear who is held there and why. For this mission, take two weeks to get

MANA CRYSTALS

These crystals are used to store mana and transport it. The energy stored in the crystals can be used to power spells and summonings in a different fashion than standard magical practices.

Each crystal contains 5 points of mana.

Each point of mana mitigates a single point of drain after a spell is cast. This method is similar to blood magic, as the mana stored in these crystals is a mix of mana drawn from a variety of sources, including living beings sapped of life. The crystals can be transported across metaplanes but they lose their power as a rate of 1 point per day.

A black market for the crystals has begun to form, with the crystals going for exorbitant amounts. The base price is 500 nuyen per point of mana, with a fully charged crystal worth 2,500 nuyen. This means a chest of fully charged crystals has a street value of 2.5 million nuyen. Now you understand why this is suddenly a concern for shadowrunners and nuyen-hungry corporations. Not to mention anarchists who would love to be able to attack the establishment with impunity and no worry of drain.

These items should never be in abundance in any single place, and if they are, they become a target for everyone out to make a buck or gain some power. If one of your runners hordes these, word gets out, and they become the next target of a run.

the trust of the Courtiers so that you can visit the dungeon, then try to take an inventory of who is being kept there—any why, if you can figure that out. For each ten names and backgrounds provided, Mr. Johnson will pay a 1,000 nuyen bonus.

Mr. Johnson does not want the Court to know who wants this information, and the best way to ensure this is to make sure you don't, either.

SPIRIT ROUNDUP

Location: Albuquerque

Timeframe: Two to four weeks

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

Celedyr has left the Sandia Mountains, but his research base remains, and unfortunately not all of the efforts remain in control. A few extra-aggressive spirits have been set loose in the area and do not seem inclined to leave. At Transys-Neuronet, we're dedicated to the safety of the regions where we work, and we're bringing it to Albuquerque. We have information on three active spirits that need to be hunted down. Payment is on a per-spirit basis. Clear evidence of the spirit's exit from this plane is needed for payment

FREE THE SLAVES OF MANA

Location: Lambeth, London
Timeframe: Immediate to completion
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Our people our disappearing, and when they return, they are not longer themselves. They are changed, drained of their character, and made to accompany powerful spellcasters and adepts, standing mute as power flows through them. The home many of us share, the ruined Angel Towers Arcology of Lambeth, has hosted a variety of terrible things, and this is only the most recent. We've scraped together whatever we could to free our people (okay, we stole a lot of it), and we want this done thoroughly. We don't just want our people freed—we want you to find out who is enslaving them and destroy whatever they're using to do it.

INSIDE INFO

The rituals to create living mana wells are not simple, so this is not a simple, fly-by-night operation or a single rogue sorcerer at work. This requires the effort of coordinated, well-financed spellcasters—the London chapter of the Magical Investors Group decided that some of society's cast-offs could be better used as servants to their will. They found an abandoned residence in a converted water tower that was part of a Victorian workhouse, and they have shored it up and made it their own. The tower has ten floors, with floors three through five dedicated to the space to make and keep living mana wells, while the spellcasters live on floors six through ten (each floor is small, about 400 square feet). Destroying the ritual space is enough to earn the full fee.

PLEASE HELP

Location: Renton, Seattle
Timeframe: Immediate to completion
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

My husband is missing. I've seen him, heard him. I've only caught glimpses. He is screaming, his skin is ... they have done things to his skin. I've never seen visions like this, but I see them now. I don't know exactly where he is, but I can tell he is near. I can give you a trail to follow. Please bring him back.

INSIDE INFO

The Magical Investors Group strikes again. The husband is a man named Stan Turpin; his wife, Hazel, is a mid-level manager with Microdeck, and in the crisis of his disappearance, she has gained some Awakened abilities. She can use them to point them in the direction of where Stan is being held—a warehouse in Bellevue. The runners will have to get by some capable and astral-enhanced security to free Stan.

A FRIENDLY CONVERSATION

Location: Denver
Timeframe: Immediate to completion
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Mr. Johnson works for a company very interested in the experiences of an individual who works for a rival organization. This individual recently returned from an extended metaplanar journey with information that would be quite valuable, but his employer is not making him available to anyone outside their organization (and only a few inside). The first trick will be locating him (he is suspected to be in Denver), and the second will be finding a way to talk to him. Gently obtaining details about his journey will be worth a considerable sum.

FIND THE FAMILIAR

Location: London
Timeframe: Immediate to completion
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Lady Dacia Cullom of Maidstone is a suspected Black Lodge member and has been so for a long time. There is no need to expose her at this time, but identifying her familiar would be valuable. Candidates include art gallery owner Stuart Kunkel, who sells much of her work; Lord Silvio Ortega of the House of Lords Appointment Commission, who shepherded her peerage; Bess Muir, MP from Maidstone; and Petra Vlad, a Maersk executive based near Maidstone. Discover who the familiar is, but do not let them know you know.

THEY'RE COMING, THEY'RE COMING

Location: Black Hills, Sioux Nation
Timeframe: One week
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

They know where I am. They know I know too much. They're coming. I've hidden as well as I can, but it won't last. They know. They find everything. They will find me. My position is defensible, hidden by rocks and trees, but not by myself. Be here when they arrive, help me stay alive, and I will pay you. The better condition I'm in when this is over, the better your pay.

They will want to bargain, or at least make me talk. You cannot allow that to happen.

INSIDE INFO

Mr. Johnson is a relic hunter who learned too much while looking for a Sioux artifact, a ghost shirt imbued with protective magic. Specifically, he learned that one of the people interested in the shirt was a member of both the Sioux Nation's Council of Chiefs and the Black Lodge. The Lodge does not like their secrets exposed, so they want to take out the relic hunter before he can tell anyone else.

TEXT RETRIEVAL

Location: Turkey

Timeframe: Immediate to completion

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

Word has emerged of a collection of books found in a basement mausoleum in a church on the Black Sea. The books are not available for public scrutiny. We need a party to gain access to the collection and look for a specific volume: black leather cover, silver locking mechanism, inlaid with silver and green paint and embossed with angular designs. Finding whether or not the book is part of the collection is the basic task; extra money can be earned for extracting the text, should it be found. Team must have high astral security skills.

INSIDE INFO

The organization doing the hiring is the Aleph Society, and they think they have a line on the Book of Dru. Whether the book described is actually the Book of Dru is up to the gamemaster.

TWISTED PLANE

Location: Japanese Imperial State

Timeframe: Immediate to completion

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ (possible bonus)

BRIEF

Astral space at Cape Manzamo on Okinawa keeps getting polluted and twisted. Several clean-up operations have been engaged, but the repairs never take. Astral specialists have concluded that something is actively twisting the manosphere, but no cause has been found as of yet. Skilled investigators are needed to find the source of the pollution. Bonuses can be earned for eliminating the source of pollution and taking care of any individuals who may be involved.

RESONANCE EXPLORATION

Location: DeeCee

Timeframe: Immediate to completion

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Mr. Johnson has heard that commlink footage of rituals from DeeCee in 2073 may have been recorded. All such footage has been lost, but the Resonance Realms remember all. It's a needle the size of a grain of sand in a haystack the size of Earth, but finding it will earn a handsome payment. Naturally, that means there will be others competing to get there first, and still others trying to stop you. Large paydays must be earned.

INSIDE INFO

The ritual in question was one performed at the Watergate Rift in 2073 involving several magic powers of the world, including Harlequin, the great dragon Hestaby, Tír Tairngire authorities, the Illuminates of the New Dawn, and more. The ritual ended up closing the Watergate Rift, and magic scholars and other experts in Awakened matters have long wanted to know just what happened there. Any footage of the event would be extremely valuable.

UNDERGROUND AFFAIRS

Location: Mumbai

Timeframe: Immediate to completion

Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF:

Construction of a new east side subway line has halted, and word has leaked out that some sort of archeological discovery was made. Details beyond that are scarce, but astral observers say they have seen a steady stream of spirits in the area of the construction site. City officials deny everything. That means there's something to be discovered, and the right team of runners will figure out what was found and let Mr. Johnson know with all due haste.

INSIDE INFO

An ancient magic talisman has been unearthed, and all of the major magic organizations of the world would like to be the first to know about it. Competition will be fierce as organizations try to get more knowledge than their competitors.

SKIN TO DIE FOR

Location: Tenochtitlan
Timeframe: Two weeks
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

You know who Natsume Soeskei is. You *have* to know who she is. Star of *Ningyo*? Watch it sometime. It's good. But forget the plot, the writing, the acting, the whatever—you won't be able to take your eyes off her skin! Those cheeks! So smooth! Does she even *have* pores? You can get the best, highest definition trid player, and you still won't see much as a crack or wrinkle. And it's not just makeup. I know makeup. I can see it. She has a treatment. A skin treatment. I've got evidence that she has something made just for her, and I'm pretty sure it's happening in Tenochtitlan. NatVat is providing some of the ingredients, if not the whole product, so they're where I'd start. I have a big red carpet coming in a month, and I'd need a few weeks of work with whatever she's using to get my skin in better shape, so time is of the essence!

NO BULL

Location: Rome
Timeframe: One month
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

In the fourth century, Pope Sylvester engaged in a spirited debate with a group of learned rabbis led by a man named Zambres, who is described as a magician and sorcerer. According to tales, Sylvester won the debate, both due to his deep scriptural knowledge and the fact that he raised a bull from the dead, while Zambres failed to accomplish that feat. Rumors from Rome say that a horn of that bull has surfaced, and it possesses considerable powers—though the nature of those powers is in dispute. The essence of the job is simple: Make sure no one gets possession of the horn for a period of one month. Or at least, no one other than you. Once the month is over, the horn is none of your concern, as long as no one else has it. Be aware that several other groups, including those interested in magic and some organized crime outfits, will be involved in the hunt.

FIND MY WIFE

Location: Philadelphia
Timeframe: Immediate to completion
Pay Range: ¥ ¥

BRIEF

My wife is a hero, a patriot who has served our nation. She disappeared with the rest of III Corps. When I heard stories of people from III Corps starting to return, I built hope that I would see her again. And then I did. And then I saw her again. And a third time. Three different versions of my wife. None of them right. One barely had any memories of me. Another had an expertise in knitting and crocheting my wife never had (and a fierce temper to boot). The third had scales.

If these three have returned, I believe my wife has, too. I just haven't found her yet. All three initially appeared in the Mid-Atlantic region, which is also where I live. I believe the real version is there, too. She's an ace auto mechanic, a skilled rock climber, and a big Concrete Dreams fan. I think she'll gravitate to those things. Please find her.

AWOL

Location: Motor City
Timeframe: Text
Pay Range: ¥ ¥ ¥ ¥

BRIEF

Corporal Willie Tom Patton disappeared with the rest of III Corps, which has been classified as convalescent leave. Multiple sources have since confirmed that he has returned from convalescent leave, so his classification has been adjusted to absent without leave. Records show he has been informed of this status. INSCOM requires Corporal Patton's presence, along with the following pieces of information: (1) Where he has been since his return; (2) Who has been aiding and abetting his separation from his corps; and (3) Who else is searching for him.

Due to the special circumstances of Corporal Patton's return from leave, teams should be equipped with solid knowledge of paracritters and their abilities.

INSIDE INFO

Corporal Patton returned with significant alterations (see options on p. 141). Opportunistic runners in Motor City have seen his potential as one of them, and they've been helping hide him. A number of parties are seeking him besides military intelligence—the Mafia, Evo, the DIMR, the Black Lodge, and possibly more. Finding him will be difficult enough; keeping him will be even harder.



CAST OF SHADOWS

The following characters can be used while playing through different elements of the plots contained in this book.

ASTRAL SPACE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OPERATIVE

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

The repair work of the Astral Space Preservation Society is often the easiest part of the job. Confronting the threats to astral space, including malicious spirits and toxic mages, can be the real challenge, which means operatives need to be ready to deal with a range of magical threats. This often means if they need to focus on anything, they focus on defense, as it's tough to preserve astral space when you're dead.

ASTRAL SPACE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OPERATIVE

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	ESS
4	4	5	3	5	4	4	3	5	6.0
DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE					
10	9/1	A1, I2	11	5/10/+2					

Skills: Astral 5, Athletics 3, Close Combat 3, Conjuring 5, Enchanting 3, Firearms 3, Influence 3, Outdoors 4, Perception 5, Piloting 2, Sorcery 5, Stealth 5

Spells: Analyze Magic, Blast, Cleansing Heal, Detect Enemies, Elemental Armor, Increase Reflexes, Invisibility, Light, Manaball, Mana Barrier, Mask, Powerbolt,

Gear: Armor jacket (+4), contacts (capacity 3, w/ image link, smartlink), Renraku Sensei commlink (DR 3)

Weapons:

Ares Light Fire 75 [Light Pistol, DV 2P, SA, 12/9/8/-/-, 16(c), w/ laser sight, silencer, smartgun system]

Survival knife [Blade, DV 4P, 8/2*/-/-/-, *max range 20 meters]

AWAKENED ACADEMIC

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Awakening, for many people, is a meal ticket. The number of Awakened people is relatively small—certainly smaller than the demand. The corp job is the easiest path, but some people want to keep their souls intact, so they seek another path. The shadows offer maximum freedom, but the flying bullets that come with it can be a turn-off for some people. Academia offers a decent middle ground—fewer corporate ties, less physical threat. High-level academics, such as MIT&T professors, do exciting and ground-breaking research, but for a lot of faculty members, the job is mainly about grading undergrads, shepherding post-grads, keeping up with journal articles, and occasionally trying to get your name in one. It's not glamorous, and the ratio of time spent reading about magic to time spent casting magic is distressingly tilted toward the former, but you're doing magic for a living. That can only go so wrong.



AWAKENED ACADEMIC

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
2	2	2	2	3	5	4	4	4	4	6.0
DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE						
2	6/1	A1, I2	10	5/10+1						

Skills: Astral 4, Athletics 1, Con 2, Conjuring 4, Electronics 2, Enchanting 3, Firearms 1 (Tasers +2), Influence 4 (Instruction +2), Outdoors 1, Perception 3, Piloting 2, Sorcery 4, Stealth 1
Knowledge Skills: Magic Theory, Spirit Types
Spells: Analyze Magic, Animate Stone, Cleansing Heal, Confusion, Detect Magic, Levitate, Mindlink, Silence, Stunbolt
Initiate Level, Metamagics: 1, centering
Gear: Area jammer (rating 4), Renraku Sensei commlink (DR 3)
Weapons:
 Defiance Super Shock [Taser, DV 6S(e), SS, 10/6*/-/-/-, 4(m), *max range 20 meters]

DENIZENS OF DIS

The citizens of Dis do not fit into any of the core spirit types from SR6, but they have similarities, and of course use similar powers. Three basic citizen types are presented here, to accompany the descriptors given in the *Bad Mojo* chapter (p. 77); each of these is a variant on a type of spirit on p. 147, SR6. The template used was for Force 4 spirits.

Since spirits like to have flexibility in materializing and de-materializing, they tend to not carry weapons, letting their powers and spells take care of any harm they need to inflict.

DIS APOCALYPTICS

Apocalypitics are based on kindred spirits. They have balanced attributes and a variety of skills, which means they can employ a variety of tactics. They use Detect Enemies and Mind Probe spells to gain an understanding of who they face, then figure out the right approach to dealing with them. They tend to weave long cons, and their Enchanting skills help them generate tesmas, foci, and other items to act as bait and McGuffins.

DIS APOCALYPTICS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
4	4	5	3	5	4	6	5	5	4	5.0
DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE						
4	11/2	A1, I3	11	5/10/+2						

Skills: Astral 4, Close Combat 4, Con 6, Enchanting 4, Influence 5, Outdoors 3, Perception 4, Sorcery 5, Stealth 3
Spells: Agony, Control Thoughts, Detect Enemies, Increase Reflexes, Manaball, Mana Barrier, Mind Probe, Powerbolt
Powers: Accident, Astral Form, Concealment, Confusion, Enhanced Senses (low-light vision, thermographic vision) Guard, Materialization, Psychokinesis, Sapience, Search

DIS NATIVISTS

The base spirit type for Nativists is the spirit of water, with slightly increased Logic and Intuition. Nativists are cautious and savvy, reluctant to forfeit any perceived advantage they have. They have offensive spells, but in a pinch, the Darkness spell and Concealment and Confusion powers can help them slip away from any place where they don't want to be.

DIS NATIVISTS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
4	5	6	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4
DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE						
4	11/2	A1, I3	10	5/10/+2						

Skills: Astral 4, Athletics 5, Close Combat 4, Influence 4, Outdoors 3, Perception 4, Sorcery 4
Spells: Acid Stream, Blast, Cooling Heal, Darkness
Powers: Astral Form, Concealment, Confusion, Engulf (Water), Materialization, Movement, Sapience, Search

DIS TRADERS

Nativists may be reluctant to make a deal, but Traders are anything but. They won't take any deal offered to them, but they'll listen, then try to make it better. That perspective is part of their willingness to amass whatever they can find in the belief that someday they'll find a use for it. Their sense of morality is almost entirely based on what's possible—if you are able to get your hands on something, their thinking goes, then you deserve to have it.

Traders don't like to back down from a confrontation, but they also don't like to lose. They favor hitting people with blows they don't see coming, then try to get things back to talking and trading instead of fighting.

Traders are loosely based on spirits of air.

DIS TRADERS

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
2	6	6	2	5	4	5	5	4	4	4.0
DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE						
4	11/2	A1, I3	11	5/10/+2						

Skills: Astral 4, Close Combat 4, Con 5, Influence 4, Outdoors 2, Perception 4, Sorcery 4, Stealth 5
Spells: Analyze Truth, Clout, Increase Reflexes, Manaball
Powers: Accident, Astral Form, Concealment, Confusion, Guard, Materialization, Movement, Sapience, Search

DR. ALICIA FIELDS, ANTARCTICA LAB RESEARCHER

(AGENT OF DIS)

Dr. Fields was once a mild-mannered researcher, but a stumble and fall through an open gateway changed all that. On the other side, she experienced an extreme time dilation and spent years being tortured and broken. She then returned to the lab only seconds later as a servant of Dis. She operates in the shadows and simply claims to be happy to study the latter days of a mana event rather than risking another stumble through a portal.

She knows about Milton, but he does not know they serve the same masters. She monitors him and the gate astrally as well as keeping track of any entities that come through. She's the right mix of savvy and crazy to help her avoid capture. She avoids all direct confrontation, and all of her reports are bland and mostly fake in order to keep interest in the lab low. If she is ever confronted about it, she'll mention that Milton is very protective of the gate-room, and she is a little afraid of him. The goal is to direct suspicion on the guard and away from her, while pushing Milton to use the more violent options at his disposal.

DR. ALICIA FIELDS, ANTARCTICA LAB RESEARCHER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
2	2	4	1	6	5	4	4	5	5	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
5	8/1	A1, I2	10	10/15/+1

Skills: Astral 4 (Astral Signatures +2), Athletics 2, Biotech 4, Close Combat 2, Conjuring 4 (Summoning +2), Electronics 1 (Computer +2), Enchanting 2, Influence 4 (Negotiations +2), Outdoors 2 (Arctic +2, Survival +3), Perception 4 (Visual +2), Piloting 2 (Ground Craft +2), Sorcery 5 (Spellcasting +2, Ritual Spellcasting +3)

Knowledge Skills: Ancient Civilizations, Ancient Mythology, Ancient Texts, Arcana, Arcanoarchaeology, Magical Societies, Magical Theory, Metaplanes, Security Systems, Sixth World History

Spells (see notes): Agony, Analyze Magic, Analyze Device, Animate Metal, Animate Plastic, Antidote, Blast, Clout, Confusion, Darkness, Detect Magic, Detect Device, Heal, Ice Spear, Ice Storm, Improved Invisibility, Increase Reflexes, Light, Mana Barrier, Physical Barrier, Shape Metal, Shape Plastic
Gear: Armor vest (+3), commlink (DR 4)

Notes: As an Agent of Dis, when Fields is within 500 meters of an active metaplanar portal (anywhere in this lab), all spells have their drain value reduced by 1 (to a minimum of 1) as energy is channeled directly. When within 100 meters, the drain is reduced by 2. When within 10 meters, the drain is reduced by 3. When within 1 meter, drain never exceeds 1.

DR. JAVIER WATSON, VETERAN ARCANOARCHAEOLOGIST

Dr. Watson is one of a myriad of arcanoarchaeologists that can contract the runners to help them explore these world-spanning arcane events. The job can be anywhere on the globe or even away from the physical plane and on to a metaplane.

Dr. Watson is a well-educated academic who has spent just enough time in the field to make him dangerous. He understands the dangers of the world on an academic level and has survived 2 (yes, 2!) potentially deadly events in his career, making him an "expert." He will want to be in on every security decision and will offer poor advice and make questionable comparisons to the events he survived. If he is not allowed into the meeting he will attempt to spy using his spells or sending in a spirit to listen and relay what's going on in the meeting. If he is not listened to or ignored completely, he will most certainly still follow his own plan and definitely lead the runners into more trouble than they will already be dealing with surrounding whatever event they are investigating.

DR. JAVIER WATSON, VETERAN ARCANOARCHAEOLOGIST

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
2	2	1	1	3	6	2	3	3	2	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
5	3/1	A1, I2	9	10/15/+1

Skills: Astral 2 (Astral Signatures +2), Athletics 1, Biotech 2, Close Combat 1 (Unarmed +2), Conjuring 2 (Summoning +2), Electronics 1, Enchanting 1, Firearms 1 (Pistol +2), Influence 2 (Negotiations +2), Outdoors 1 (Survival +2), Perception 3, Piloting 1 (Ground Craft +2), Sorcery 3 (Ritual Spellcasting +2), Stealth 1

Knowledge Skills: Ancient Civilizations, Ancient Mythology, Ancient Texts, Arcanoarchaeology, Magical Theory, Security Protocols

Spells: Animate Stone, Animate Wood, Antidote, Clairaudience, Clairvoyance, Confusion, Detect Magic, Heal, Light, Mana Barrier, Physical Barrier, Shape Stone, Shape Wood

Gear: Armor vest (+3), commlink (DR 4)

Weapons:

Ruger Redhawk [Light Pistol, DV 3P, SA/BF, 7/10/7/-/-, 8(cy), w/ laser sight]

Combat knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, *max range is 15 meters]

Hiking stick/staff [Clubs, DV 3S, 5/-/-/-/-]

FREELANCE JOURNALIST

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Freelance journalists in the Sixth World come in all forms, from every background imaginable. Some may consider themselves heirs to the noble news reporters of old, while others revel in muck-raking and mud-slinging. However they get the job done, their whole reason for existence for living boils down to one thing: finding that one big scoop that will make them famous (or infamous).

FREELANCE JOURNALIST

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
2	3	3	2	4	4	4	5	4.3
DR		I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE			
6		7/1	A1, I2	9	10/15/+5			

Skills: Athletics 4, Biotech 2 (First Aid +2), Close Combat 1, Con 5, Cracking 3, Electronics 3, Engineering 3, Firearms 2 (Pistols +2), Influence 3, Pilot 2, Stealth 6

Augmentations: Cybereyes (rating 2 w/ low-light, vision magnification), cyberjack (rating 2)

Gear: AR gloves, armored Jacket (+4), Erika Elite commlink (DR 4), jammer (rating 4), MCT 360 cyberdeck (DR 3), monocle (w/ low light, thermographic vision, vision enhancement), omnidirectional microphone (w/ audio enhancement, select sound filter 2), RFID tags (x5), security/stealth tags (x5), tag eraser, Transys Avalon commlink (DR 6)

Weapons:

Colt L-36 [Light Pistol DV 2s/2S(e), SA, 8/8/6/-/- w/ laser sight, 40 rounds gel ammo, 50 rounds stick-n-shock ammo]

GOVERNMENT AGENT/CORP TROUBLESHOOTER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

Good times never last. Both governments and corporations understand this, but at the same time they have vested interests in maintaining those good times (or at least the status quo) as long as possible. This means that they both need operatives that can both detect and act preemptively to potential situation in order to stave off any problems before they become problems. Methods may vary, but these specialists have the training and backing to get the job done.

GOVERNMENT AGENT/CORP TROUBLESHOOTER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	5	4(9)	3	4	4	5	3	1.5
DR		I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE			
6		14/3	A1, I4	10	10/15/+5			

Skills: Athletics 3, Biotech 3 (First Aid +2), Close Combat 4 (Blades +2), Con 3, Electronics 3, Engineering 3, Firearms 5 (Pistols +2), Influence 3, Perception 5, Piloting 3, Stealth 5

Augmentations: Cybereyes (rating 2 w/ low light vision, flare compensation, smartlink), damage compensator 6, datajack, orthoskin 2, reaction enhancers 3, synaptic booster 2

Gear: Armored vest (+3), any other appropriate gear as needed

Weapons:

Ares Predator VI [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, BF/FA, 10/10/8/-/- w/ APDS rounds, silencer]
 Defiance Super Shock [Taser, DV 6S(e), SS, 10/6*/-/-/-, *max range 20 meters]
 Forearm snap-blades [Blades, DV3P, 6/-/-/-/-]

INFORMATION BROKER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Simply put, it's the livelihood of the information broker to know things, and their livelihood depends on what they know, who they know, and when they know (typically as soon as possible). How they come to know information at any given time depends on their methods. Intimidation, charm, bribery, or good old wheeling and dealing are just some of the methods used. But whatever the methods and style, information brokers possess a very valuable commodity. And as such, many want to know what they do and sometimes are willing to use less-than-pleasant means to get it. This means that when dealing with an information broker, chances are they have some kind of protection.

GOVERNMENT AGENT/CORP TROUBLESHOOTER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
2	3	3	2	4	5(8)	4	6	5.3
DR		I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE			
5		7/1	A1, I2	10	10/15/+5			

Skills: Close Combat 1, Con 4, Influence 6, Firearms 2, Perception 5, Pilot 2, Stealth 4

Augmentations: Cerebral booster 1, datajack, datalock, mnemonic enhancer 3

Gear: Armored vest (+3), Transys Avalon commlink (DR 6)

Weapons:

Defiance Super Shock [Taser, DV 6S(e), SS, 10/6*/-/-/-, *max range 20 meters]

KELLAN COLT

A "former" shadowrunner and established arcanoarchaeologist, Kellan long ago shifted her considerable talents into a mix of both and has built a reputation as one of the best in her field. Now in her mid-thirties, she's taken to limiting the particular jobs she takes but has taken a deep interest in all of the strange astral phenomena occurring around the globe. Most of her work was initially limited to the Americas, but she has expanded globally in the past decade. She deeply enjoys the intellectual side of her efforts but knows firsthand field experience is often the best way to gather information in the earliest time of a large study.

She contracts globally, especially to places she has already been so she understands the lay of the land she is sending teams into and can see through the local lens. When research is required in new areas, she often accompanies the team, usually under the guise of an assigned academic. She only utilizes her own considerable level of skill if a plan is about to go terribly awry or innocent individuals or the mission are in danger. She doesn't bother to rescue foolish runners.

She has a generally pleasant and polite demeanor but can become distant and aloof if she is lost in a topic or studying. She has gained considerable wealth over time and can outfit herself with the necessary gear and arms that she needs but rarely spends her own funds outfitting others on any expedition with anything other than the basics.

KELLAN COLT

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
5	5	5	3	5	4	5	5	9	7	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
8	10/1	A1, I2	11	10/15/+1

Skills: Astral 7 (Astral Signatures +2, Emotional States +3), Athletics 4 (Throwing +2), Biotech 2 (First Aid +2), Close Combat 5 (Clubs +2, Blades +3), Con 5 (Acting +2), Conjuring 6 (Banishing +2, Summoning +3), Electronics 3, Enchanting 6 (Alchemy +2, Artificing +3), Engineering 1 (Demolitions +2), Firearms 4 (Pistol +2), Influence 7 (Instruction +2, Leadership +3), Outdoors 4 (Navigation +2, Survival +3), Perception 7, Piloting 2 (Watercraft +2, Ground Craft +3), Sorcery 8 (Ritual Spellcasting +2, Spellcasting +3), Stealth 5

Knowledge Skills: Ancient Civilizations, Ancient Mythology, Ancient Texts, Arcanoarchaeology, Atlanta Streets, Atlantean Myths, Dragons, Kansas City Streets, Magical Groups, Magical Politics, Magical Theory, Seattle Politics, Seattle Street Gangs, Spirits

Language Skills: Arabic (Expert), Aramaic (Expert), Egyptian Hieroglyphs (Specialist), English N, Esperanto (Expert), Latin (Expert), Or'zet (Specialist), Sanskrit (Expert), Spherethiel (Specialist)

Initiate Grade, Metamagics: 5, Centering, Flexible Signature, Masking, Quickening, Shielding

Spells: As needed; she has designed and learned versions of almost every spell known

Gear: Armor vest (+3), commlink (DR 6), *fit to situation

Weapons:

Ares Predator VI [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA/BF, 9/9/7/-/-, w/ laser sight, gel ammo]

Combat knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, *max range is 15 meters]

Stun Baton [Clubs, DV 5S(e), Attack Ratings 6/-/-/-/-]

MAGICAL INVESTORS GROUP MEMBER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

A sociologist once theorized that disposable income is the source of ninety percent of (meta)humanity's problems. Or if no one has, they should, and they could use some Magical Investors Group members as a prime example of this. That's not to say the members are all evil or harmful, but they have lots of money and they want to make it do something in the area of magic, and that sort of mixing of two different sorts of power often leads to chaos. Their over-arching goal is the same one shared by many wealthy and powerful people throughout time: Use what they have to get more.

MAGICAL INVESTORS GROUP MEMBER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	ESS
2	3	3	2	4	4	3	4	5	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
4	6/1	A1, I2	10	5/10/+1

Skills: Astral 4, Athletics 1, Close Combat 1, Con 1, Conjuring 4, Electronics 3, Enchanting 4, Firearms 2 (Pistols +2), Influence 4, Outdoors 1, Perception 4, Piloting 2, Sorcery 6, Stealth 1

Spells: Analyze Truth, Chaos, Control Thoughts, Detect Magic, Flamestrike, Increase Attribute, Invisibility, Overclock, Powerball

Initiation, Metamagics: 1, quickening

Gear: Area jammer (rating 5), armor clothing, Hermes Ikon commlink (Dr5)

Weapons:

Fichetti Security 600 [Light Pistol, DV 2P, SA, 10/9/6/-/-, 30(c), w detachable folding stock, laser sight]

MAGICAL RESEARCHER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Ever since the Awakening, metahumanity has endeavored to learn about the ever-evolving frontier of magic. At the vanguard of this endeavor is the magical researcher. Some choose to focus on magical theory or practical applications in an academic or laboratory setting. Other researchers may prefer to get into the field to experience new magics and phenomena firsthand or explore ancient places of arcane power. No matter their methodology, the magical researcher is a trove of magical knowledge.

MAGICAL RESEARCHER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	ESS
3	3	3	2	5	4	3	5	7	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
7	6/1	A1, I2	11	5/10/+1

Skills: Astral 5, Conjuring 5, Enchanting 4, Firearms 2, Influence 5, Perception 4, Sorcery 6

Spells: Analyze Magic, Analyze Truth, Antidote, Clout, Detect Enemies, Detect Life, Detect Magic, Fireball, Heal, Increase Reflexes, Improved Invisibility, Lightning Bolt, Physical Mask, Powerbolt

Initiate Level, Metamagics: 1, Masking

Gear: Armored jacket (+4), Erika Elite commlink (DR 4), glasses (rating 3 w/ flare compensation, low-light vision, thermographic vision)

Weapons:

Colt L-36 [Light Pistol DV 2S(e), SA, 8/8/6/-/- w/ laser sight, 100 rounds stick-n-shock ammo]

MILTON DUNBERRY, ANTARCTICA LAB SECURITY

(AGENT OF DIS)

Milton Dunberry was a typical example of your below-average security guard who had made enough mistakes to get himself assigned to an abandoned base in Antarctica. He was too expensive to fire, as the company had invested quite a bit into his cyberware and figured the assignment would give him time to think about what got him there and get his mind right. That's not quite what happened. Instead, while he certainly thought about what got him there, the primary effect was to make him bitter. So many others got away with so much worse, and yet he was the one who was punished. His resentment and anger fed into the local manasphere, and the metaplanar gateway that had been quiet shimmered into activity one day. Or so he thinks.

The gate was actually opened by Dr. Fields, who had been watching Milton slowly decline into anger and saw him as a perfect host for one touched by Dis. She has been apologetic for the accident and keeps to her lab studies rather than bothering the gateroom.

In Antarctica, Milton felt a presence come through and speak to him. It offered power and peace of mind but required him to stay in Antarctica until it could gather enough power before they moved somewhere else and Milton could act as the physical officer of his metaplanar patron. With his agreement, Milton also inadvertently agreed to be connected to the being, and it has slowly infiltrated his mind. This isn't possession, more of a powerful mental manipulation. The efforts have left only a change to his aura as a sign of the traveller's work.

Now, Milton operates as a protector of the gateway. He initially protects as any guard should, refusing access, but eventually resorts to clandestine murder and the assistance of a metaplanar creature to create terror and death.

MILTON DUNBERRY, ANTARCTICA LAB SECURITY

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6	4(5)	5(7)	4(5)	4	4	5	4	4	2.5

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
12	12/3	A1, 14	11	10/15/+1

Skills: Athletics 3, Biotech 1, Close Combat 4, Electronics 1, Firearms 4, Influence 3, Outdoors 2, Perception 4, Stealth 2

Augmentations: Cybereyes (rating 2, w/ camera, flare compensation, image link, smartlink), dermal plating 2, muscle replacement 1, wired reflexes 2

Gear: Armor jacket (+4), commlink (DR 4), flashlight

Weapons:

Colt Manhunter [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA, Attack Ratings 10/8/6/-/-, w/ smartgun]

Defiance Super Shock [Taser, DV 6S(e), SS, Attack Ratings 10/6*/-/-/-, w/ smartgun; *max range 20 meters]

Stun baton [Club, DV 5Se, Attack Ratings 6/-/-/-/-]

MODERN DRUID

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 3)

Despite the rapid development and integration of technology into everyday life of the Sixth World, there are some who eschew it and seek out a simpler, less complicated life in more rugged and primitive areas of the world. In the past, these individuals would have been called mountain men or women. These individuals have learned how to live in harmony with nature. And while often highly independent (bordering of stubborn), they make excellent guides when the job leaves the confines of the modern city—or when one finds themselves without a wireless signal.

MODERN DRUID

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	ESS
5	4	4	4	5	3	4	5	4	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
8	8/1	A1, 12	11	10/15/+1

Skills: Astral 3, Athletics 4, Close Combat (Blades +2) 3, Conjuring 5, Enchanting 1, Firearms 4, Influence 2, Outdoors 6, Perception 5, Sorcery 4, Stealth 5

Spells: Clairaudience, Detect Enemies, Detect Life, Detect Magic, Heal, Increase Reflexes, Improved Invisibility, Mana Ball, Mana Bolt, Physical Barrier, Mana Barrier, Silence

Gear: Binoculars (optical), medkit (rating 2), survival kit, Wild Hunt clothing (+3)

Weapons:

- Crossbow (light) [Projectile, DV 3P, 6/8/2/-/-]
- Defiance T-285 [Shotgun, DV 4P*, SS/SA, 8/11/6-/-, *for one barrel fired, 5P for double, 6P for triple]
- Polearm [Blade, DV 4P, 8/-/-/-/-]
- Ruger 101 [Sporting Rifle, DV 5P, SA, 2/6/10/12/11 w/ scope]
- Ruger Redhawk [Light Pistol, SA/BF, 7/10/7/-/-]
- Survival knife [Blade, DV 4P, 8/2* /-/-/-, *max range 20 meters]

THE PARLIAMENT OF BEASTS

Free spirits of beasts have taken up residence in Kanheri Caves in Mumbai. They occasionally consult with each other in a gathering that locals have taken to calling the Parliament of Beasts. They share knowledge about life in this plain and information about how to resist banishment, and they also enjoy one another's company. They could be viewed as benign were it not for the fact that they are strong and their ultimate purposes are not known.

MODERN DRUID

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	ESS
7	6	5	7	5	5	5		5	5.0

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
5	10/2	A1, 13	11	5/10/+3

Skills: Astral 5, Close Combat 5, Perception 5

Powers: Animal Control, Astral Form, Enhanced Senses (hearing, low-light vision, smell), Fear, Materialization, Movement, Natural Weapon (claw/bite), Sapience

Attacks:

- Claw/bite [DV 3, 10/-/-/-/-]

PLANESENDER

(FORCE 6 FREE KINDRED SPIRIT)

Commonly appearing as a male in his mid-twenties of Native American descent wearing a stylish but casual suit featuring a mix of Wiccan and Amerind symbols integrated into the stitching and accessories. He is a free kindred spirit originally summoned by a small coven of witches in Fall City who were looking for an initiatory patron. The Wiccans were primarily healers but often dabbled in “alternate” forms of medication and escapism and had quite a bit of success with the help of their patron spirit. Their operations cut into the bottom line of the First Nations, who removed their business rivals in the fastest way they could. Planesender was freed and sought revenge but couldn't go after them directly. He now builds his power by offering trips to other metaplanes as well as void realms, while at the same time hitting them with a one-two punch of Confusion spell and Confusion power during the trip.

Along with the karmic benefits he gains from his sendings, Planesender also makes a decent amount of nuyen getting paid to move others across planes. This leaves him with a decent amount of funding to hire protection or other workers. He operates as Mr. Johnson for runs against the First Nations, contracts his own subtle bits of revenge, and makes deals with other spirits to use his name for similar operations to throw off the trail.

PLANESENDER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
7	6	8	4	6	6	7	6	6	6	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
7	15/2	A1, 13	12	10/15/+1

Skills: Astral 6 (Astral Signatures +2, Emotional States +3), Athletics 2, Close Combat 6, Enchanting 2 (Alchemy +2, Artificing +3), Firearms 2, Influence 4 (Negotiations +3), Perception 6, Sorcery 6 (Ritual Spellcasting +2, Spellcasting +3), Stealth 3 (Sneaking +2)

Spells: Animate Metal, Animate Plastic, Animate Stone, Animate Wood, Antidote, Armor, Blast, Clout, Confusion, Heal, Mana Barrier, Physical Barrier, Shape Metal, Shape Plastic, Shape Stone, Shape Wood, Stunbolt

Powers: Accident, Astral Form, Concealment, Confusion, Enhanced Senses (low-light vision, thermographic vision), Fear, Guard, Influence, Materialization, Movement, Sapience, Search

Gear: Renraku Sensei commlink (DR 3)

Weapons:

- Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, DV 2P, SA, 9/9/6/-/-, 11(c)]

PROFESSIONAL CLEANER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 6)

Business in the shadows is often messy, both metaphorical and literal. And sometimes things happen that bring attention to the mess. Professional cleaners are those called into make sure such messes are properly tidied. Whether it means destroying evidence (especially bodies), silencing witnesses, deleting troublesome data, or simply making sure problems simply go away (by whatever means necessary), the cleaners are the one to call to tidy things up and take care of loose ends.

PROFESSIONAL CLEANER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	5	3(5)	3	4	5(7)	3	4	3.9

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
8	11/3	A1, 14	10	10/15/+5

Skills: Biotech 3, Close Combat 3, Engineering 5 (Demolitions +2), Firearms 5, Influence 4, Perception 5, Stealth 6

Knowledge Skills: Chemistry 6

Augmentations: Cat's eyes, cerebral booster 2, orthoskin 2, sleep regulator, synaptic booster 2

Gear: Bug scanner, chemistry kit, lock picking kit, medkit (rating 5), lined coat (+3), jammer (rating 4), sequencer, RFID tags x3, sensor tags x3, stealth tags x3, tag eraser.

Weapons:

PSG Enforcer II [Sniper Rifle, DV5P, SS, 1/8/12/12/6 w/ 100 caseless rounds]

Colt M5-27 [Shotgun DV4P, SA/BF/FA, 5/11/8/-/-]

Ultimax 71 [Machine Pistol, DV 3P, BF/FA, 10/8/8/-/- w/ silencer]

Shock gloves [Unarmed Combat, DV 45(e), 5/2/-/-/-]

PROFESSIONAL MERCENARY, BASIC

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

Sometimes the job requirement calls for a quiet professional who is proficient in combat and tactics but does not necessarily possess the flash and attitude of your hotshot street sammies. What they may lack in 'ware, they make up for in skill and knowledge. Considered to be consummate pros with their own moral and personal codes of conduct, the mercenary is a professional soldier first and foremost—their contract is their bond.

PROFESSIONAL MERCENARY, BASIC

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	4	4(5)	3	3	3	4	2	4.6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
8	9/2	A1, 13	10	10/15/+5

Skills: Athletics 3, Biotech 3 (First Aid +2), Close Combat 4, Engineering 4, Firearms 6, Influence 1, Outdoors 2, Perception 4, Piloting 2, Stealth 4

Augmentations: Cyberears (rating 2 w/ audio enhancement, balance aug-menter, dampener, spatial recognizer), cybereyes (rating 2 w/ low-light, flare compensation, smartlink), wired reflexes 1

Gear: Ares Gunfighter scabbard, armored retention holster, ballistic mask (+1), BDUS, MEMS tactical vest (+3), helmet (+1), medkit (rating 4), subvo-cal mic, survival kit

Weapons:

AK-97 [Assault Rifle, DV5P, SA/BF/FA, 4/11/9/7/1, w/ smartlink]

Ares Predator VI [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, BF/FA, 10/10/8/-/-]

Combat/survival knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, * max range 20 meters]

Fragmentation grenade (x2) [DV GZ 16P, DV Close 10P, DV Near 4P Blast 15m]

Remington Arms AA-16 [Shotgun DV5P, SA/BF/FA, 5/11/7/-/-]

Stun grenade (x2) [DV GZ 10S, DV Close 8S, DV Near 6S, Blast 15m]

Thermal smoke grenade (x2)

PROFESSIONAL MERCENARY, HEAVY WEAPONS EXPERT

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

Whether it's providing cover fire or mowing down opponents in a hot war zone, the heavy weapons expert is the one called in when normal small arms just aren't getting the job done.

PROFESSIONAL MERCENARY, HEAVY WEAPONS EXPERT

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
4	4	4(5)	5	3	3	4	2	3.9

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
9	9/2	A1, 13	10	10/15/+5

Skills: Athletics 3, Biotech 3 (First Aid +2), Close Combat 4, Engineering 4 (Gunnery +2), Firearms 5, Influence 1, Outdoors 2, Perception 4, Piloting 2, Stealth 3

Augmentations: Cyberears (rating 2 w/ audio enhancement, balance aug-menter, dampener, spatial recognizer), cybereyes (rating 2 w/ low-light, flare compensation, smartlink), muscle replacement 1, wired reflexes 1

Gear: Ares Gunfighter scabbard, armored retention holster, ballistic mask (+1), BDUS, MEMS tactical vest (+3), helmet (+1), medkit (rating 4), subvo-cal mic, survival kit

Weapons:

Ares Predator VI [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, BF/FA, 10/10/8/-/-]

Combat/Survival Knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/-/-/-, * max range 20 meters]

Ingram Grey Knight [MMG, DV5P, BF/FA, 2/10/10/8/6, w/ 100 rounds (belt), smartlink]

PROFESSIONAL MERCENARY, MARKSMAN/SNIPER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 5)

When people think about warfare, they often think of heavy weapons fire and artillery tearing up a battlefield. But even on the modern battlefield, there is still a need for a specialist who can sneak into enemy territory and take out a prime target with one shot, then fade back into the darkness. Or a modern military unit that needs a trooper who's part of the squad but can engage targets from ranges where other weapon systems can. These marksmen take care of problems one bullet at a time.

PROFESSIONAL MERCENARY, MARKSMAN/SNIPER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
4	4	4(5)	4	3	3	4	2	4.6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
6	9/2	A1, I3	10	10/15/+5

Skills: Athletics 3, Biotech 3 (First Aid +2), Close Combat 3, Engineering 2, Firearms 4 (Longarms +2), Influence 1, Outdoors 4, Perception 4, Piloting 1, Stealth 5

Augmentations: Cyberears (rating 2 w/ audio enhancement, balance augementer, dampener, spatial recognizer), cybereyes (rating 2 w/ low-light, flare compensation, smartlink), wired reflexes 1

Gear: Chameleon suit (+2), ballistic mask (+1), medkit (rating 4), subvocal mic, survival kit

Weapons:

- Ares Predator VI [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA/BF, 10/10/8/--]
- Cavalier Arms Crockett EBR [Sniper Rifle, DV5P, SA/BF, 3/8/11/8/8, w/ smartlink, vision magnification]
- Combat/Survival Knife [Blade, DV 3P, 8/2*/--/--, * max range 20 meters]

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

When information can't be found by a Matrix search, it's often up to someone to get out into the meat world and find it, no matter where it may be. The private investigator is the one to call to get the job done. Some embrace the classic 'gumshoe' persona while others blend into and embrace the modern times. From overnight stakeouts, to tailing someone across the city, to good old interrogations, and everything in between, it's the PI who isn't afraid to dive into the meaner, darker places of the streets.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	3	3	3	5	5	5	6	5.8

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
7	8/1	A1, I2	10	10/15/+5

Skills: Athletics 2, Close Combat 3 (Clubs +2), Con 4, Electronics 2, Firearms 3, Influence 5, Perception 6, Piloting 3, Stealth 5

Augmentations: Cyberears (rating 2 w/ audio enhancement, dampener, spatial recognizer),

Gear: AR gloves, armored jacket (+4), binoculars (w/ image link, low light, vision magnification), bug scanner, data chip (x5), electric paper (x10), endoscope, Erika Elite commlink (DR 4), jammer (rating 4), laser microphone (w/ audio enhancement, select sound filter 2), monacle (w/ low light, thermographic vision, vision enhancement), RFID tags (x5), security/stealth tags (x5), tag eraser

Weapons:

- Defiance Super Shock [Taser, DV 6S(e), SS, 10/6*/--/--, *max range 20 meters]
- Extendable baton [Club, DV 2P, 5/--/--]
- Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, DV 4P, SA, 8/11/8/-- w/ laser sight]

RAZORRHINO

This creature is a fantastical abomination that did not evolve in our ecosystem but would definitely throw off the top levels of apex predators if it stuck around. It's a quadruped with a thick body, powerful hind legs, and claws capable of gripping or ripping on its forelimbs. It has a short tail and a thick armored hide. Its head is elongated and looks like a mix between a rhino and a canine with three sharp horns that it uses to gore, tear through obstacles, and overturn trees and rocks on the ground in search of food. It is omnivorous, but the lower its Essence gets, the more carnivorous it becomes, as it needs to feed off the Essence of its prey along with the flesh.

Several have come through portals around the world. Their presence on our metaplane isn't natural, and all of them suffer from a form of Essence loss that makes them increasingly aggressive the lower their Essence gets. They lose a single point of Essence for each lunar phase they are present on this plane, instead of the normal lunar month.

RAZORRHINO

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	M	EDG	ESS
10	3	5	12	3	2	5	6	6	4	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
22	9/2	A1, I3	13	10/20/+2

Skills: Astral 6 (Astral Signatures +2), Athletics 6, Close Combat 7, Influence 5 (Intimidation +3), Outdoors 3, Perception 5, Stealth 3 (Sneaking +2)

Powers: Armor (6), Dual-Natured, Enhanced Senses (low-light vision, smell, thermographic vision), Essence Drain, Hardened Armor (6), Mimicry, Mystic Hardened Armor (4), Natural Weapons

Weaknesses: Essence Loss (Lunar Phase), Vulnerability (Orichalcum)

Weapons:

- Gore [Unarmed, DV 6P, Attack Ratings 8/--/--]
- Bite [Unarmed, DV 4P, Attack Ratings 10/--/--]
- Claw [Unarmed, DV 3P, Attack Ratings 12/--/--]

STANLEY WRIGHT

This is not the Smelly Stan everyone remembers. He is an agent touched by the powers of another plane and now works to fuel that plane by bringing lives across the planar barrier to sap of essence and mana from the desperate. He's one example of many that operates in the communities of the poor and desperate offering a "safe" and "comfortable" life. The place they are taken appears perfect, but each bite of food, night of peaceful sleep, warm shower, and sliver of carnal joy fixes them more in place. The euphoria of the place is enough to make them not care, but some grow gaunt and haunted. The more he brings over, the closer Stan comes to filling his quota, incurred through a debt he's not eager to discuss.

STANLEY WRIGHT

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	2	2	2	5	3	3	6	3	6

DR	I/ID	AC	CM	MOVE
2	5/1	A1, I2	9	10/15/+1

Skills: Athletics 1, Biotech 2, Close Combat 1 (Blades +2), Electronics 1, Firearms 1, Influence 4 (Negotiations +3), Outdoors 1 (Urban +2), Perception 3, Stealth 2 (Sneaking +2)

Gear: Commlink (DR 1), Bulldog stepvan

Weapons:

Knife [Blade, DV 2P, Attack Ratings 6/2*/-/-/-, *max range is 15 meters]



GAME INFORMATION

Here are the rules for using content from *Slip Streams* in your *Shadowrun* games.

ALCHERA

Alchera present opportunities to add twists to your games, putting strange locations in unexpected places or bringing back images from the past. The forms alchera take are as varied as the metaplanes. Natural forms may be similar to the those seen on our plane—flowing streams, forests, meadows, deserts, tundra—or weird, alien versions of the same—basalt pillars in rivers of lava, twisted cacti springing out of solid rock, moss covering polished stone. They also may be different types of civilization—a small collection of thatch huts, a twisted stone city, or a series of linked treehouses. The metaplanes have a wide variety of landscape possibilities, so feel free to make their appearance as varied and interesting as you want.

Alchera may be recurring or one-time-only affairs, and the recurring intervals can be regular or irregular, according to the needs of the story and campaign.

Alchera come in three forms: manifest, materialized, and displacement.

MANIFEST ALCHERA

Manifest alchera are ghostly and insubstantial. The reality they overlay can be seen beneath their ghostly images, and nothing in the alchera can be interacted with in any way. Manifest alchera can be used to add to the atmosphere of a scene or to drop hints about metaplanar events that are relevant to the ongoing plot. For example, an alchera might show a location of an artifact they PCs are looking for, provide a window into the past, or provide information about spirits who are part of the job the PCs are working.



MATERIALIZED ALCHERA

Materialized alchera are more substantial than manifest alchera and become dual-natured when they materialize. Their physical presence means they can only materialize in otherwise empty spots, such as an abandoned building or barren rock. The interaction is limited—the alchera can convey physical sensations (temperature, texture, sound, smell), but elements of it can't be broken off and kept. You may be able to chip a away a piece of rock or break off a branch of a tree, but the item disappears when you leave the alchera or the alchera fades.

The appearance and disappearance of a materialized alchera can be disorienting. When caught in a materialized alchera at such a time, make a Willpower + Intuition (3) test. Failure imposes the Nauseated status (p. 52, SR6) for ten minutes. If a character is inside the alchera when it disappears, they are pushed to the edge of it, which could be inconvenient, based on the location.

Materialized alchera can be used for purposes similar to manifest alchera but with more concrete, detailed interactions.

DISPLACEMENT ALCHERA

Displacement alchera are similar to materialization alchera, except they do not have the requirement

to appear in empty space. Instead, these alchera appear in a place where landscape exists, and the alchera just shoves it out of the way. Where the displaced material goes, no one knows. Any sustained magical effects, such as barriers and wards, vanish when the alchera appears. Otherwise, displacement alchera has the same rules as materialization alchera—people in range when it appears or disappears are pushed outside of it rather than vanished.

SAMPLE ALCHERA

THE DEEP LACUNA

When lots of Los Angeles sank after the quakes of 2069, a series of submerged caves appeared. Investigations showed these were more than just new geologic features—they extend in physically impossible ways and sometimes shift their location, indicating that they are actually alchera. That's about the only certain thing about them. Explorers have spent more than a decade trying to map the intricate, inter-connected tunnels, only to have to rip up the maps they make when tunnels shift and alter. This seems to be a displacement alchera with no end in sight. Legends persist that if you hit the right tunnel at the right time, you might find items or artifacts brought over from over meta-planes. Those who might have found such things,

of course, are not talking broadly about what they found. Some rumors say that full gateways to other metaplanes might be buried in the Deep Lacuna, but that's generally not how alchera work, and most of these rumors are not to be trusted.

THE SEARS TOWER

Perhaps one of the grimmest regularly recurring alchera in the world, this manifest alchera appears on the anniversary of the collapse of what was once the world's tallest building. The blocky, black-steel building is imposing, a ghostly reminder of what downtown Chicago used to be while looking over the Shattergraves, the area it destroyed in its collapse. Recent attempts to reclaim the core of Chicago led to an uptick in tourism for the site, but the return of chaos to the area has seen that tail off.

SATANAZES

For a while, medieval maps showed an island called Satanazes west of Portugal. Its name literally means "devils," and what little information exists about the island focuses on its inhabitants—saying they are devils, and not adding much else. Time passed, charts became more accurate, and people figured that the island never existed, or was confused with some other place.

Flash-forward to now. Coastlines across Western Europe and Northern Africa are reporting the appearance of a barren rock of an island, populated by manic, writhing individuals. The island remains visible for varying amounts of time—anywhere from an hour to two days—but invariably disappears before anyone can make physical contact with it. It has been spotted from Casablanca, Gibraltar, Lisbon, Liverpool, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Bergen, and more. Witnesses report screaming coming from the island, though it's unclear whether it's from pain, excitement, or some other cause.

At this point, it's not clear if this is a manifestation or materialization alchera, though the amount of noise coming from it has some people thinking it's the latter.

PULLING MANA THROUGH RIFTS

While alchera are becoming more common in the Sixth World, rifts and other astral gateways remain quite rare. The corps would very much like to figure out the connection between alchera and other metaplanes and possibly turn them into rifts or gateways, but so far they have seen little success in this. That means they have to rely on a two-step process: opening a temporary rift and drawing magic through it. Both of those steps require rituals, as listed below (and using the rules on p. 143, SR6).

ASTRAL GATEWAY

(ANCHORED)

Threshold: 9

This ritual opens a temporary gateway to a metaplane selected by the ritual leader. The leader must have visited that metaplane or met a spirit or creature from that plane in order to open a gateway to it. The gateway must remain in the place where it is opened. Any objects within five meters of the gateway become dual-natured, and anyone, even non-Awakened individuals, can astrally project in that same range. The ritual takes six hours. The gateway lasts for a number of days equal to the net hits on the sealing test.

MANA SIPHON

(ANCHORED)

Threshold: 7

This ritual pulls mana through an astral gateway or rift to make a mana flow in the immediate vicinity. It takes four hours to perform. The area of the flow is the same as the five-meter area around the gateway that makes objects dual-natured, plus one meter per net hit on the sealing test. Those net hits also determine the strength of the mana flow, per the **Mana Ebbs and Flows** rules, below. Up to two net hits makes it a low mana flow; three or four hits make it a medium mana flow; five or more hits make a high mana flow. The mana siphon lasts for twenty-four hours. The flow is aspected for the tradition of the ritual leader.

MANA EBBS AND FLOWS

Various conditions can contribute to the mana levels of certain spots changing, either increasing the available magic or making it more difficult to channel. Intense events (emotionally intense, magically intense, whatever) can leave a residue in the the manosphere, twisting or enhancing the manosphere. Mana shifts are aspected, meaning they respond to a certain tradition. Those who are not of that tradition do not experience any changes due to the aspected mana shift, except for the mana void, which affects all Awakened individuals. There are seven forms of mana shifts:

High mana flow: High mana flows are aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute in the area automatically gains a bonus Edge before a test.

Medium mana flow: Medium mana flows are aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute spends 1 Edge less on Edge actions and Edge boosts than normal (to a minimum of 1 Edge).

Low mana flow: Low mana flows are aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute in the area gain 1 bonus die on any test where Magic is part of the dice pool.

Low mana ebb: Low mana ebbs are aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute in the area receives a -1 dice pool penalty on any test where Magic is part of the dice pool.

Medium mana ebb: Medium mana ebbs are aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute spends 1 Edge more on Edge actions and Edge boosts than normal.

High mana ebb: High mana ebbs are aspected toward a particular tradition, and any Awakened individual of that tradition using the Magic attribute cannot gain or spend Edge on tests using the Magic attribute.

Mana void: No magic at all can be performed in these areas, including use of alchemical preparations.

LIVING MANA WELLS

A living mana well is a complicated and rather evil thing to create, and the powers to create one are beyond the PCs. They might encounter one, though, so they should know what they do.

A mana well is a walking mana flow, using the rules on p. 140. They cannot be high mana flows, only low and medium.

A mana well behaves similar to a patient under anesthesia—they respond to orders and can move, but they have no will of their own and don't form memories of what happens to them in their time as a well. They only respond to the voice of the person who formed them, which means they can be fooled by technology or magic that adequately imitates the voice of their master (use Con tests resisted by the Willpower of their master plus 3 if they are a low mana flow, 5 if they are a medium mana flow).

The personality and memories of a living mana well are intact—they are just subdued. A Mind Probe spell with five or more hits can tell that the personality of the soldier remains, but it is subdued. Living mana wells do not resist the spell with their own attributes, as their minds have been subdued. Instead, they use the Willpower of their master; for their Logic attribute, substitute 3 if they are a low mana flow, 5 if they are a medium mana flow.

While PCs cannot create a living mana well, they can attempt to free one from the bonds of the ritual holding them. They can attempt this using the **dispelling** rules (p. 143, SR6); treat low mana flow living wells as having a spell Drain Value of 6 with 5 net nits, while medium mana wells have a spell Drain Value of 8 with 6 net hits. When the

spell is fully dispelled, the person behind the living mana well regains control of their body, and the mana well effect is lost. The individual is, of course, confused and disoriented.

RETURNED SOLDIERS

The only clear information about the soldiers returning to Earth, including those from III Corps, is they spent some time in the metaplane of Dis, and it generally altered them in some way. How they got to Dis and why they were there remain unclear.

There is significant disparity in these soldiers. Some of them have been gone for a long time, others for mere months. Some have intense memories of their time away, others have barely any memories of all. Some come back barely altered, while others are drastically changed. But we'll start with what they have in common.

COMMONALITIES

MEMORY GAPS

While the soldiers have different levels of memory of their time away, none of them have actual memories of how they left Earth. Their time away was like a bad dream, where they didn't know how they disappeared or where they went. They were just there. Similarly, they don't know how they got back. They just found themselves in a different place. Many of them were working on plans to escape where they were when they returned home, but they don't know if those efforts led to their return, or if they escaped some other way.

POWERS

Every returned soldier receives at least one power, though it may be hidden and they may not know they have it. See below for more information on powers.

SLOW AGING

The soldiers have not aged according to the Earth calendar—they've generally aged at about a tenth of the expected rate. So those who have been gone a decade have only aged one year, and those who were gone a year have only aged just over a month. A soldier might have been gone since World War II and only aged fourteen years. A soldier from the Ming dynasty might emerge, having only aged fifty years.

POWERS

Each returned soldier should have at least one and no more than three of the listed powers. As a general rule, if making a returned soldier character

based on existing stats or archetypes, reduce an attribute of 3 or more by 1 for each power selected.

ASTRAL VISION

The soldier is not Awakened but can astrally perceive. They can't tell anything about the power of an individual or object from their aura, but they can tell if a person or item is Awakened or not. This requires a Perception + Intuition (2) test.

DISTANT VISION

The soldier gains the Innate Spell critter power (p. 225, SR6) and uses it to cast Clairvoyance (p. 134, SR6). If they were not Awakened before they disappeared, they receive the Magic attribute at 3 and the Sorcery skill at 2.

GECKO GRIP

The soldier has grown small hairs over their hands and feet similar to the outer layer of gecko tape gloves. That means they can use assisted climbing (p. 93, SR6) whenever scaling a vertical surface—but only when they have no shoes on. A Called Shot (Disarm) action made against them needs three net hits to make them drop their weapon. They also have trouble putting down a weapon when they want to.

GILLS

The soldier has grown gills in their neck, meaning they can breathe underwater.

FORESIGHT

The character gets glimpses of future events, though often in quick flashes that lack context or only provide hints of things to come. The game-master can determine how these glimpses happen, when they are fulfilled, and whether they can be changed, but they should be accurate enough to make people pay attention when they happen.

FROG TONGUE

The soldier gains a long, sticky tongue that they can shoot out of their mouth with precision. The tongue can pull an item weighing up to half a kilo (a full kilo of the individual's Body is 6 or more). Someone must manually remove the object from the tongue, as the tongue cannot drop it on its own. Treat the effort to grab an object with the tongue as an unarmed attack with no damage.

PREHENSILE TAIL

The soldier has grown a prehensile tail. They can pick up objects with it and hang from it. It has a Strength equal to half of their unaugmented

Strength (rounded up). They also can reduce the cost of Edge boosts and actions by 1 (to a minimum of 1) on tests using Athletics.

SPECTRAL HAND

The soldier is capable of making their hand and part of their forearm insubstantial so that it can pass through solid objects. They cannot dematerialize an object and carry it with through a solid object, but they can partially rematerialize the hand, so that they may stick it through a door and open it the the knob or handle on the other side. A dual-natured weapon can sever the hand while it is dematerialized.

STONE SKIN

At will, with a Minor Action, the soldier can harden their skin, boosting their Defense Rating by 2. This stacks with other Defense Rating enhancements, including armor. They can make their skin return to normal with another Minor Action.

TELEKINESIS

The soldier can move physical objects with the power of their mind, and they do not need to be Awakened to do so. They make a Willpower + Intuition test; for each net hit, they can move a kilogram of material. They cannot fling it; it moves relative slowly, at a rate of a half meter per combat round.

CHARACTERISTICS

Along with powers, returned soldiers might have certain distinct characteristics that present interesting role-playing possibilities but don't give the character any particular advantage. There is no cost to giving these to a character, but no more than two should be applied.

DOPPELGÄNGER

The soldier is no longer one of a kind—there are at least two of them running around. Both of them insist they are the real person, and they become tremendously confused when presented with evidence of their duplicate. All of these individuals have identical DNA, but they manifest different variants on their essential character traits (for example, both may have a certain innate caution, but one has learned to be watchful while in motion, while the other insists on taking things slowly to help them watch out for danger).

MEMORY HOLE

The soldier has a specific part of their past that they cannot recall, even though other memories

are intact. They may remember their childhood home but not a best friend they had while living there, or they may remember all of their siblings or unit members except one, and so on. A Mind Probe spell with 7 or more hits can access the memories that have somehow been locked off to the individual.

MISSING FEATURES

The character might have parts of them that did not survive the transition to their current state of existence. It could be an earlobe, an entire ear, and eye, a finger, or a chunk out of their arm or leg bone. The change is cosmetic and does not affect their attributes or skills, and they can replace the absence with the help of modern medicine if they so choose.

PLAYING A RETURNED SOLDIER

A character who is a returned soldier can open up interesting storytelling possibilities for the player and the gamemaster. The PC will have a mystery in their past, events that they do not clearly remember but still might come back to haunt them. They can have a sense that something is following them, even chasing them, but they don't know what, and they don't know what will happen when it finally catches up.

The gamemaster can use that as a story hook in games. It could be the central focus of a campaign, as the player tries to discover what happened in their past, or it could be a side element, as a contact or someone the PC encounters while on the job has a connection to the PC's missing time or to some element of their disappearance.

Playing a returned soldier requires taking the **Returned Soldier** quality, either at character creation or later, with gamemaster approval.

RETURNED SOLDIER (12 KARMA)

The character served in a military at some point, only to vanish off the face of the Earth for a time. They have now come back, but the experience is hazy. They have some memories of a vast city called Dis and being held in a maze-like building against their will, but other memories refuse to surface. On their return, they find their body and mind have changed, giving them new abilities. Select two powers from the list starting on p. 141 and one characteristic from the list on p. 142.

SAMPLE SOLDIERS

III CORPS TROOPER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

A III Corps trooper is one of the soldiers who disappeared while on the way to Detroit. They

have now started to return, with significant confusion about where they have been and how long they have been gone. To their advantage, they have not been gone for that long, so they know the basics of life in the Sixth World and how to exist within it. That doesn't mean they'll have an easy time dealing with the changes they've experienced, and they'll face the challenge of learning what happened to them.

III CORPS TROOPER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	5	4	4	2	3	2	4	3	5.4

AC	CM	MOVE
A1, I2	10	10/15/+1

Initiative: 6 + 1D6

Defense Rating: 10 (with Stone Skin active)

Skills: Athletics 4, Close Combat 4, Con 1, Electronics 1, Firearms 4, Influence 2, Outdoors 3, Perception 3, Piloting 2, Stealth 3

Powers: Gecko Grip, Stone Skin

Augmentations: Dermal plating 2

Gear: Armor jacket (+4), grapple gun w/ standard rope, Sony Emperor commlink (DR2)

Weapons:

Colt Government 2076 [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA, 10/8/6/—/—, 14(c), w/ laser sight]

SIERRA LEONE SOLDIER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 4)

This soldier vanished from the African nation of Sierra Leone in the late twentieth century. For them, eight years have passed, but the world they are returning to is utterly different from the one they left. Cyberware, bioware, the Matrix, augmented reality—all of it is new to them, all of it disorienting. But these soldiers are survivors—they fought in a war where they had to scramble for supplies, support, and just about anything they could get. The weirdness of the Sixth World is just another obstacle for them to deal with, like their disappearance from the world and their journey to Dis.

SIERRA LEONE SOLDIER

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	ESS
3	5	4	3	3	5	3	5	6.0

AC	CM	MOVE
A1, I2	11	10/15/+1

Initiative: 9 + 1D6

Defense Rating: 6

Skills: Athletics 4, Close Combat 5, Con 3, Electronics 2, Engineering 2, Firearms 4, Influence 2, Outdoors 5, Perception 5, Piloting 3, Stealth 5

Powers: Distant Vision, Spectral Hand

Gear: Armor vest (+3)

Weapons:

Survival knife [Blade, DV 4P, 8/2*/—/—/—, *max range 20 meters]
Uzi V [SMG, DV 3P, SA/BF/FA, 8/8/7/—/—, 24(c), w/ integral folding stock, laser sight]

RUSSIAN WW2 SNIPER

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 6)

You want danger? You found it. Hitting targets at a kilometer with weapons rated at 500 meters, able to see a fly land on a distant pile of dung, and tactically brilliant with their approach to the battlefield, these soldiers are fierce, deadly, and unthreatened by sub-zero temperatures. They've been gone for about 140 years in Earth time, but they've aged only fourteen years, so they still have plenty of fight in them. Most of the Sixth World will be beyond anything they expect—until they see the rifles. Those, they know how to use.

RUSSIAN WW2 SNIPER

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	ESS
4	6	4	3	3	6	5	5	6.0

AC	CM	MOVE
A1, I2	11	10/15/+1

Initiative: 10 + 1D6

Defense Rating: 8

Skills: Athletics 5, Close Combat 4, Engineering 1, Firearms 5 (Rifles +3), Influence 2 (Intimidation +2), Outdoors 6, Perception 8, Piloting 1 (Groundcraft +2), Stealth 6

Powers: Astral Vision, Telekinesis

Gear: Armor jacket (+4)

Weapons:

Ares Desert Strike [Rifle, DV 5P, SA, 3/10/10/10/10, 14(c), w/ detachable imaging scope, rigid stock, shock pad]

Browning Ultra Power [Heavy Pistol, DV 3P, SA, 10/9/6/-/-, 10(c), w/ laser sight]

Survival knife [Blade, DV 4P, 8/2*/-/-/-, *max range 20 meters]

AZ-AM WAR

(PROFESSIONAL RATING 6)

The Az-Am War featured few pitched battles and a lot of guerrilla combat. The jungles of Amazonia saw plenty of fighting, and the Awakened troopers of that nation were feared for their craftiness and guile. Their time lost on a distant meta-plane has not made them any less skilled at their craft, and they carry it out with a large chip on their shoulder. They're suspicious of everyone they meet and determined to not let anyone get the drop on them, ever.

AZ-AM WAR

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M	ESS
3	6	6(8)	3	2	6	3	5	5	6.0

AC	CM	MOVE
A1, I4	11	10/15/+1

Initiative: 14 + 3D6

Defense Rating: 8

Skills: Astral 3, Athletics 5, Close Combat 7, Electronics 4, Engineering 2, Firearms 5, Influence 3 (Intimidation +2), Outdoors 6, Perception 5, Piloting 4, Stealth 6

Powers: Frog Tongue, Prehensile Tail

Adept Powers: Astral Perception, Enhanced Accuracy, Improved Reflexes 2, Improved Ability (Close Combat) 1, Mystic Armor 2

Gear: Armor vest (+3), Sony Emperor commlink (DR 2)

Weapons:

Katana [Blade, DV 4P, 10/-/-/-/-]

Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, DV 4P, SA, 8/11/8/-/-, 6(cy)]



NOTHING BUT SHREDS

NOTHING IS REAL. EVERYTHING IS REAL.

What you think is real rips and shreds, and the unreality beneath spills out. Everything you dreamed of. Everything you fear. The past returns, distorted and dark. The future sparks in glimpses and flashes. You see it all at once. You can try to deny it. But it is real. Everything is real. Which is that same as nothing being real.

Reality is tearing apart. The holes are everywhere. Dive into them.

Slip Streams is plot book advancing the story of *Shadowrun, Sixth World*.



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